

## Chapter 10

### Conclusion: A Shifting Recognition of Global Civil Society?

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#### 10.1 Introduction

In the final chapter of this edited book, the authors provide a summary of the key messages of civil society in a globalized world. To do this, the authors firstly discuss the future direction of civil society, and then examine the enhancement of social movements in contemporary society. In the final part of this chapter, the authors provide some observations regarding the recent global health crisis (COVID-19) and why civil society is vitally important in a globalized world.

#### 10.2 The Future Role of Global Civil Society

Global civil society, drawing upon the classic illustrations of Edwards (2011) and Keane (2003), can be described as a collective delineated societal space that sits between government, market and the family unit that hosts similar interests, values and goals. However, it is not, as traditionally presented within the literature, solely the domain of western cultures. Examples of these groups, as illustrated by the World Economic Forum, include:

- “NGOs, non-profit organizations and civil society organizations (CSOs) that have an organized structure or activity, and are typically registered entities and groups.
- Online groups and activities including social media communities that can be “organized” but do not necessarily have physical, legal or financial structures
- Social movements of collective action and/or identity, which can be online or physical.
- Religious leaders, faith communities, and faith-based organizations.
- Labour unions and labour organizations representing workers
- Social entrepreneurs employing innovative and/or market oriented approaches for social and environmental outcomes
- Grassroots associations and activities at local level.
- Cooperatives owned and democratically controlled by their Members.”

(2013, p. 8)

Globally, civil society organisations such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Unicef, and the World Wildlife Fund have become increasingly involved in global affairs and played a role in law and policy making, agenda setting and diplomacy in tackling global social, political and environmental issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an immeasurable and catastrophic effect on global society and groups; it has in one way or another affected every individual's life. The pandemic has presented global society with a distinct challenge in order to

safeguard humanity. This is emphasised in the recent 'State of Civil Society' (CIVISCUS 2021) report, which states that global civil society has a vital role to play in reconstructing the post COVID-19 world. The COVID-19 pandemic and the necessary lockdowns imposed by countries worldwide are having a significant impact on social and economic life, including, for example, the rights of excluded vulnerable groups and personal civic freedoms. Snowden et al. (2021) emphasise that the COVID-19 pandemic signals the need to reset social, economic, and political structures. Furthermore, the UN's Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to the COVID-19 Crisis warns that:

“The COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis: it is affecting societies and economies at their core. While the impact of the pandemic will vary from country to country, it will most likely increase poverty and inequalities at a global scale, making achievement of SDGs even more urgent. Without urgent socio-economic responses global suffering will escalate, jeopardizing lives and livelihoods for years to come.”

(UNDP, 2020)

CIVISCUS, (2021) in their recent analysis of the civic society assert that the socio-economic and political problems highlighted by the pandemic are enduring, and post COVID recovery plans must be inclusive of agencies such as charities, NGOs and civic campaigners. Globally, civil society has proved its worth during the pandemic, has made a substantive contribution to the global social fabric, and has presented a distinct source of resilience. CIVISCUS (2021) argue that civil society should be nurtured and encouraged to grow, rather than inhibited, and should be nurtured rather than repressed. Third Force News (2021), representing the voice of the “third sector” in Scotland, argue that civil society has been mobilised to instigate change globally. Clearly, civil society should be enabled to fulfil its potential in service provisions, but also in its traditional role of enabling collective decision making, to develop awareness of issues and to further the scrutiny of policies and decisions made by governments.

Whilst civil society must be enabled to fulfil its potential, achieving this is a challenge. The notion of global civil society is difficult to define, with some disagreement evident when attempting a definition (Keane, 2003 and Edwards, 2011); this multifaceted and contested concept causes confusion and a lack of clarity when determining impact. Gomez (2018) conducted an in-depth systematic review of the notion and impact of the civil society on policy. Gomez reports that most research focusses on agenda setting and policy implementation and fails to account for all stages of the policymaking process and the role civil society plays in the process. However, Gomez does concur with the generally accepted assertion that civil society does have influence. Nonetheless, civil society's impact has been demonstrated clearly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst much of the impact of civil society is unreported, the Solidarity in the Time of COVID-19 report published by CIVISCUS (2020) provides clear evidence of civil society responses to the pandemic and their impact.

The CIVISCUS report (2020) illustrates impact by drawing upon global examples of how civil society has: a) met the basic human needs of groups by need, providing food, safety in the form of a) personal protective equipment (PPE) providing

financial aid, maintaining health and social care provision and the provision of mental wellbeing support; b) promoted and shared information, by acting as a hub to disseminate accurate information, for example, by providing access to accurate information in appropriate languages and formats they could understand; c) providing remote services; whilst digital technology was used for sharing information, it also became an important tool for service provision – the provision of online and phone support enabled many services to continue when face-to-face support was no longer possible; d) monitoring and defending human rights; e) Influencing and engaging with states; for example, civil society urged that international guidance should be followed so that elections could be held safely and people could vote in confidence, which resulted in delayed elections in Malawi and the Dominican Republic f) public campaigning; in Brazil a CSO coalition campaigned for the introduction of minimum income during the pandemic – supported by more than 500,000 people the campaign and secured a law approving the scheme; g) nurturing community leadership – investing in community leadership and volunteering enabled local knowledge and resilience; for example, in Malaysia, a scheme was implemented coaching community leaders to develop skills that enabled them to connect with the platforms offering support and which enabled them to articulate their communities' needs. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the BIFERD organisation in response lockdown poverty trained more than 50 local volunteers to develop negotiation and advocacy strategies to support communities in lockdown.

CIVSCUS (2020) provides detailed case studies illustrating impact at local, national and global levels. Civil society, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, has harnessed an energy that must be recognised to develop a process of change that promotes a safe and respectful world.

### **10.3 Civil Society and Social Movements**

Over the past decade, there has been an extraordinary level of mobilization of various types of protest movements globally, from the most recent Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 in the US, to Latin America, to the Arab Spring, to the “occupy movements” in the U S and Europe 2009-2010, to democracy protests in Hong Kong in 2019. The transnational networks of ‘self-representation’ grant a voice for the marginalized who may be unheard due to local inaccessibility and indifference. In multiple ways therefore, global civil society has formed, fashioned and expanded a ‘new’ space to reinstall voices, concerns and justice as inspiration and arbiter of laws. The sensed unfairness draws on the knowledge of grievances by individuals in comparable circumstances wherever they are in the world as long as a reason of the wrongdoing is upheld in folk memory or historical record.

There are ample instances of very boisterous discontentment with the neoliberal agenda and its wicked effects, which offers substantiation to the ascendancy of some nascent and vigorous transnational alliances. These links and movements have stirred civic contest and captivated bigger crowds, unswervingly committed to challenging current agendas and organizations. We are witnessing heightened global coalitions aiming to draw the attention of governments in order to alter the structures and institutions that fail to assist the masses or openly violate the rights of common citizens. The public no longer remain silent, quiet down, or halt their

presumptions; Rather, they can demonstrate/mobilize their discontent, protesting and dissenting in novel and innovative ways: on social media, through their cell phones and cyberspace networks, and on the ground. Modern information and communication platforms have emboldened civil societies and the public to consider that they can transform things, topple regimes, make systems better, and insist on the means and apparatuses that give them a legitimate say; they can demand that they are both heard and attended to, and install movements and strategies that help them and a wide swath of society, not just the elite 1% (of the population).. New high-tech developments have changed social ties, particularly the meaning of the term co-presence. The label “swarm” has been used to refer to new horizontal forms of civil society organization that are highly decentralized, flexible, and multidimensional, associated with and organized in cyberspace (Taylor, 2004).

Politics and the political ideas that stimulate and undergird civil society are shifting, and the involvement of modern technology is only aggravating the trend. As we advance into the third decade of the twenty-first century, an extensive alteration in political culture is becoming more apparent. There are innovative approaches and new methods of contesting and challenging power, and new models and analytic contexts are required so as to comprehend global social movements. There are global movements, transnational actions, democratic and membership philosophies that are bubbling and springing up everywhere.

Novel consciousness, judgment and praxis of global civil society movements is sweeping through Asia, the Middle East, the US, Latin America, and Europe. Within western liberal economies, the “occupy movement” became an iconic marker of this contemporary cycle of economic contention. The slogan 1% and 99% caught the imagination of the masses facing the brunt of recession and economic downturn. Enthused by Tahir Square and Iceland, the Spanish Indignados and the 15M movements in Portugal and Spain, New York’s Occupy Wall Street (OWS) stirred dissents and occupations in over 900 cities across more than 80 states. Across the globe, the public took to the streets to dissent against skewed socioeconomic and political developments in the wake of the global 2008 recession and the banking debacle, appealing to the new repertoires of contention or re-explaining older forms of demonstration such as occupation of public space and encampments (Vanden et al., 2017, p. 1). Similarly, Black Lives Matter emerged as a reaction to the ongoing police brutality against black people in the US, itself a symptom of much deeper injustices the poor and those of colour face in the United States in everyday life. According to Manuel Castells:

“It began on the Internet social networks, as these are spaces of autonomy, largely beyond the control of governments and corporations that had monopolized the channels of communication as the foundation of their power, throughout history...They came together. From the safety of cyberspace, people from all ages and conditions moved toward occupying urban space, on a blind date with each other and with the destiny they wanted to forge, as they claimed their right to make history – their history – in a display of the self-awareness that has always characterized major social movements. The movements spread by contagion in a world networked by the wireless Internet and marked by fast, viral diffusion of images and ideas.”

(Castells, 2015, p. 2)

Furthermore, Melucci (1980) has noted that new social movements are rising not primarily from the relations or means of creation and delivery of resources as perceived earlier, but rather in the context of construction and the whole ecosphere. Therefore, civil society organizations and social movements are moving from exclusively focusing on economic relations to the socio-cultural creation of symbols and identities. The current social movements discard the acquisitive and economic positioning of consumerism in capitalist systems by enquiring about the contemporary views that connect the quest of contentment and accomplishment closely to progress, growth, and improved efficiency by an alternative endorsement of ideals and empathies in relation to the social order. For instance, the ecological crusade of the 1970s, which began in North America, spread throughout the world and has brought a “dramatic reversal” in how we contemplate the connection between economy, society, and ecology.

Additionally, new social movements are positioned in civil society or the cultural domain as a priority for united action rather than contributory action in the state, that Claus Offe typifies as “bypass[ing] the state” (REF). The new-fangled social movements are difficult to describe, as they display heterogeneity of concepts and ideals, and often tend to have realistic positionings and pursue institutional restructurings that broaden the structures of participants in deciding the course of action (Larafia, 1992; Offe, 1985). These actions point toward a “democratization dynamic” of average life and the enlargement of civil versus political dimensions of the social order (Larafia, 1992). The reallocation towards the ‘cultural turn’ was accomplished by highlighting the latest social movements as products of post modernity. The “hyper-individualism” that typifies the capitalist market system tenders disapproval for shared accomplishment and offers little to embrace communities collectively in the face of rising personalized pecuniary and collective disquiet. Hence, new-fangled social movements appeared from the disintegration of politics and mirrored a profound disenchantment with institutional and formalistic politics the waning of the collective setting of groups and occupations as locations for political mobilization, and the growing standing of culture as the domain through which individualities and groups are shaped, created and stabilized (Larafia, 1992).

Social movements are accordingly rendered as ‘global fluids’ that move persistently in networks and grids and take the form of an unstructured nebula with blurry outlines and a mutable future (Melucci, 1996). Moreover, Taylor gives example of “networking switching that involves the movement of people, objects and images that coalesce, disperse, concentrate and dissolve and thereby switch the point of attack through the flooding of spaces. Complex social movements are conceptualized as leaderless, non-organization” (Taylor, 2004, p. 23).

The contemporary ascendancy in the influence of global civil society is linked to the revolution of information, communication and technology. Cyberspace is revolutionizing civil society advocacy and is enabling the creation of networks and coalitions. The term ‘dot cause’ applies to any citizen assemblage that encourages a societal cause and essentially mobilizes backing through its internet site. The constant change of communication know-how in the digital era encompasses the

scope and spread of messaging on social media to all spheres of public life in a system that is simultaneously global and local, general and personalized, in an ever-changing form. The method of making meaning is characterized by boundless variety. There is, though, one characteristic shared by all procedures of emblematic construction: they are mainly reliant on the communications and references shaped, structured and disseminated in cyberspace communication networks. Even though citizens construct their own connotations through their understanding of communicated resources on their terms, this rational processing of ideas is often preconditioned by the communication setting. Recently, the upsurge of 'mass self-communication', that is, the usage of cyberspace networks as podiums of digital messages, has caused a vital transformation of the communication infrastructure. Mass messaging has the potential of reaching an array of receivers, and of linking to boundless networks that diffuse digitized data in the ecosphere. This sort of mass communication is based on horizontal networks of collaborative communication that are difficult for regimes to control; it also offers a high-tech stage for the manufacture of the social actors' originality, be it distinct or cooperative, apropos the formations of the social order. This is the reason why regimes are becoming wary of tech giants like Twitter and Facebook, and why organizations have a love/hate rapport with them. Communication can be viewed to operate as an infrastructural dimension with the capacity to outline and shape social relationships across the disjointed landscape. The critical features of on- and offline communication tools are immediately noticeable when observing the indicators or advents of contemporary movements (Castells, 2015 and 1996).

One lesson evolving globally is that the way forward is a better state-CSO partnership in the distribution of basic services to citizens. The philosophy that encouraged minimal government involvement and promoted market-based resolutions to service provision is conspicuously receding, and there is increasing reappraisal of the critical role of the state – especially during the current COVID-19 pandemic. As a consequence, CSOs seem to be facing numerous vital prospects and contests. In relation to effectiveness, enhanced economies of scale in health supplies are one potential benefit for CSOs in their superior teamwork with regimes. There is also the likelihood that better CSO-government partnerships could lead to the improved sustainability of CSO programmes. Universally, CSOs face intricate choices and challenging demands when harmonizing diverse activities. The key contemplation for different CSOs is where they are likely to have maximum impact. There is a requirement for dedicated CSOs with a distinct advocacy role at the nationwide level, and there are countless CSOs whose involvement, proficiency and impact lies in local-level provision. The CSO sector as a whole must safeguard both methods.

## 10.4 Some Observations

The book was compiled during the coronavirus pandemic and, as editors, we could witness the acute pressure and tall expectations from regimes around the globe to alleviate the disruption, hurt and suffering the pandemic was causing. During the course of the last year and a half, much has been debated on a 'return to big government'. The attention on state responses is definitely logical, as people looked to the authorities for real help and aid and, repeatedly, this assistance actually made the critical difference between life and death. Thus far, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a deep effect on government policies, business strategies, and on societies at large. The disaster has played out at the global and national level, and, correspondingly, at community and civil society levels. To a certain degree amid the emphasis on governments' pandemic responses, the coronavirus actually sharpened and intensified the significance of organized civil society action.

Globally, the mandate for civic engagement has increased, and innovative avenues are opening up for civil society organizations (CSOs) to play significant and multilevel roles during the crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed implicit and explicit pressure on global civil society, unleashed by the kernel of civic empowerment that compelled CSOs to extend their presence in local communities. In some nations, civil society activism moved up a gear and undertook tougher approaches, as during the pandemic, governments tried to drown out the critical voices of civil society. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the demand for, and augmented the supply of, civic activism, along with the need for CSOs to push back against punitive regime restrictions. All in all, COVID-19 has been a bugle call for global civil society. The pandemic has placed substantial stresses not only on administrations but also on societies around the world.

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