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Professionalization and Participation

NGOs and global participatory democracy ? A Research

Agenda

Abstract

Political participation beyond elections is a recurrent subject in the analysis of politics at the domestic level. Since the beginning of the 1990s, official discourses and academic research increasingly underlines the capacities of NGO participation in decision-making to reduce the major democratic deficits that have grown during the recent decades in the governance of global relations. The emergence of this participatory discourse has fundamental consequences for the strategies, the power and the organisational structures of non-state actors. We argue that this discourse has led to increasing inclusion of non-state actor participation in decision making processes. What follows is a process of professionalization and adaptation of nongovernmental non-profit actors. The aim of our contribution is to develop a conceptual framework which prepares the ground for the empirical analysis of this particular topic

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1. Introduction

The nongovernmental non-profit organizations¹ have attracted an increasing number of scholars over the past decades, starting with the “discovery” of transnational relations (Risse-Kappen 1995). Where do they come from, what do they do, what is their legitimacy, how do they operate etc. are some of the relevant issues. Parallel to this particular research domain only relatively recently has the concept of global governance emerged. This particular area of research has been linked to the notion of participation if not democratization of the international system of governance. Today, the unresolved issue is not to what extent NGO participation takes place but whether their increasing involvement in practically every domain of public policy, foreign policy and international politics actually contributes to the postulated process of democratization.

This raises two interrelated complex issues which we will address in this paper. The first issue is indeed the development of normative arguments and expectations whether the participation of NGOs in the formulation and implementation of governmental policies is a gain in democratization. However, the core problem, as Omelicheva (2009:109) argues, is that “our ability to speak credibly of global civil society as a viable democratic force would be improved with the development of empirical theory, conceptual elaboration and more rigorous methodological research”. This problem then leads to the second issue relating to the empirical dynamics of the NGO world as such. Here we question the evolution of the system of NGOs as such in the first place, their adaptation and their professionalization. By the latter we understand the degree to which their normative objective is supplemented with the

¹ Or ‘civil society’ as a majority of actors and academic authors calls NGOs since the end of the 1990. For a debate in European Union studies see Saurugger 2008.

necessary knowledge and skills. Thus far, only a limited number of studies actually address this particular problem (cf. Devin, 2004, Siméant 2005, Martens 2005, Eberwein/Saurugger/Reinalda, 2009). At the core of these two issues taken together are the causes and consequences of the individual and collective adaptation processes of the NGOs. Will they become more and more similar to for-profit organizations thereby being some kind of subcontractors and thus converted into the equivalent of pressure groups which are an age old phenomenon or will they actually be able to improve the provision of public goods at the international level by maintaining their independence? The main question raised in this paper is therefore whether the expectations raised by the normative literature can be confirmed by an empirical analysis of the activities of non-governmental non-profit organizations.

Before analyzing in greater detail this particular aspect, we will first study the different aspects of non-state actor participation in democratic arenas as it is developed in the normative literature. We will in a second step present a rough typology of NGOs and their basic functions before conceptualizing the problem of adaptation by linking it to the concept of professionalization. We will then in a third step illustrate the evolution of the NGOs by using data drawn from the list of NGOs accredited by ECOSOC. We will also illustrate the issue by reference to the attempts undertaken by a number of organizations to form their future leaders, a prerequisite for their proper professional functioning. Before drawing some preliminary conclusions we will outline our research strategy for a comprehensive assessment of the professionalization process of NGOs and the consequences this may have for their participation at the global level.

2. Normative approaches

The idea to associate transnational non-state actors in global governance stems from the first half of the 20th century (Reinalda 2009). However, at that time, the association was mainly considered as a functional aspect leading to better regulation. It is only at the beginning of the 1990s that their participation in global affairs was considered to be an important element to foster the democratic legitimacy of both international organizations and the states (for a particularly complete overview see Omelicheva 2009). What precisely democracy is, however, is, particularly at the global level, subject to debate. It is therefore important to present the debates summarily before looking more precisely at the conceptualisation of the democratic character of non-state actor participation on the global level.

To analyse the call for more democracy is a rather complex undertaking, mainly because definitions of democracy vary tremendously. In contemporary political theory, democracy is usually considered to be a deficient concept. And as Kohler-Koch and Rittberger (2007: 2) recently underlined this has led to a “disagreement about how to respond to the deficiencies of the state of democracy originat[ing in] different assumptions underlying different theories of democracy”.

Despite all the controversies there seems to be consensus that democracy refers to participation. On the one hand participation leads to efficient problem solving and on the other, procedural conditions allowing for participation enhance the legitimacy of the decisions made. Democracy is perceived as “a condition where a community of people exercises collective self-determination. Through democracy, members of a given public – a demos – take decisions that shape jointly their destiny, with equal rights and opportunities of participation, and without arbitrarily imposed constraints on the debate. In one way or another, democratic governance is participatory, consultative, transparent, and publicly

accountable. Whatever the specific mechanism applied democratic governance rests on the consent of the governed.” (Scholte 2004, 285).

This definition of democracy, however, encounters some difficulties when transferred to the global level: the public is multiple, its members are subject to different rules of law if at all, and the interests vary considerably. Most importantly, the question of non-state actor participation is raised differently at this level, as it is only partially framed by legal structures, contrary to the national level.² Thus transnational or international non-governmental actors operate in a legally diffuse and normatively challenged space. Once one leaves the national arena, two factors help us to structure our research: on the one hand, **participation** in decision-making, conceived as interest representation achieved through deliberation, association and inclusion in transnational public-private committees, and on the other, their role in actual **governance**, such as relief work and self-governance.

Participation

Theorists of participatory democracy see participation as more than voting in elections. The increasingly high abstentionism in elections and the disenchantment with political parties and the political class more generally (Stoker 2006, Mair 2006) has led to the development of new forms or even a market of political activism (Richardson 1995, Jordan and Maloney 2007).

Participatory democracy calls for broad participation in the decision making system. It requires creating opportunities for all members of a group to contribute to decision-making processes. However, participatory democracy has different meanings. While in the late 1960s and 1970s the concept was used as a critique of democratic elitism³, it has a more functional role in contemporary democratic theory. This has led some observers to take a rather critical

²² The only exception concerns humanitarian organizations. The Geneva Conventions accord the right – if not the obligation - to humanitarian organizations to assist the victims in armed conflicts. Yet even there states do not necessarily respect the norms enshrined in international humanitarian law.

³ Based on the works by Pateman (1970) and Bachrach (1967)

position in arguing that “the new approach of participatory governance rests on the very traditional premises of technocratic politics” (Greven 2007: 242).

These two conceptualisations can also be distinguished as *principled* understandings based on the idea that participation in itself is in line with fundamental democratic principles, in particular equal representation, and as *functional* understanding focusing on the outcome of social participation both in terms of good governance and in terms of efficiency (Kohler-Koch and Finke 2007). The instrumental character of participation is based on the idea that the participation of all concerned actors will lead to system effectiveness while at the same time contributing to its overall level of legitimacy (Gbikpi and Grote 2002, Heinel 2007). Thus, taken together, scholars working on a transnational level argue that global processes would lead to the diffusion of dominant cultural frames, values and resources (Boli and Thomas 1999, for an overview see Bailer et al 2007).

Ever since Tocqueville, non-state actors have been considered to be crucial actors in democratic systems. Following the pluralist literature in the 1950, after some forty years of relative silence on this matter, contemporary debates, starting in the 1990s, reveal, as Rossteutscher (2005:4) put it, “a shift in the urge for associative help comparable to the pluralist turn in the 1940s and 1950s”. Non state actors, as some believe, contribute to better representation, deliberation, the counterbalancing of powers, the cultivation of political skills and the formation of public opinion (Warren 2001).

According to Scholte (2004) transnational non-state actors, such as academic institutions, business forums, clan and kinship circles, consumer advocates, development cooperation initiatives, environmental movements, ethnic lobbies, faith-based associations, human rights promoters, labour unions, relief organizations, think tanks, could play their role as

transnational representatives of diverse demoi. In this sense, their participation at the global level is to be understood as more than promoting new norms or raise issues. They are conceptualised as agents of resistance (Kaldor 2000) or systematic transformation (Florini 2003). The normative view insists “less on causal pathways of influence, or scope conditions of political success, but on the emancipatory role of NGOs” (Steffek 2008, 8). Yet this postulate does not answer whether and how this can actually be converted into actions and decisions unless any form of participation is considered to be indicative of the process of democratization process at the international level.⁴

We find both ideas – the principled and the functional understanding - in the specific form of participatory democracy which is associative democracy. In this form of democracy, non-state actors contribute to democratic processes for the benefit of increased legitimacy. Thus, it is assumed that non-state actors – both economic and others - can be at the same time an instrument to improve the efficiency of policy-making and ensure citizens’ participation (Hirst 1994⁵, Cohen and Rogers 1995, Schmalz-Bruns 1995). In situations where political parties do not supply adequate access to citizens in order to allow them to participate in the decision-making processes, which is the case at the global level, associations offer opportunities for such participation.

In the framework of associative democracy, the inclusion of interest groups in decision-making to democratise the process is justified on the basis of two arguments. First, it ‘organised civil society’ is the product of the right of free association. Defenders of these forms of democracy portray these groups primarily as bottom-up, citizen-initiated, part of the

⁴ For a critical view see Jaeger (2007)

⁵ Hirst’s conceptualisation of associative democracy is focused at the local level. Given the subsidiarity norm of the EU, his understanding of the concept was not used by scholars in their analysis of the EU’s democratic deficit.

voluntary process of people's coming together to govern themselves. Groups can therefore be a positive force for democratic development in explaining, raising, and discussing the issues of the day. Thus, an important element for determining the value of a group system as a "vehicle for representative government is to ascertain the degree and type of popular participation in voluntary associations" (Baumgartner and Leech 1998, 89).

The second most important justification for interest group participation is that they provide lawmakers with relevant information otherwise not available (Mansbridge 1992, 35). In their understanding of associative democracy Cohen and Rogers underline that the State must support interest groups lacking the necessary resources to intervene in the policy-making process so that they can provide the necessary expertise to policy makers. The model of associative democracy, by combining the neocorporatist agenda to the requirements of the theory of liberal democracy, assumes that non-state actors can be at the same time instruments to improve the efficiency of policy-making and assure citizens' participation. We find here elements of the neopluralist view which is based on the classical idea developed by Truman (1951) that the representation of interests through the group system is certainly neither perfect nor without bias; but the diversity of associations helps to preserve a rather equal representation of all interests.

Non-state actors, and this is the novelty brought in through the neopluralist approach, do not only provide influence through information, but also contribute to political campaigns and interact with one another in particular ad hoc coalitions as Lowery and Gray (2004) argue. They show that there is a much broader range not just of competition but of collaboration as well among organized interests. The influence production process is not unidirectional – there are significant feedbacks among actors.

Thus we can summarise the arguments developed by the authors on participatory and associative democracy in two points: first, resources, financial as well as social ones, are needed to enhance the capacities of non-state actors in order to intervene in public political debates. According to theorists of participatory democracy, the lawmakers must enhance the resources actively.

Second, non-state actor mobilisation is fundamental for measuring the degree to which citizens are represented and participate in the decision-making process through non-state actors. This element refers to degree of representativity and internal participatory structures of non-state actors. These elements are crucial for understanding how non-state actors adopt their external participatory features and their internal structures – a process we call professionalization – in order to participate efficiently in global affairs.

Applied to the global level, democratization means the participation of non governmental members of various societies at the international level. As a consequence the activity of any such actors may be considered to further the advancement of democratic governance at the global level. The underlying assumption is that civil society participation contributes to the collective/public good. These postulates are primarily defined by the intention of the individual actors that they actually fulfill this role. From an empirical perspective, however, the question is less relevant as to the motivation of the actors involved. Instead one needs to analyze first three specific interrelated problems before being capable at all to assess this supposed democratization trend.

In order to participate there must be a space allowing these actors to participate in the first place or to try to participate. This issue needs to be addressed first before discussing the

normative expectations linked to the participation of organized civil society. The potential for participation differs fundamentally with respect to the operative dimension of any organization and the advocacy dimension. Given the still central role of the state in international relations, success of the corresponding activity still depends on the ability and willingness of the states to tolerate (or even support) their contribution to what the latter consider as a part of providing public goods.

With respect to the advocacy function of NGOs access is not necessarily an issue. They can at any time launch a campaign focusing on human rights, the environment or development for example. This implies generating support among its supporters, the media and politics. But it also relates to the problem of access even though of a different sort: access to the national and international political decision making institutions. Over the years that access is no longer questioned and has become more or less the rule at least within the UN system. But again, **access does not necessarily mean success in achieving specific objectives**. The advocacy role refers to an additional problem: purely national NGOs may also have an international role if they try to influence their respective national political institutions to enforce specific norms or activities at the international level in their foreign policies.

While operative and advocacy activities of non-state actors lead to different forms and challenges for participation, both forms are generally and schematically linked to non-state actor participation in the (good) governance literature.

Governance

Under the heading of governance, non-state actors are expected to contribute to the efficient management of international public policies. Here, the accent lays less on the enhancement of

democracy at the global level than on the conceptualisation of non-state actors as **partners** in global governance.

In the age of globalization and global interdependence non-state actors play a role as partners as well as independent actors. Transnational governance schemes including state and non-state actors aim at providing a functional equivalent to public authority. These schemes establish their own rules, ethics and labels in global affairs. Their activity can be understood both as a problem solving one or as a strategy circumventing the state to create norms and rules in the transnational sphere (Ronit 2006). The normative and empirical literature shows that many international conferences and meetings that followed the report on Global Governance (Commission on Global Governance, 1995) have emphasized the demand for new rules regulating numerous fields of international public policy in creating a “societal steering system” as Ronit calls it (Ronit 2006, 235; See also Jordan et al. 2005). Three arguments can be presented in favour of the partnership understanding (Steffek 2008): First, non-state actors possess non-conventional expertise and knowledge that neither state authorities nor international organizations can offer. Second, these non-state actors represent citizens’ interests and values directly in international policy-making procedures, thus creating an international ‘public sphere’ (Nanz and Steffek, 2004). Thirdly, non-state actors also act as reverse channels and inform citizens directly about decisions taken in the international realm.

The governance conceptualisation of non-state actors presents their participation in global affairs more as a functional necessity than as a democratic imperative. The knowledge and expertise of non-state actors in their respective fields of specialisation should be used as a tool for providing better and more efficient policy-making procedures, both in the agenda setting as well as in the implementation phase of policies decided internationally.

The short review of the various arguments can be summarized in the following way. First, participation of nongovernmental organizations is a reality. Second, participation has become almost a necessity in order to include in the political decision making process the knowledge of these agencies. Third, nongovernmental organizations have also become relevant actors in the implementation of policies. This leaves several issues unresolved: First of all, does the increased participation effectively improve the legitimacy of the political process? Secondly, To what extent does professionalization contribute to that end? And, finally, does this imply a gain in democracy, that is participation equal to democratization?. An answer to this question is anything but simple. If democracy is conceptualized in procedural terms (in principle openness of the political system allowing for participation) this poses less of a problem in contrast to democracy or democratization defined in substantive terms. In the latter case value judgments are inevitable. We will leave out the normative dimension and limit ourselves to the linkage between participation and professionalization, its causes and consequences.

3. Democratization and professionalization of the NGO world

The nongovernmental non-profit organizations have attracted an increasing number of scholars over the past decades, starting probably with the “discovery” of transnational relations or “bringing them back in” (Risse-Kappen, 1995). Where do they come from, what do they do, what is their legitimacy, how do they operate etc. are some of the relevant issues. Parallel to this particular research domain only relatively recently has the concept of global governance emerged which has been linked to the notion of participation if not democratization of the international system of governance. Interestingly enough the issue of professionalization has thus far been given little attention with the exception possibly of

France⁶. Knowledge and skills defining any professional activity are critical attributes for an organization not only to survive but to compete in an increasingly crowded market for private and public funds. Knowledge and skills are also core resources for these organizations. They are the precondition for the ability to influence the decision-making process on the one hand, to participate in the implementation of decisions on the other

Analyzing professionalization processes is not an easy task simply because the world of NGOs is a heterogeneous class of actors, varying in structure, size, capabilities, skills, domain of intervention and missions. This includes extremely diverse classes of actors: among others foundations, professional associations, interest groups or grass roots movements. As we are focusing on the role of nongovernmental organizations in terms of participation and democratization it seems justified to limit our focus on an analytically relatively homogeneous class of actors. The nonprofit status as the exclusive criterion is insufficient. It makes a difference whether an NGO is active in the interest of its own members or whether it is active in the interest of others. Naturally, each interest group would claim that its objectives are in the general interest⁷. An association of engineers, for example, is clearly representing a segment of civil society. Its focus is primarily related to the status of its members relative to the outside world and its internal focus is limited to the dissemination of knowledge and skills.

The specific group of organizations we are interested in are those that are engaged in the pursuit of a normative objective. If the group of engineers would form an association named “engineers for sustainable development” this would be different. Sustainable development is the core objective whereas the knowledge and skills of engineers are instrumental for the

⁶ For example the special issue of the *Revue du Tiers Monde* edited by Le Naëlou/Freyss, 2004. Professionalization has obviously been a concern for some time of the many French international solidarity organizations

⁷ The medical profession is particularly skilled in equating their individual interest with the public interest.

attainment of the objective. The latter is therefore defined in terms of the interests of a specific or generalized group of beneficiaries.

Therefore, next to the nonprofit attribute the pursuit of an objective in the interest of a public good is equally relevant. Historically, as Freyss (2004:742 nn) shows, the normative objective or objectives of this type of nongovernmental actors had its foundation in charity. It was the result of the moral appeal grounded in religion. Later on philanthropy became a dominant motive guided not by religious belief but by reason. More recently the motive, in contrast, has been defined in political terms based on the principle of solidarity respectively international solidarity. Solidarity may be fueled by belief, reason, and/or political conviction.

This gives us the two elements for the identification of the class of non-governmental organizations which we are interested in and which we assume to be relevant for their role as agents of democratization. This class of actors can be differentiated in terms of their functional role or roles. As we will show that aspect is relevant for the discussion of professionalization. This dimension can be reduced to two major properties: advocacy and service delivery. Advocacy can be defined as the engagement of these organizations for specific objectives that can associated with a public good such as human rights. Service delivery in turn means that the organization provides some material or nonmaterial good to a broader audience. The provision of a material good may be emergency relief (shelter, food, medical treatment etc.), the provision of a non material good is basically information such as the International Crisis Group provides with their regularly published analyses. We contend that each NGO is more or less engaged in fulfilling both functions, even though depending on their specificity the one or the other will predominate.

Both functions can be fulfilled professionally. Advocacy can rely on the experience of marketing and lobbying. The same is true for the service functions the various NGOs fulfill. Their activity might not only be driven by good will but also based on the knowledge and skills of a particular set of professions. Yet either goodwill or skills and knowledge may be at the origin of the creation of such a type of NGO. The question therefore is to what extent are professionals a constitutive element in the formation of an NGO of the type we are discussing.

We can distinguish three types:

1. those who define their mission in terms of their own profession,
2. those that adapt existing knowledge and skills to a new situation, based on a specific idea, and, finally,
3. those whose origins is defined in political terms and based on protest.

With respect to the first type we find NGOs such as *Pompiers sans Frontières* (Firemen without Border) or *Reporters sans Frontières* (Reporters without Borders). This type of organizations relies on professionals either active in operational activities such as the Firemen or in advocacy such as the Reporters. Firemen without borders deliver services (disaster preparedness activities among others) that are part of their profession whereas Reporters without borders is engaged predominantly in advocacy.

The second type of organizations are created based on a new idea and preexisting knowledge which is then adapted to its particular mission. The Red Cross or, very recently, NGOs engaged in microfinance are such cases. In the case of the Red Cross medical knowledge for treating wounded soldiers was available based on the idea that this group of persons (among others) is entitled to protection and assistance in the name of humanity. The medical knowledge available nevertheless had to be adapted to the specific conditions of the

battlefield (war surgery). A similar case are NGOs engaged in microfinance and microcredit (see Boyé et al., 2006). This implied as well the creation of the appropriate organizational structure relying on specific knowledge derived from economics and finance. The normative objective in this case is to provide people with the possibility to generate some income.

The third group has its roots in a social movement, which at some point turns into a social movement organization. There is obviously at some point an organizational imperative recognized by its members in order to gain political leverage. Attac (the « Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens“) is such an example. Founded in France in 1998, it is an international organization and network in the global justice movement active in 40 countries and about 1.000 local groups.

Taking into account this variety of organizations sharing two common properties: non-profit and normative objective. They perform two complementary functions where one may be dominant (i.e. advocacy) or where both are complementary (service delivery and advocacy). The research problem can therefore be framed in terms of adaptation on the one hand, professionalization on the other.

Professionalization and Adaptation

Professionalization may be defined as one component of the adaptation of an NGO to the requirements related to its activities. Defined this way adaptation and professionalization become almost synonymous with a particular focus on the knowledge and skills of the organization and its members. We therefore suggest as a provisional definition adaptation as

the process whereby an organization defines or redefines its strategic choices embodied in its mission. It thereby reacts to the changing environment in which it operates.

Professionalization in contrast refers to the process of specialization and diversification of its members and its internal structure.

We have identified the subclass of organizations which can be subsumed under the label of international solidarity. International solidarity is not a profession but rather a choice or vocation. Naëlou (2004: 777) takes a radical position by raising the issue whether the term professionalization is but a trick of the NGOs to legitimize their existence and their activities targeted at their (governmental) donors. Experience based on learning would therefore be central for solidarity NGOs not so much their reliance on professionals. One could therefore speak of professionalization in terms of the “capacités collectives à *agir* solidairement” (Freyss, 2004:764, italics in the original)⁸. This is why she raises the question whether we are dealing with organizations characterized by “professionalization without profession” (Millon, cit. by Naëlou, 2004:778). Professions are defined in the sociological literature as areas in which official and legal structures define the ways and means of legally attributing the profession to an actor (such as lawyers, engineers, etc.).

If solidarity is primarily a vocation this does nevertheless not exclude the professionalization of the organizations, both for advocacy or service delivery purposes. Reality shows as well that the requirements of NGOs in their job announcements define in very specific terms the kind of profile required from the candidates⁹ (nutritionist, water engineer, etc.).

Professionalization can therefore be defined in terms of its underlying technical logic opposed to the logic of solidarity (Naëlou, 2004a:783). Freyss goes even further by pointing to the

⁸ The collective capacity to act in a solidary fashion, transl. by the authors.

⁹ A look at the various websites of NGOs such as Oxfam is ample evidence.

drawbacks of professionalization which is based on technical specialization or what he calls the balkanization of the given domain of intervention on the one hand, the bureaucratization on the other. Balkanization relates both to the internal division of labor into different sectors of specialization, i. e. knowledge and expertise, as well as with respect to the different target groups (old persons, children, women etc.). “Balkanization” raises the issue of priority setting and coordination both within and between organizations. Bureaucratization, in contrast, seems to be an inescapable imperative for any organization. Bureaucratization is a universal phenomenon and therefore relatively neutral with respect to the normative objectives pursued by an organization. Yet this may indeed have consequences for the organizations’ functioning and its performance.

Causes of professionalization

At the outset, the professional status of an NGO is not relevant. In the absence of an internationally recognized legal status their status is defined by each state separately. In France it is the 1901 law requiring only a valuable mission, in Germany the equivalent principle of “Gemeinnützigkeit” (public utility) applies. The formal set of rules does not presuppose any professional skills but rather “good intent”. Given these conditions what could professionalization mean? Let us take the example of humanitarian organizations. Anybody could call herself or himself a humanitarian as well as any organization can call itself a humanitarian organization. The normative objective(s) can therefore differ as well. Some humanitarian organizations define their mission relatively narrow, based on the four fundamental Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Others include as well conflict resolution, development or other additional

objectives. As a consequence a common deontology characteristic of officially recognized professions does not exist.

And yet, the process of professionalization is undeniably under way. In the following we will formulate a few propositions illustrated by a number of examples. These hypotheses are for the time being only suggestive. They need to be tested systematically in the future. These propositions will focus on two aspects:

- a) the conditions that are conducive to professionalization on the one hand, and
- b) the consequences of professionalization on the other.

These two dimensions will be elaborated next.

Conditions conducive to NGO professionalization

It has generally been argued that the creation of norms has its origins primarily in civil society (cf. Keck/Sikkink 1998 ; Schemel/Eberwein, 2009). For NGOs the problem consists in finding the resources for their activities. As they either offer their services for the implementation of public policies or whether they initiate the creation of new public policies this means that this will find its repercussions in the allocation of resources in the government budgets. In order to have access to funding (proposition 1.1) the NGOs have to demonstrate that they are professional, that is that they distinguish themselves as a particular group of actors able and qualified to provide particular services. In order to legitimize the funding of NGOs for the provision of specific services whatever the reasons may be¹⁰ governments (proposition 1.2) will specify a number of conditions how the resources have to be spent.

¹⁰ It could be that it is cheaper for a government to outsource specific activities, or that it does not want to create a special administrative branch to provide specific services.

This, we postulate (proposition 2) that the professionalization of NGOs is a supply driven activity of the states to the extent that government funding cannot be substituted by private donations. Conversely (proposition 3) the NGOs collectively recognize their interest to delimit themselves as “professional organizations” from non professional ones. As long as their activities are not established as recognized professions and that the governments do not legislate correspondingly the option for the NGOs consists in a process of self-regulation.

Based on these arguments one of the consequences for the NGOs is professionalization in terms of bureaucratization. That is the public donors define relatively narrowly the conditions how the resources have to be managed. A good example is the Framework Partnership Agreement of ECHO, the European Community Humanitarian Office and the contractual rules that apply once a project has successfully passed the barrier of approval. Project management is objective neutral but the bureaucratic procedures that apply can make life for the professionals providing the services relatively hard.

What is the potential motive for autoregulation? Autoregulation can be interpreted as a strategy of NGOs to delimit themselves as “professional organizations” from others. It is one possibility to reduce competition. Cooley and Ron (2002:6) argued that “the growing number of IOs and INGOs within a given transnational sector increases uncertainty, competition and insecurity ... in that sector” increases”. Yet how efficient is this process of autoregulation as another element of externally induced professionalization? Again, taking the example of the humanitarian NGOs the result with respect to codes of conduct has been successful in that practically all humanitarian NGOs have signed it. In terms of unifying humanitarian action the result is disappointing as reality shows (see among others Leader, 1998; Hilhorst, 2008). Networks have been created at the national (*Coordination Sud* in France, VENRO in

Germany or InterAction in the United States of America), the regional (VOICE at the EU level) and the international (ICVA) levels. Yet this networks struggle hard to establish a common denominator as these NGOs usually tend to emphasize what distinguishes them from the others).

Professionalization in terms of specialization is another trend based on the recognition of the various needs. In this case professionalization implies the technical dimension of service delivery. Logistics, camp management, water and sanitation etc. are standard activities of humanitarian NGOs each of them requiring specialists. This implies necessarily the risk that technical standards become dominant whereas the overall objective is lost out of sight. The Project SPHERE 2004) with its minimal standards that has such an attempt to contribute to the professionalization of humanitarian action. Its technical focus has been widely criticized. The COMPAS Quality of the Group *Urgence, Rehabilitation, Développement* (URD)¹¹ is one of the responses which is indicative of the process in search of professionalization.

We can draw a number of preliminary conclusions with respect to the professionalization. In particular NGOs providing services are forced to professionalize in order to demonstrate their utility to the principals donors, the states. The states are the primary source of competition among NGOs by funding those activities they consider relevant in their interest. One of the consequences is not only the professionalization in terms of specialization but also of bureaucratization. This is also a precondition for participation. Only those NGOs having a good track record of performance will have less difficulties to participate in the decision-making process.

Consequences of Professionalization

¹¹ See the website for details www.compasqualite.org/en/dynamic-compas/supports-dynamic-compas.php

Again, we will refer to a proposition Cooley/Ron (2002:6) have formulated and which will serve as the starting point for our own discussion: “ the marketization of many IO and INGO activities – particularly the use of competitive tenders and renewable contracting - generates incentives that produce dysfunctional outcomes. These two authors reduce dysfunctions to the increased competition among NGOs and donors. The dysfunctional outcome consists in the inefficient if not wasteful use of resources. From their theoretical point of view, the new economics of organizations conceptualized in terms of the principal-agent model, that conclusion is plausible. But it is no more than that as it ignores two aspects which are probably even more relevant. One relevant dimension relates to the problem raised by Dijkzeul/ Gordenker, 2003), the tension between the strategic and the field levels of organization. But this is not the only problem.

Going back to the metaphor of “balkanization”, the greater the degree of specialization within an organization the greater the problems concerning an organization’s priorities (proposition 4.1) . At the same time the costs of coordination will increase. This relates primarily to the headquarters with their bureaucratic structures. Competition starts at home so to speak. The specialization and differentiation within an organization which will necessarily go hand in hand with organizational growth. This leads us to postulate the proposition that the greater the preoccupation of the leadership of an organization is organizational survival the more likely will it pursue a strategy of specialization in order to establish its reputation and capacity as an efficient service provider. This poses severe problem in terms of the managerial capacities of the organizations, in particular the recruitment of individuals capable of assuming the heavy load of leadership. As the evaluation report commissioned by OCHA shows (xxx) the big humanitarian NGOs have established some internal procedures and training programs for their

future leaders. This activity is based on the recognition of the crucial role of leadership and coordination skills.

One can add an additional proposition (4.2) related to the increasing professional specialization of the organization. Taking into account the funding availability aspect and organizational survival increasing specialization can lead to two strategies of adaptation: one would be increasing inter-agency coordination, the other is mandate change if not mandate enlargement (cf. Schemel/Eberwein, 2009). At the structural level this may lead to a process of concentration (prop. 4.3) where only the big organizations will in the end survive. An alternative one might find the pressure on the part of donors to reduce their workload by reducing the number of service suppliers. That is one of the motives behind the Humanitarian Reform that is to channel national resources through the UN as coordinator. Alternatively, ECHO is strongly suggesting the NGOs to form consortia which would have the same effect that is reducing the number of project proposals.

One of the problems that will arise relate to participation properly speaking: the greater the specialization the greater the probability that they will be included at least at some stages of the decision making process (proposition 5.1). That is participation will be greatest in those areas where NGOs bring in their specialized knowledge and experience. This may well lead to increasing participation with the pressure to compromise which, in turn, may create problems within the organization if it is a membership organization (proposition 5.2). A good example of this problem is the French network *Reseau Action Climat* (RAC) which is part of Climate Action Network (CAN). RAC is a relevant partner for the French administration in environmental issues but this has created conflicts among the organizations included in the network and their members because the RAC specialists did compromise in order to

participate. This problem does not arise with respect to specialized advocacy or non-member organizations such as Transparency International. But these organizations may nevertheless get some public funds if they perform activities which are in the interest of the government. The preliminary conclusions concerning the consequences of participation related to several dimensions. First of all, specialization in conjunction with the emergence of new problems and the availability of public funds leads the individual organizations to rethink their particular mission and survival strategy (that is issues relating to the adaptation of their mission and structure). Recognized specialization is a necessary property for these organizations to be able to participate in the political decision making process. This, however, is a structural vulnerability of the NGOs at large: the greater the number of NGOs participating as specialists, the greater the possibility of the states to instrumentalize the NGOs. Governments may be able to "pick and choose" what they consider to be in their interest (proposition 5.3). One could furthermore argue, that the greater the need is to rely on "technical" knowledge and skills, the greater the probability that the decisions made may be "better", but at the same time these results will be less and less be transmitted as politically relevant both to their members as well as to the public at large (prop. 5.4).

Outlook: The convergence proposition

The previous arguments have converged to a positive if not optimistic assessment of professionalization (specialization) with respect to participation. The assessment with respect to potential gains in democratization is pessimistic. The convergence proposition argued that one path of professionalization leads the NGOs to become more and more likely to for profit organizations. The only difference would be that there is that in the latter case there is a direct link between the producer and the consumer of services, whereas in the case of the non profits

the NGO is the linchpin as the producer between the funding agency and the beneficiaries whose needs as consumers are defined by both the donors and the NGOs. Another preliminary conclusion is that NGOs do certainly represent a lively civil society but that their activities seem to be much more dependent on the states rather than the states being increasingly weakened by and dependent on NGOs.

We hope that our systematic empirical research will show that our pessimism is unjustified.

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