

# Civis mundi sum: global civil society

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## Abstract

The need for global civil society stems from democratic deficits at the global level, but it is an open question how effective global networks of civil society can be in creating meaningful links of interdependence between societies, global markets and states. Global civil society is actively shaping and informing new constructions for governing globalization as an important actor that can no longer be ignored. It can potentially manage diversity and conflict, support and sustain multi-level public debates. Will a global civil society be able to deliver the enabling frameworks powerful and persistent enough to shape a new global public space?

Key words: global civil society, global governance, globalization, global justice.

## Resumen

La necesidad de una sociedad civil global proviene de los déficits democráticos existentes a nivel global, pero sigue siendo un asunto pendiente conocer cómo de efectivas pueden ser las redes globales de la sociedad civil en la creación de lazos significativos de interdependencia entre sociedades, mercados globales y estados. La sociedad civil global informa y conforma activamente nuevas construcciones para gobernar globalmente como un actor destacado que no puede ser ignorado más tiempo. Potencialmente puede manejar la diversidad y el conflicto, respaldar y mantener debates públicos en múltiples niveles. ¿Será capaz la sociedad civil global de posibilitar un armazón suficientemente poderoso y persistente para formar un nuevo espacio público global?

Palabras claves: sociedad civil global, gobernanza global, globalización, justicia global.

We are sceptical [...] of the claim that transnational or international NGOs constitute "global civil society" [...] the global civil society movement might better be understood as imagining itself as the bearer of universal values, both operating in the teeth of globalization and yet simultaneously using globalization as its vehicle for disseminating universal values (Anheier, et al., 2005: 26).

## **The Postnational Constellation**

Ronnie Lipschutz (1992: 391) saw that «the growth of global civil society represents an ongoing project of civil society to reconstruct, re-imagine, or re-map world politics». As Scholte (2000 a: 287) says:

This theoretization of the postnational constellation or «supranationality», is not to deny the continuity and significance of territoriality and its institutions and geographic as well as metaphoric identities. Many emphasize that globality has not taken over territoriality but territoriality no longer has the monopoly on social geography [...] Crossborder cooperation strengthens «supraterritorial networks» which provide new loyalties and regional identities. As a consequence, there is a shift in the «geography of values» which supports the argument for an emerging global civil society.

The emergence of global civil society is viewed as a response to the «leaking away of sovereignty from the state both upwards, to supranational institutions, and downwards, to subnational ones [...] Global civil society is emerging as a functional response to the decreasing ability and willingness of governments to undertake a variety of welfare functions» (Lipschutz, 1992: 399).

Identification with the nation state as the primary social grouping has begun to wither partly in response. At the same time, identity based on consumption and the market is insufficient for establishing new identities. This has given rise to new forms of collective identities, new nationalisms in some places, but also the creation of cosmopolitan identities and a global consciousness (Lipschutz, 1992: 399).

Recognition of the democratic deficit on the level of global governance raises the questions whether and how civil society can contribute to reducing it, dynamizing the process of global democratization. More precisely, what role can civil society play in a reconfigured democracy for global governance?

## **Defining, Refining and Redefining Global Civil Society**

Global civil society is a relatively new phenomenon. It became part of the official vocabulary in the mid-1990s when international funding

institutions, theoretical and empirical analyses started to employ it in their programs and research.

The need for global civil society stems from democratic deficits at the global level but this society remains vague and deficient without the articulation and application of global rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights goes some way to defining a potential global citizenship, but we are still a long way from institutionalizing form(s) of citizenship rights at the global level. It is precisely the articulation of these sets of rights and responsibilities related that guarantee a defence against the over-indulgent markets of turbo-capitalism. Ralf Dahrendorf characterizes civil society as «the medium through which freedom is projected, boosted and dispersed. It thus constitutes the home of the Citizen» (Dahrendorf, 1997: 60).

It is an open question how effective Global Citizens (global networks of civil society) can be in creating meaningful links of interdependence between individuals, social groups and the institutions of Global Merchants (markets) and Princes (states), but the attempt is clearly being made. These forms remain, however, fragmented and reflect global inequalities in terms of participation and access to technology.

Global civil society as an existing, yet at the same time emerging and potential force can neither be encompassed by the total number of international NGOs nor is it synonymous with the anti-globalization protestors that receive so much of the media's attention. It emerged in response to what is viewed as the rampant and uncontrolled extension of liberal market processes that have caused and are causing increasing environmental and social insecurity.

Like the term «globalization», the definition of «global civil society» is debated and contested, and is one of the reasons it is attractive to stakeholders from differing fields. Sometimes it is described in terms of new social movements that take place on a global scale, and is termed «transnational civil society» in international relations theory. Sociologists identify it with the emergence of a «world society». Economists relate it to the international labor movement and the public reaction to globalized markets and neo-liberalism. Civil society can also be exploited to legitimize economic actors and the reforms economic institutions initiate and implement. Political scientists tend to focus it on its potential to spread democracy around the world. It is important to reiterate the formulation that «Globalization constitutes the sort of contextual change that requires new approaches to democracy and civil society» (Scholte, 2002 a: 285). According to Hurrell (1995: 139):

(There has been a shift) in the character and goals of international society: away from minimalist goals of co-existence towards the creation of rules and institutions that embody notions of shared responsibilities, that impinge heavily on the domestic organization of states, that invest individuals and groups within states with rights and duties, and that seek to embody some notion of the planetary good.

Normatively, global civil society is associated with initiatives that embody certain values like *Médécins sans Frontières*, *Save the Children*, *Oxfam*, *Amnesty International* or *Greenpeace* which have become the «brand names» of global civil society. They provide humanitarian assistance and express global solidarity with the poor and oppressed who have become the victims of economic globalization's dark side (See Anheier *et al.*, 2001). Sometimes the term refers to the growing interconnectedness and interdependence of citizens in new social networks among environmental and human rights groups, students, or global media. There is no agreement on its definition or scope, but its emergence, both in terms of new global social movements, and in the academic literature, is recognition of a sphere of public activity that is above and beyond (yet often connected to) local, national, and regional societies. The globalization of civil society, like economic globalization, is a process that extends into new areas of emergent global governance: environmental regulation, consumer rights and protection, and human security.

It is clear that in the 1990s, a supranational sphere of social and political participation became vibrant and allowed space for citizens, social movements, and individuals to dialogue, debate, and deliberate with each other, with representatives of governments and the business community in what can be called multi-stakeholder global conversations.

The number of international NGOs, their scope in geographic and thematic terms, and their level of organization has incalculably increased over the past 2-3 decades. They make up, however, only part of the increased activity at the global level. There are also grassroots groups with global reach (movements of indigenous peoples who have put their concerns on the global agenda) and multi-theme coalitions that form, transform and recede in response to global challenges. Many different kinds of groups organized by citizens have come to play increasingly crucial roles since the 1990s by gathering and disseminating information and generally raising public awareness for advocacy and action to influence public policy. This shift in global dynamics is unprecedented.

Part of this vigorous development is the growth of technological and financial resources available to global civil society. INGOS have become the agents of directing private, corporate, bilateral and multi-lateral funding flows, thus increasing their power. INGOS and networks of global NGOs

function to ameliorate and mediate some of the most adverse effects of economic globalization. They can provide a safety net in which to catch those who become the casualties of economic liberalization. By supporting democracy-building in the world, they help to establish the rule of law and respect for human rights, thus embodying global values that have evolved in the international system.

For many, a primary role for global civil society is to re-politicize economic development by retaking control of economic instruments in order to redistribute political power more equitably, transparently and with more accountability. That is why debates about globalization and global civil society have become discussions about the future of democracy and social justice.

Even if calling contemporary social movements and global networks «global civil society» overstates what is happening, the determination «international» or «transnational» understates what has and is occurring. In the past decade we have quickly moved beyond just the cross-border, transnational nature of relations. This revolutionary change, facilitated by technology and communication, has opened up traditionally closed societies to an unprecedented extent. Even Myanmar, under strict military dictatorship, cannot keep the eyes of the global public away from domestic violence and violations of human rights. The unprecedented global mobilization of civil forces in opposition to the Iraqi invasion catapulted global civil society forces into the global media arena, giving force and confidence to these increasingly coordinated and organized movements.

It is also argued that only a «global civil society» can be posed as a counterweight to «globalization». If democratic deficits of governance are to be addressed at the global level, only a global organization of civil society can hold global economic and political actors accountable. Global civil society is seen as the mechanism by which globalization can be «civilized». In addition, «global civil society» embodies a normative aspiration that cannot be said of «transnational civil society». Global civil society is an expression of the emergence of a global consciousness, of shared values and goals. It stresses, as Anthony Giddens phrased it, our «overlapping communities of fate» in which individuals act as global citizens. This encompasses our increasing environmental interdependence, vulnerability and responsibility.

The strength of global civil society lies in its ability to call powerholders to account by requiring transparency and the dissemination of information about their activities. It may also require compensation in response to the most blatant exploitation of resources, and abuse of human rights and the environment. Another strength lies in global civil society's ability to unite

the cacophony of voices into an orchestra which is ignored by enterprises and multi-lateral economic organizations at their peril. Transformations in the context of international law and corporate monitoring and reporting have largely occurred as a result of pressures from civil society. It has also resulted in the direct intervention in states on behalf of its citizens when their rights are abused by state powers.

Despite extreme heterogeneity and fragmentation, much of the activity in the sphere of global civil society consists of what some have termed «globalization from below», a project whose normative potential conceptualizes widely shared global values related to re defining security in the 21st century (della Porta *et al.*, 2006). These include minimizing violence, maximizing economic well-being, realizing social and political justice, and upholding environmental quality.

Beyond the violence of small groups of protesters, broad alliances of NGOs, CSOS and concerned individuals have begun to reshape and address global issues. Even in a nascent form, global civil society boasts successes from the movement against landmines, to Jubilee 2000, which put international debt on the global agenda of world leaders. The Kyoto Treaty and the establishment of the International Criminal Court of Justice can all be labeled victories for global civil society.

New alliances of NGOs and CSOs, gathering such as the World Forum on Democracy, parallel summits like the People's Summits at the WTO, or Summits of the Americas, etc. have resulted in the move from confrontation, conflict and protest to articulated and structured criticism. Far from being «one-issue movements», these new post-national social movements not only protest, they raise critical voices, through their networks, against the most outstanding injustices and inequalities of power monopolies. The move from monitoring to governing (actively shaping decision-making and participating in confrontative dialogues with decision-makers) is partly a result of a series of world conferences on contested issues like environmental protection, human rights, gender and global economic policies. This changed global economic and political constellations and lead the UN and other closed intergovernmental organizations or multi-lateral economic organizations (MEIS) such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO towards dialogue and cooperation. It is also a result of a growing global consciousness and sense of responsibility. This reflects the changing values of an increasing number of citizens who not only protest, gather and organize themselves across frontiers, but who consciously develop networks on a more or less permanent basis. The World Conferences of the 1990s resulted in a cumulative vision of desired alternative futures (Foster, 2001).

Michael Edwards, the director of the program on Governance and Civil Society at the Ford Foundation, reported that more than 49 million people joined the «Hemispheric Social Alliance» to control the Free Trade Agreements of the Americas, and more than 30,000 INGOs are active on the world stage, along with 20,000 transnational civil society networks. To summarize Edwards, civil society can make two contributions to effective global governance: 1) by improving the quality of debate and decision-making through demands for more information, transparency and accountability of the international system; 2) by strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of decisions through provision of a broader spectrum of those whose support is required to make them work (Edwards, 2002: 77).

More humanized goals for our global future are in the process of formulation. However, the institutionalized forms and frames for a more systematic and structured horizontal or «civil-lateral» organization and accountability of global players are still missing. It is too early to tell whether emerging global publics and civil networks will be able to deliver the enabling frameworks, institutions and fora which will be powerful and persistent enough to shape a new global public space where global civil society can develop and be sustained and contribute to global governance.

Some of this potential can be measured in the jump from 11 million shots on the Internet search in 2003 to over 304 million in 2007 on various global civil society topics. The results are formulated in the subsequent table. It is of special interest which categories have become the focus today. It is clear from the comparison that there has been extensive growth in interest on issues related to global civil society and governance.

## **Global Civil Society and Global Governance**

While interest in the relationship between emerging global civil society and global governance is growing, it is still unclear in what ways civil society can be «institutionalized» in new global governance structures. Global governance is not an embryonic form of a world government modelled after the modern nation state. Instead, global relations are regulated in a «poststatist» fashion with no single center of authority. Civil society, therefore, serves a different function than in the previous periods and has to find new ways for establishing itself within the new global, post-national constellation. If realized, the engagement between civil society and regulatory mechanisms could enhance the respect and legitimacy that citizens accord to global governance. Civil society could affirm and guide global governance arrangements and when necessary constrain their behavior. Civil society can also provide the space for expression of discontent when arrangements are regarded as illegitimate.

During the 1990s, both the engagement and the representation of civil society organizations and networks shifted from monitoring to active participation in governance. Signs of an emerging internationalism built around global social movements and a world public opinion can be viewed in the context of the associational revolution of the 1990s. John Foster (2001) emphasizes that the development of social movements, NGOs and civil society organizations is uneven worldwide, but their growth in numbers and in reach around the world is unquestioned.

## **A Call for Change**

Some critics want to put the genie of globalization back into the bottle, but there is no way to turn the clock back. Globalization has brought benefits, including an active global civil society that is increasingly becoming an effective watch dog of global economic and political institutions, striving for more democracy and justice at the local, national and regional levels. The problem can be identified not with globalization itself, but with who and how it is governed.

In Blahó (2001), the issues that must be confronted and the articulation of a new development paradigm are clearly framed as follows:

Globalization is private-sector driven, yet responsibility for its effects in both economic and social terms is the duty of nation states. Since TNCs increasingly operate worldwide, they owe little to national governments, but they need to be mobilized to support social rights. The public sector is far behind the private sector in the national and international contexts and societal restructuring is required to catch up with the economy and technology.



Globalization exacerbates the intensity of competition which is increasingly seen as the only way to survive. This extreme competition diminishes diversity in societies and contributes to social exclusion: individuals, enterprises, cities and nations that are not competitive (enough) are marginalized and eliminated. With this loss of diversity, countries lose the necessary capacity to renew themselves. This, in turn, limits their ability to flexibly and innovatively confront and solve problems.

At the same time, while enormous global wealth is being generated in the global economy, the income of many nation states is in decline. A new distributional problem has been created. This has occurred at the very moment when nation states need the resources most to confront and manage the new social needs and demands.

Globalization has intensified outstanding social problems like poverty and unequal income distribution and created a new series of problems like new forms of international crime, the growing gap between rural and urban, new forms of international migration (also economic and environmental migration) which can often be linked to civil wars, the lack of economic opportunity, and the drug trade.

While the labor-saving nature of globalization is well documented, there has not been enough attention paid to its labor-creating potential. Attempts must be made to balance labor-saving economic benefits with the social costs of unemployment and social exclusion. A new development paradigm must clearly address these new, concrete problems.

The system based on the international agreements between nation states needs to be globalized. The positive discrimination of economically weak nations also needs to be globalized so more countries and more people can take advantage of the opportunities opened up by globalization and the new technological revolution, at the same time minimizing their negative effects. This entails the global coordination of national social policies instead of their eradication dictated by global economic forces. Nation states need to be empowered as defenders of democratic principles and as vehicles for social self-defense. There is not the equivalent of a global welfare state, but we urgently need the creation of an active international social policy. Social rights and global social and economic development need stronger international action and the international social rights machinery needs to be further strengthened.

What Blahó recommends is bold new approaches to achieve global social priorities, leading to the reduction of global inequalities and the marginalization of poor countries and people; that nation states need to strengthen their social organization, institutions, legal frameworks and an enabling economic environment, without being dependent on external

help. Poverty eradication must be central to all state and international policies and nation states must fulfill their obligations to implement policies that do the most to secure economic and social rights for the most deprived ensuring their participation in decision-making. Increasing social protection and reducing vulnerability requires the institution of global justice.

Jan Aart Scholte (2005) sets out proposals which give particular emphasis to the development of global public policies through transworld institutions. Some of these, summarized here, may help to focus reform efforts where global civil society can play a vital role.

### **Enhancing human security**

- On the basis of the two global covenants on human rights, cases could be made against the IMF or WTO, for example, when their measures violate basic rights that could be legally enforced as a «transplanetary bill of rights».
- A global arms control authority which supplements national governments could impede the development and spread of conventional arms as well as WMD.
- UN peacekeeping operations could be enhanced to link governments and civil society watchdogs. With better, on the ground intelligence, damage in conflict zones could be diminished with faster interventions.

### **Enhancing social equality**

- The introduction of a global redistributive taxation system and the abolition of offshore finance.
- To improve the imbalance in North-South global economic decision making, votes in Bretton Woods institutions could be redistributed away from the major states; other agencies like the OECD could expand and broaden their membership.
- The abolition of agricultural subsidies in the North and alternative trade schemes could enhance export earnings for poor countries.

### **Enhancing democracy**

- Local and national democracies are part of global democracy and strengthening each level strengthens the whole.

- Further devolution to substate authorities in terms of public participation and accountability in the governance of global flows would better integrate local governments and civil societies in the formulation and execution of policies of global concern.
- Civil Forums could help to promote the discussion and debate of complicated issues which is necessary in democracies.
- Public education about globalization and its governance could promote democratization by informing citizens of their rights and responsibilities as global citizens.
- The greater need for transparency of policymaking processes to citizens, e.g., employing non-technical, non-bureaucratic language and terminology and translation into local languages. People who are better informed are better able to take responsible decisions at all levels of governance.
- Efforts to democratize private regulatory mechanisms need elaboration. Public consultation and evaluation, achieved by greater dialogue with civil society and legislative bodies, could be a step forward towards this end.

The greatest number of proposals for the democratization and governance of globalization lie in the potential of civil society. Supporting and developing civil society could contribute to advances in all the areas outlined above. Therefore, more investment of resources should be secured to realize the potential of civil society at the global level. State and economic actors could improve the depth and breadth of their engagement with civil groups. In the long run this will enhance their own efficiency and acceptance in local environments.

One of the most valuable, and yet surprisingly most overlooked publications was produced by the International Labor Organization (2004). This is the product of 30 national, regional and Key Actor dialogues that took place in 2002-2003. In many areas this report agrees with Scholte, emphasizing that the imbalance between the economy and society is subverting social justice; and the imbalance between the economy and the polity is undermining democratic accountability. They use the term «networked governance» to express the participation of more people on more levels of global agenda setting, policy formation and implementation.

In their *Vision for Change* they emphasize that the many actors that are engaged in the realization of global social and economic goals – international organizations, governments and parliaments, business, labor,

civil society – need to dialogue and partnership with each other in order to form the democratic instruments needed to govern globalization. The United Nations needs to be strengthened as a key instrument for an efficient system of multilateral governance so that it can provide a democratic and legitimate framework for globalization.

This is a call for a stronger ethical framework. So far globalization has developed in an ethical vacuum with successful markets being the only measure of success. Market-driven globalization does not promote values like respect for human rights, respect for diversity, protection of our shared natural environment and an awareness of our common humanity. It has instead weakened social trust in institutions at all levels of governance and has indeed weakened our democracies and the very fabric of our societies.

The «invisible wars» bred by global inequalities, tend to generate «visible wars» (Szentes, 2003: 359-367). We need to remember some of the «historical lessons»: about the interaction of internal and external factors of development, about acting in time, about the need to reduce asymmetries in interdependence, about increased state responsibility for development, and the need for changing the world system as a whole. There is also the lesson about the need for countervailing forces, i.e., the need for a civil society for controlling both the state and the market. «A truly democratic world order cannot rely on the spontaneity of the market, nor on the dirigism of some state-power. Instead, it must ensure the upper hand to the global civil society unfolding and organizing on the world level» (Szentes, 2003: 385).

A global civil society emerged in the 1990s in part to respond to the most blatant abuses of market-driven globalization. A cohesive global society can be built around shared values which can stimulate the creation of a Global Commons or Global Public Space where a moral and ethical framework can be constructed for private and public behavior. Realizing the shared values upon which our future depends requires the actualization of these values on the parts of both individuals and institutions – all actors participating in globalization (states, markets, civil societies). Accepting these values and responsibilities with the accompanying public scrutiny and accountability that they require should become the platform on which the Global Commons rests.

## **Civil Society, Global Governance and Global Citizenship**

Global civil society is not, however, a panacea. Michael Edwards warns that the outcome of civil society involvement in global governance depends, among other factors, on whose voices are heard in global debates, and «whether civil groups are effective in playing the roles assigned to them in the evolving international system» (Edwards, 2002: 72). The danger is real: in the absence of accepted rules of the game, the loudest and the strongest groups will dominate.

One of the dangers that is often brought up is the argument that global civil society is not democratically elected and therefore it is neither accountable nor legitimate. Groups and organizations that call themselves «global civil society» and claim to represent world opinion could replace civil activity at the national level, thereby weakening democracy at the local level. Global civil society becomes equated with particular groups that might be described as social movement missionaries (e.g., environmentalists, feminists, human rights activists, economic regulators, sustainable development addicts). They have been chosen by multi-lateral economic organizations and intergovernmental agencies to represent interests that may or may not be genuine. Too often they are accused of having been coopted by the representatives of Global Princes and Merchants who have chosen them as the representatives of civil society. Although what is termed «global civil society» is increasingly participating in multi-stakeholder discussions, and partnering with states and corporations in alliances that are characterized as public-private and private-private, too often it is only those groups that appear less radical and/or threatening that are chosen. This perception has led to the construction of frames to compartmentalize NGOs and CSOs which ultimately has led to the selective exclusion of certain groups from participation at the global institutional level.

Another criticism leveled against global civil society is its lack of legitimacy. Global civil society organizations like other levels of civil society activity should be judged according to the views and values they represent and on their activities and achievements. But too often this question has been insufficiently answered by the statement that civil society regulates and is accountable to itself, thus reiterating the justification given by Princes and Merchants.

Some of the global representations of global civil society (among them usually the most internationally recognized, efficient and well-funded NGOs) do express a tendency to develop a neo-liberal, bureaucratized «professional» language which can reproduce power relations and

hierarchies, thereby recreating through self-regeneration the already contested and deficient mechanisms of global governance. Civil society should not, however, be viewed as the simple sum total of NGOs, CSOs, INGOs. It is more fluid, chaotic, pluralistic, diverse and changing than a simple register of non-governmental organizations can encompass.

An even bleaker view is expressed by Stanley Hoffmann (2002: 111). In answer to his own question about the contribution of the emerging global civil society to world order, Hoffmann answers that NGOs have little independence from governments. In addition, what we call «global governance» is partial and weak and, in contrast to Scholte, Hoffmann does not see the rise of a collective global consciousness or solidarity and as a consequence a sense of world citizenship. In sharp contrast with most of the authors writing about globalization, he believes that in opposition to economic life, «human identity remains national» (Hoffmann, 2002: 111).

### **Strengthening the Global Community through Dialogue and Good Governance**

We are living in a Chaordic Age<sup>1</sup> which can be characterized by:

- the hybridization of the state, business and civil society;
- emerging new forms of governance without government, especially in the emergence of private governance structures;
- innovative models for business, investment and philanthropy;
- cosmopolitan citizenship;
- new models of public-private and private-private partnerships and multi-stakeholder alliances;
- dynamic approaches to collaboration and new forms of leadership;
- the construction of new, global architectures of relationships in a multitude of fields.

This multi-stakeholder world is increasingly networked. These networks evolve, amorphously transform and recede based on the intensity of common bonds of interests. This is a process that is being driven by globalization too. Within this global associational revolution lies

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<sup>1</sup> Chaordic, Chaordic Age: the science of complexity; the behavior of any self-governing organism, organization or system which harmoniously blends characteristics of order and chaos, neither hierarchical nor anarchic (<http:///>); see also, Chaordic Commons of Terra Civitas.

the seeds for a more participatory and democratic system of global governance. But to sustain its development dialogue, discourse and deliberation need to become more systematic. The «dialogue of the deaf» must be replaced by strategic partnerships – new, innovative and substantive initiatives which put the social dimension back into the globalization equation. This will ensure wider participation and help to alleviate the inevitable stress and pressure that economic globalization creates when, as it is today, not linked to social progress.

Traditionally, civil society promoted and managed the values of democracy and tolerance within the bounds of the nation state and was located between the state and the family. Global civil society is not nation state-based civil society that becomes transnational or global in its scope and activities. Global civil society encompasses civic activity that: (a) addresses transworld issues; (b) involves transborder communication; (c) has a global organisation; (d) works on a premise of supraterritorial solidarity. Often these four attributes go hand in hand, but civic associations can also have a global character in only one or several of these four respects. Civic associations often operate in regional and global spaces as well as in local and national contexts and, as a consequence, conceptions of civil society need to be recast to reflect these changes (Scholte, 2002 a: 285).

Today, global civil society is actively shaping and informing new constructions for governing globalization as an, if not equal partner, an important actor that can no longer be ignored in global politics. The discussion about global civil society focuses on its potential to manage diversity and conflict, encouraging, supporting and sustaining public debate at all levels and advocating non-violence. Democracy in the new century may come to be defined in terms of conflict management and that requires the empowerment of local communities. That is why a discussion about the potential for democracy-building at the local level should not be ignored in the scope of globalization studies.

## **Glocal and Glocalising Democracy**

Procedural democracy is still predominantly territorial bound, although rapid and fundamental changes have occurred at the level of international law and regimes, particularly with regard to human rights. Substantive democracy, however, which is about political equality and the democratic role and participation of citizens in rule-making is steadily increasing at the global level (Kaldor, 2002).

One contemporary paradox is that while procedural democracy is spreading from Latin America to East Central Europe and Asia, traditional decision-making at the level of the nation state is being challenged. This has been connected with globalization and the increasingly institutionalized role of global civil society in its governance. It is harder to maintain authoritarian regimes in a climate of rapid communications, inter-dependence, and global markets. The pressure to democratize can be provoked from above (international financial institutions, external governments, and private donors) and from below. Civil societies at the local and national levels are increasingly connected to global communications and social networks that they exploit to push reforms forward (Anheier *et al.* 2005: 16-17).

Political apathy is also a product of globalization with low voter turnout in elections, low interest in national and regional politics and traditional parties, low levels of trust in democratic institutions, and lack of visionary and efficient national leadership and bureaucracies. This has led to the «glocalization» of many issues by civil society; that is, addressing a local problem in a globalized space or emerging globalized public sphere. Across the globe, civil society is organizing itself into «smart mobs» via SMS messaging from mobile phones and through the internet.

Civil society is also beginning to understand that the framework of good global governance requires competent state representatives and that who they elect nationally can make a difference at the global level. They are also learning very fast how to make use of global networks to enhance democracy at the national level.

Many theorists argue that an important way to reinvigorate democracy is greater devolution to the local level. They insist that nation states tend to centralize authority and increased public participation can best be achieved at the local level. While it is true that many decisions are now taken at the supranational and global levels, it is also the case that the increased complexity of decision-making allows for greater «subsidiarity», that is to say, allowing as many decisions as possible to be taken at the level closest to the citizen. The new technologies and e-government make this possible.

Does global civil society enhance or undermine democracy at the local level? The conclusion is that it does both. Civil society can improve the substantive democratic conditions of local governments through global links that provide activists and their issues with a higher profile. It allows them to place new issues on the global agenda to be discussed in the emerging global public sphere.

It is also the case that sometimes local positions can be strengthened nationally by the globalization of local problems, thereby pressuring



national governments for changes. An important caveat, however is that there is also a tendency of NGOs and INGOS to be coopted by donor organizations and funders who set agendas and, through professionalization, become increasingly separated from the grassroots conditions and needs (Jensen and Mislivetz, 1998).

Often demand for external help emanates from civil society groups within countries that are experiencing difficult and rough transitions. External support can provide necessary resources and reduce the vulnerability of local actors when confronting state authority. Different agencies provide different kinds of help. Some of the following players have had a role in empowering local civil society groups during transition periods (Sisk, 1999):

- Regional organizations like the EU and OSCE aid countries in the management of their economies and in security cooperation. They also assist in the supervision and evaluation of elections. The EU and the Council of Europe, for example, promote the democratic development of aspiring applicants who want more political, social and economic integration in Europe.
- International organizations like the UN and its agencies promote human rights, and also assist in election administration and monitoring. They can also promote information-sharing and capacity-building.
- Private philanthropic foundations like Ford or Soros promote open and pluralistic societies, civic education, and freedom of information. They train opposition parties, inform legislation and advance human rights such as minority and women's rights in political life.
- NGOs with global programs like the International Institute for Democracy and Election Assistance (IDEA) promote country-level capacity-building and the development of codes of conduct for political parties.
- Regional NGOs specialize on the development and support of regional transnational networks of local NGOs, political parties and the mass media.
- Country-specific NGOs develop local capacity-building in the areas of democracy promotion and participation (Sisk, 1999).

Efficient cooperation and coordination among all these levels of actors is crucial. Building trust between these actors and institutional learning are important components in the construction of mutually-supporting networks. These networks together engage in some of the following tasks:

- Promotion and advocacy of global norms at national and local levels;
- Provision of financial, technical and infrastructural support for local NGOs; capacity-building and civic education within societies in transition;
- Consultation and facilitation, sharing best practices and information at the national, international and local levels;
- Administration and monitoring elections.

### **Post-National Democracy: New Forms and New Content**

Democracy, however, involves more than elections and institutions. It requires a bottom-up dynamic that has often been lacking in transitional states. It is true that the democratization of societies takes much longer than the establishment of democratic institutions. The recent turbulence in many transition countries points to the long process required for embedding social democratic principles in societies that are traditionally authoritarian and paternalistic. Bottom-up approaches to democracy-building in these cases become more important in the long run than top-down, elite-driven approaches.

Another contemporary irony in the era of globalization is that many of the actors mentioned above (regional and international organizations, private foundations and global NGOs) are refocusing their activities from the national to the local level. Some economists suggest that global trends are converging to create conditions whereby economic development may be best approached at the local, not national level (Sisk, 1999). Therefore, the tendency to decentralize economic decision-making to the regional if not local levels, as in the EU, has gained force. The EU's principle of subsidiarity recognizes that the emergence and development of new global norms or standards needs the development of local democracies if they are to be acted upon.

In an era of rapid and pervasive globalization, local governments face increasingly complex and interdependent challenges, e.g., environmental threats, pandemics, employment, trade- and finance-related questions, human migration and refugee flows, organized crime and trafficking. Most citizens typically look to local authorities first to solve their immediate social problems. These new challenges are putting tremendous pressure on local societies, and in order to be able to address and manage these challenges local communities need new and innovative democratic alternatives.

Democracy itself has come under scrutiny in the recent decades, and particularly in the aftermath of the decision to invade Iraq. The question has been posed as to whether or not democracy can be imposed on societies

from the outside, and whether or not traditional (Western) democratic practices are universally applicable. In many parts of the world today democracy might better be defined in the context of conflict management. There may be a strategic advantage to furthering NGO participation, cooperation and collaboration in conflict zones. Their participatory decision-making system, their local knowledge and expertise, the trust they have built in to their practice and their commitment to the communities they serve, make them important actors in the field of local conflict management.

Not only INGOs and international organizations need to play a role in strengthening local capacities to handle an increasing number of complex tasks. An active role needs to be played by educational systems, by universities and think tanks, to help empower communities, enhancing their capacities to improve the quality of governance locally and nationally. An informed public makes better decisions. There is increasing determination and commitment to creating and supporting tripartite networks of public officials, the private sector and civil society to establish *ad hoc* networks (public-private, and private-private governance arrangements) for local democracy protection and promotion.

Multi-lateral economic institutions are also finding that their programs are more efficiently implemented and managed when they work with local groups. On the other side, local civil society actors gain legitimacy at home from the international recognition of their work. Democracy-building, however, is a long-term project and commitment and coordination on the part of all actors acting at all levels is crucial. There are strong developmental reasons for enhancing local democracy that are widely recognized by the international community and a more systematic inclusion of NGOs in the system of multi-level governance is inevitably required.

To be suspicious and doubting of the possibilities of democracy at a global level is understandable, but developments in the areas of civil society, national sovereignty, and economics have moved too far and too fast to return to pre-globalized or less globalized times. The question and the challenge is how to make global institutions sensitive to the demands of individuals and open towards citizens.

Dialogue and deliberation, which are in principle open to all civil society groups and which take place at many levels, are the next best options. Global civil society is not representative and not the same as democracy. But it could be an «alternative mechanism» for democratizing global governance and «civilizing» global economic processes. Moreover, if global civil society was combined with subsidiarity – more decision-making at a local level – it could enhance the participation of individual citizens.

Global debates can be domesticated and domestic debates globalized. Redefining democracy in the context of globalization contributes to the global debate about governing globalization and may help to alleviate the gulf between vast regions of poverty, hopelessness and the despair which breeds terrorists (the Red Zones) and the global fortresses of plenty (the Green Zones). If global civil society does not cross this gap, then increasing insecurity, violence and terrorism will (Anheier, 2005: 1-22). We need to think innovatively about new varieties of flexible, multi-stakeholder mechanisms of global governance which respond to both local and global demands.

There is an enormous cost to prolonged global instability that results from an ungoverned or not well governed globalization, first of all in human terms. Globalization has been rejected as both morally unacceptable and politically unsustainable. There are many who want to promote a fairer and more inclusive globalization. Some critics speak of formulating a «Global Marshall Plan» (Radermacher, 2004), «Green New Deal» or global social contract, recommending the formation of Policy Coherence Initiatives, a Global Council of Wisemen (and women it is to be presumed) and global public institutions. There are no lack of innovative and visionary choices. David Held's proposal for a Global Covenant derived from the core principles of cosmopolitanism (equal worth, active agency, accountability, sustainability, consent, democracy, inclusiveness) could be considered (Held, 2004).

The concept of «Global Public Goods» is another elaboration designed to address contemporary economic, political, social and environmental realities that require the concerted efforts of diverse actors across the globe which link the local, national, sub-regional, regional and global levels. According to Held (2008):

At its simplest, the principle suggests that those who are significantly affected by a global good or bad should have a say in its provision or regulation, i.e., the span of a good's benefits and costs should be matched with the span of the jurisdiction in which decisions are taken about that good. Yet, all too often, there is a breakdown of 'equivalence' between decision-makers and decision-takers, between decision-makers and stakeholders.

Stakeholders need to move from trying to manage contemporary and future problems with mechanisms from the past. These challenges and conflicts require the elaboration and consensus-driven implementation of new vehicles for global problem-solving.

## **Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century**

Today we are faced with an unprecedented complexity and intensity of challenges: environmentally (the unquestionable consequences of global warming), politically (the Middle East, Iraq and Iran, North Korea), and human security generally, as well as the crisis of democracy in developed countries. David Hayes (2008) strenuously argues that

[...] as the first decade of the 21st century nears its end, it is becoming ever more evident that the processes of transformation the world is experiencing are – in their scale, their speed and their character – complex and daunting to a perhaps unprecedented degree. In almost every geographical region and sphere of human life, immediate tensions and challenges are also the visible sign of profound structural problems that demand coordinated, focused attention.

One of the greatest challenges for our societies is the lack of leadership at all levels of governance and a sense of global responsibility for our common futures. Changing the nature and path of globalization, by making it more inclusive and ethical, is in our best interests because it will be the key to a more secure and better life for more people. The challenges and responsibilities, some of which are outlined above, are grave, imminent and unavoidable.

There is a fundamental role in these changes for global civil society, but civil society alone is not enough. The appeal to mobilize for change requires the formation of bold, new, innovative hybrid forms of states, markets and societies and a broader coalition of forces between different sectors of global stakeholders. Opening the space for more participatory and accountable decision-making and policy-implementation, global civil society may contribute to a more equitable and just distribution of the benefits of globalization to more people in the new century.

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