



The Voice of Global Civil Society Models of Aggregation

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*** This Paper is intended to be read with the accompanying Models of Aggregation Graphs
(See Power Point Attachment)**

Abstract:

Conference participants are asked to envision possibilities for the creation of more influential arrangements to represent the diverse elements of “global civil society.” This paper provides an overview of a range of models of aggregation for cooperation, collaboration, and coalition. The typology of civil society networks, consortia, alliances and forums is intended to draw attention to different types of organization structures. Such a typology may help to provide insights into effective means of consolidating the collective knowledge and resources of “global civil society” and focusing the diversity of their voices.

Introduction:

The purpose of this paper, which investigates a cross-section of recent transnational civil society experience, is to gain insights into the complexities and challenges inherent in existing models of civil society aggregation. Using an organizational theory perspective, the paper examines the various structural or compositional factors and strategic objectives adopted by the civil society coalitions. First the paper delineates the methodology behind the taxonomy of civil society models of aggregation. Then, each of the models of aggregation is briefly described.

The Methodology:

Nine sets of descriptive characteristics are considered. The characteristics are defined, founded loosely upon the human relations, contingency and institutional schools of organizational theory (Hodge, Anthony and Gales 2002). The nine characteristics are:

1. Degree of Formality / Informality
2. Shape of Governance Structure: Vertical (Hierarchical) / Horizontal (Flat)
3. Permanent (comprised of many permanent bodies) / One Time (few permanent bodies)
4. Routinized / Ad Hoc
5. Closed-Restricted Membership / Open-Non-Restricted Membership
6. “Like” (single-sector membership) / “Like-Minded” (multi-sector membership)
7. Focused Objectives / Broad Objectives
8. Inflexible Mandate / Flexible Mandate
9. Results-Oriented / Dialogue-Oriented

Profiles for civil society organizations were collected to illustrate a range of models of aggregation:

1. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
2. Oxfam International
3. The European Network on Debt and Development (Eurodad)
4. NGO Working Group on the Security Council
5. Global Campaign to Action against Poverty (GCAP)
6. Civil G8
7. OneWorld
8. Worldwide Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS)
9. World Social Forum

These models of aggregation are depicted, for expository purposes, by ascending vertical and horizontal scales. A two-dimensional heuristic graph, containing a vertical axis and a horizontal axis, groups models in terms of the nine organizational characteristics and separates the graph into four central quadrants (See

Power Point Attachment - Graph 1). The nine descriptive “binaries” are grouped loosely together around those factors that are oriented toward structure and composition and those that more closely correspond to strategic objectives. The selected organizations are plotted onto the graph with the most formal/structured and results-oriented being plotted in the top-right quadrant and the least formal/structured and results-oriented in the bottom-left quadrant (See Power Point Attachment - Graph 2). The graph represents one lens to organize the descriptive characteristics and visually depict the models of aggregation.

The Models:

Each of the nine organizations explored below exhibit different characteristics in terms of decision-making; developing leadership and governance mechanisms; orienting and focusing objectives and determining the rules of membership.

1) “Microsoft” Model (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC]):

The “Microsoft” model is essentially a single organization with a specific and concise results-oriented mandate. The structure of decision-making and governance is highly centralized and vertical (hierarchical), defined in terms of “top-down” processes. Major decisions are primarily reached at the highest levels of management in international boards or executive bodies. Accountability measures are clearly defined up the “chain-of-command.” Levels of organizational transparency may be compromised by the fact that the organization is not clearly accountable to the “public” at large.

In his analysis of plausible methods for “internationalizing the policy processes” of think-tanks, Simon Maxwell describes the “Microsoft” model in terms of setting up “a network of think-tanks, all branded Overseas Development Institute,” in which all of its members are “exactly the same and our empire would extend from coast to coast” (Maxwell 2003, 2). Maxwell rejects the efficacy of this model on both intellectual and moral grounds, questioning the authority, effectiveness and legitimacy of such an organizational entity. Maxwell writes that it “would be a very bad model for us because that kind of hegemonic, dominating, monopolist of ideas is probably a bad idea intellectually, [...] and there is no way that we could take over think-tanks around the world and nor should we” (Maxwell 2003, 2).

2) “Franchise/McDonalds” Model (Oxfam International):

Organizations following the “franchise” or “McDonalds” model (i.e. Oxfam International) function like a “matrix” network, composed of a number of identical or homogenous “nodes” (franchises) who each hold more-or-less equal decision-making power and essentially look the same. They are characterized by the “local” and “independent” ownership of its affiliated members, which are linked together by a set of common operational rules, objectives or services provided by the organization. Stephen Borgatti defines such “networking” organizations as “a collection of autonomous firms or units that behave as a single larger entity, using social mechanisms for coordination and control,” (Borgatti 1996). B.J. Hodge, William P. Anthony and Lawrence M. Gales write that “matrix” networks tend to facilitate the efficient use of resources, knowledge and expertise at the cost of potentially increasing power conflicts and impeding decision-making due to the extensive coordination and cooperation that is required for “matrix” networks to function effectively (Hodge, Anthony and Gales 2002, 204-206).

John Clark writes that these groups “agree to a set of common ground rules and work together on specific activities where there is mutual advantage. Examples include the World Council of Churches, the ICFTU, Oxfam International, Friends of the Earth International and international inter-faith networks” (Clark 2003, 4). Governance and decision-making structures are cooperative but clearly defined. These are collaborative arrangements, comprised of primarily “like” organizations that are committed to achieving

the same overarching goals and agree to operate in the same way in order to achieve them. For example, members of the Oxfam International confederations are guided by a common vision and philosophy, operate in essentially the same way and deliver identical services (i.e. addressing inequality, poverty, hunger, armed conflict and injustices wherever they occur) (Hajnal 2002, 58).

3) “Star Alliance” Model (The European Network on Debt and Development [Eurodad]):

Another “approach to using networks” discussed by Maxwell is the “Star Alliance” airline model. In the “Star Alliance” model member airlines remain independently owned. Unlike, the “McDonald’s” franchise model, “Star Alliance” members choose in which areas to strategically cooperate and in which to remain independent. Alliances maintain a higher degree of autonomy over individual policy mandates and governance structures. “Star Alliance” airline members “make their own decisions about aircrafts, routes, maintenance schedules, uniforms, food, charging and so on, but they work together in some kind of loose alliance,” (Maxwell 2003, 2). Members choose to cooperate indefinitely over the long-term.

“Star Alliance” members work to coordinate and integrate strategic activities and operations such as establishing a common global umbrella brand or vision; developing a shared technology platform; providing joint training and ensuring human resource development. The “Alliance’s” areas of cooperation and collaboration are not static and can be re-structured according to member decisions and to enhance the degree of coordination among members. Thus, the nature of the “Star Alliance” model is such that it allows for some degree of flexibility in terms of enabling members to revisit and revise areas of cooperation as desired.

The model also relies on trust between its members in order to make its “policy-sharing” (Maxwell 2003, 2) practices work, as cross-guarantees of maintaining certain standards of quality and practice among all “Alliance” members must be upheld. A high degree of trust and optimism regarding the strategic value of the alliance relationship is also required. However, accountability measures can be limited as the “Alliance” is based primarily on a model of self-accountability in which members are primarily accountable only to other members and vested stakeholders.

4) “Club” Model (The NGO Working Group on the Security Council):

Composed primarily of a fixed group of stakeholders, “Clubs” focus their efforts on a particular field or area of interest. The closed meeting structure of “Clubs” can result in a low degree of accountability for its functions, although, the use of a semi-rotational membership process may help to broaden representation and transparency. The mandates of “Clubs” are also generally narrow and focused, subject to the interests and concerns of those in charge of determining policy in the specific fields that “Clubs” direct their attention. The NGO Working Group on the Security Council (SC), for instance, provides a central and ongoing point of contact and dialogue between interested NGOs and the UN Security Council. The Working Group on the SC provides briefings to SC presidents, organizes informal contacts between NGOs, delegates and experts and aims to achieve greater Council transparency and accountability; better information and analysis available to Council; Council procedural reforms and legal and political policy accomplishments.

The individual members of “Clubs” generally possess a high degree of legitimacy, based on their expertise. While the NGO Working Group on the SC does not claim to be representative in any formal sense, it does have powerful legitimacy as it counts many of the largest and most widely recognized international NGOs working at UN Headquarters among its members.

5) “Campaign Coalition” Model (Global Campaign to Action against Poverty [GCAP]):

Under the “campaign coalition” model, a wide range of organizations and individuals gather together under the banner of a larger organizational structure that promotes the opinions jointly subscribed to by its members. It supports specific policy positions in a variety of international milieu. Members come together around a set of specific issues or objectives that are long-term and require a significant degree of involvement on the part of members (Tarrow 2005, 172).

“Campaign coalitions” enable members to maintain their diversity and independence as an organization, while working to achieve a focused set of mandated goals determined by coalition members. A high degree of member autonomy is thus retained and national or regional-level members are encouraged to develop their own activities under the banner of the coalition and to support the initiatives of other members so as to strengthen the campaigns of both the coalition and individual members. Due to the diversity and large size of “campaign coalitions,” however, they can be prone to logistical confusion, ineffectiveness and miscommunication. Lengthy decision-making processes can also create significant logjams and inefficiencies in campaigns, thereby, actually impeding the overall progress of the coalition.

6) “Event Coalition” Model (Civil G8):

Unlike “campaign coalitions,” most “event coalitions” are based in the short-term (though they can become permanent “event” fixtures), but call for a high degree of intense involvement on the part of members. At best, these models “may trigger opportunity spirals; they can produce new institutionalized forms of cooperation; and they can socialize participants from the local level into rooted cosmopolitans,” (Tarrow 2005, 178).

“Event coalitions” adopt horizontal governance structures, using “roundtable” discussion to maintain informality and to encourage the input of all members. Membership tends to be open although the overarching organizational vision and direction is sometimes “loosely” shaped by an advisory-type board. Membership can also be restricted by the specificity of the coalition’s overarching focus; a specific event or series of events. The coalition’s mandate is similarly limited and focused due to the nature of its overarching purpose; to influence a particular international “event” or institution. This “dependence on the opportunities offered by international institutions puts them [“event coalitions”] at the mercy of changes in international politics” (Tarrow 2005, 168). “Event coalitions” can be based around summits, conferences and meetings, taking the form of more institutionalized consultative processes or consisting of the mounting of international protest events, such as alternative summits. “Event coalitions” have been “formed around summits of the G-8, the IMF, the World Bank, the European Union and, of course, against the American-led war in Iraq,” (Tarrow 2005, 171).

7) “Dialogue Broker” Model (OneWorld):

“Dialogue brokers” are agents for the dissemination of information and the promotion of dialogue among members, policymakers and the larger public sphere. Its primary mission is to enhance the voices of members and create greater awareness of issues pertinent to its members. The “broker” centralizes public access to information, promotes partnership and relationship-building and engages in outreach activities. “Dialogue brokers” create an information and knowledge-sharing network in which they function as the central or overarching “nodes” facilitating information dispersal and enhancing dialogue.

These models are characterized by a high level of member autonomy and control over the content that is shared and the type of dialogue that takes place. The model’s mandate is flexible; broad; member-controlled and entirely dialogue-oriented, while still maintaining a fairly permanent and routinized

organizational and communication structure. The rules of membership and process for joining tends to be relatively unrestricted, provided potential members meet certain general principles or criteria. “Dialogue brokers” are not intended to make policy or achieve specific results beyond facilitating dialogue and communication.

8) “World Assembly” Model (Worldwide Alliance for Citizen Participation [CIVICUS]):

“World Assemblies” are “loose” alliances made up of a diverse grouping of “like-minded” but autonomous members. They provide a focal point for knowledge-sharing; common interest representation; global institution-building and engagement. The “World Assembly” model of CIVICUS seeks to “give expression to the enormous creative energy of the burgeoning sector of civil society” as one of its principal operational mandates. CIVICUS’s annual World Assembly serves as a primary vehicle for civil society practitioners; researchers; activists; concerned business leaders and representatives from development agencies to share ideas and experiences on strengthening citizen participation and civil society. The annual Assembly also acts as a forum where groups from around the world look at successful models for advancing national, regional and global agendas.

The mandates of “World Assemblies” are highly flexible and determined largely by members based around several broad and overarching objectives. The governance structures of “World Assemblies” tend to be horizontal and, even though the alliance itself may be a permanent entity, there are few permanent bodies in the sense that membership processes are fluid and amorphous with new members joining regularly.

9) “Social Forum” Model (The World Social Forum [WSF]):

“Social forums” are comprised of an amorphous, impermanent and permeable membership, consisting of activists; CSOs; individuals; faith-based groups and other social movements. Characterized by their plurality and diversity, “social forums” are unique in that they are intended to facilitate decentralized coordination, networking and dialogue among members. They are highly transparent as the membership process is generally informal and “self-selective;” members “reflect rather than represent” the organization (Clark 2003, 6).

“Social forums” develop “loose” or broad-based methodological and operational synergies and thematic activities but do not possess a defined set of concise policy objectives or campaign goals. They are almost entirely dialogue-oriented, encouraging its members to share their diverse and wide-ranging views that will inform an overarching joint culture or vision for the group. The World Social Forum (WSF), for example, is characterized by plurality and diversity, is non-confessional, non-governmental and non-partisan. It is intended to build collaboration among its members engaged in concrete action towards building another world, at any level from the local to the international.

These forums experience many challenges, however, due to the openness and plurality of their structure and operational mandate. In the past the relevance and intrinsic value of a model that is purely non-deliberative has been questioned (Teivainen 2005). Moreover, there exist no defined mechanisms for determining the representativeness, accountability and legitimacy of the forum. Gunther Schonleitner writes that:

NGO legitimacy can rest on various foundations, such as positive achievements, expertise, representivity, partnerships and values. Yet, for a forum that promotes a broad-based global process to make ‘another world possible,’ representivity is key to its legitimacy. [...] whether the quantity and diversity of participants confers legitimacy on the WSF depends upon the extent to which it can show that it is line with the collective will of these actors (that is, its degree of accountability) (Schonleitner 2003, 134).

Conclusion:

This paper presents several models of civil society aggregation, categorizing examples based on the organizational characteristics that they exhibit and using terminology found in the discipline of organizational theory. Nine sets of characteristics were applied to classify the individual examples. This typology is visually represented by a two-dimensional, four-quadrant graph, containing a vertical axis and horizontal axis upon which each aggregation model was plotted and a brief summary of each of the model's provided.

The principal objective of this paper has been to develop more nuanced understandings of the options – the types of organizational models one might envision for an entity to “aggregate” the collective knowledge, resources and strengths of its members. This paper has presented some of the ways that civil society may organize. It seeks to provoke further thought, dialogue and debate regarding the suitability of each of the models. What are the most promising possibilities for effective arrangements that can legitimately represent the diverse elements of a “global civil society”?

*See attached PowerPoint file for Graphs

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