Civil Society as a network of institutions

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Contents

Abstract

According to a political philosophy approach, civil society may be defined as the network of institutions of private origin and a public purpose in which communities share goods, meanings and values, significantly contributing to the progress or decline of governance. Its empowering role is growing as cooperation networks spread across the local, national, supranational and global levels, strengthening both the communities they serve and the governance procedures they legitimize. Those institutions cut through the "tabula rasa" model of political society, creating networks of cooperation among people with common or at least complementary fields of experience, aims and judgements. The building of a typology of institutions according to functions of care, culture, capital, and citizenship, enhances civil society as an intermediate between community and governance.

Selon la philosophie politique, la société civile peut être définie comme le réseau de institutions d'origine privée et finalité publique, où les communautés peuvent coopérer, en partageant des biens et des valeurs et contribuant d'une façon relevante pour le progrès ou déclin de la gouvernance. Le rôle d' *empowerment* de la société civile est en croissance au niveau local, national, supranational et global, en renforçant les communautés qu'elles servent et les processus de gouvernance qu'elles légitiment. Ces institutions ont brisé le modèle "tabula rasa" de la société politique, en créant des réseaux de coopération entre des gens avec des cultures, finalités et jugements communs ou, tout au moins, complémentaires. Une typologie établie selon quatre fonctions primordiales – soins, culture, capital et citoyenneté – souligne la condition médiatrice de la société civile entre communautés et processus de gouvernance.

1. Introduction

Civil society may be defined as the network of institutions of private origin with a public purpose. Its purpose extends to all ends compatible with a common good. Whereas civil society is open to various configurations it is always defined by its relationship to governance procedures; that expresses the difference between „society" and civil society: people interact, exchange, and share interests and values in this intermediate space between the spheres of governance and community. As the issues to be defined by society depend upon collective deliberation, the identity of the autonomous and self determined individual requires a social matrix that acknowledges the right to choose and that confers upon the individual a voice in deliberation. For a community to exist in history, it must be materialized in institutions. As each man and woman is loyal to particular social structures and the set of practices that constitute the public life of a community express is multiple, democratic political authority emerges as the key to governance.

Governance grows through the ordered superimposition of political powers onto the network of institutions that form the social fabric and organize individual freedoms and behaviour.[2] Community is constituent of the individual because self-interpretations and the horizon of meaning are made possible by it. Civil society articulates the legitimacy of state and international organizations through representative citizenship, and sustains the social fabric of communities through its procedure decisions.

Civil society organizations seem suited to defend special interests. But how does one identify the public scope of such special interests? To what extent can the interests of citizens' groups clash with political representation? What is the point of belonging to non-governmental organizations, other than to draw strength from the private sector? What is the correlation between civil society and democracy? How can the representation of interests be reconciled with the types of compromise that regulate government action? How can power be devolved to civil society without affecting the state's sovereign power and private-sector freedoms?

Such questions are not adequately answered whenever communities are envisaged just as contractual associations, the nation-states as power units and human behaviour considered as increasingly rational and reasonable in history. Community is not a residual phenomenon, condemned by global markets or global managers; it is not a romantic strategy of survival, or a utopian nostalgia; neither, at its worst, an appeal to collectivism. Civil society balances liberal values with respect for traditions, as it does not holds society as a result from a single „contract"; it is based on communication, a process in which diffuse loyalty is more important, effective and lasting than the irrevocable but terminable obligations of a contract.[3]

2. Historical excursus

The concept of civil society as a network of communities between the public and the private has arisen with modernity, alongside the new protagonists of political order, the nation-state and the individual endowed with rights. We may consider as the „founding fathers" of civil society authors such as Suárez, Locke, Hobbes and Althusius who presented alternatives to the exhausted model of the two powers (spiritual and temporal) exhausted by the Wars of Religion and the Christian fundamentalisms of Inquisition and the „rule of the saints on earth".[4] The „founding fathers" considered any community of citizens as based on two pacts; individuals associate themselves to achieve private ends and organize in order to establish a public authority. As civil society organized individual rights and the expression of interests, it empowered private existence. As it exalted communal existence, it empowered the non-religious state.

As they revisited the definition of man as an *animale sociale et politicum*, which corrected the compact theories of the Hellenic *polis* and the Roman *civitas*,[5] the „founding fathers" exhibited significant differences in their interpretation of natural right, freedoms and property, giving birth to antagonistic trends. Suárez distinguished between *pactum associationis* and *pactum subjectionis* as different articulations of the community of citizens. Althusius envisaged a pyramid of associations coordinating hierarchy and freedom: today, they would be called „communitarists". On the other side, Hobbes and Locke used the „tabula rasa" model that pronounces that the state of nature is radically modified by political contract. Natural law, binding morality to nature, is substituted by natural rights. Political contract becomes a decision based on utilitarian reason (Hobbes), subjective or objective rights (Grotius and Locke) a vision prolonged in Stuart Mill's organic liberalism. In the transition from the 18th century to the 19th century, the concept emerged in Hegel's *Bürgergeselschaft* as a moment of the state, decided by majority will (Rousseau), historical reason (Hegel) or revolutionary ideology (Marx).

All along the 19th century, every European liberal society produced its version of a civil society concept, reflecting its own practice and history. As the dissolution of the „ancient regime" was sped up by the reinforcement of the nation-state, civil society emerged out of the disintegration of the old communities and the emergency of the individual This trend is reflected by Thomas Reid's and Adam Smith's „common sense school"l; in the Krausist thought, in the likes of Oliveira Martins, in Portugal, and Sanz del Rio, in Spain; in Tocqueville's *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* an exercise extended to *Democracy in America*. At the turn of the 19th century, the decline of the community was an issue that launched the foundation of Sociology in the 20th century in a non-positivist basis. In 1887, in *Gesellschaft und Gemeinschaft* Ferdinand Toennies distinguished between „natural will" and „reflexive will". Martin Buber introduced a distinction between the old „community of blood" and the new „chosen community." Max Weber called „comunitarization" the process of mutual orientation that takes place between citizens. The works of Georg Simmel, Helmuth Plessner and Talcott Parsons enhanced similar holistic-individualistic alternatives.[6] or democratic consensus (Luhman)[7] and moral sense (Taylor).

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[3]   Michael Oakeshott 1991. Rationality in Politics. Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays. Indianapolis.

[4]   Vogelin 1953

[5]   „Naturale autem est homini ut sit animal sociale et politicum, magis etiam quam omnia alia animalis; quod quidem naturalis necessitas declarata", in: Aquinas Summa Theologica, I, 1.

[6]   Nisbet 1953

[7]   Marshall et al. 1995; with essays and case studies on American civil society.

All these trends were assessed since the beginning of the 80's in the context of the crisis of individualism conjoined by the crisis of progress after the 70's, the era of the „end of ideology". The ideology of progress was in check not only because its promises were not accomplished and there were world-wide unbalances in standards of living, but because they were objectionable (Hans Jonas) or unsustainable (Meadows). Daniel Bell questioned the ideological and „historicist" approach of the notion of civil society. The future inspired more disquiet than hope: the totalitarian shock of 20th century (Marxism and Nazism), and the fundamentalist shock of early 21st century (Islamo-fascism) showed how material progress is not enough to confer meaning upon human existence.

Authors of the most different persuasions – liberals, conservatives, progressives, traditionalists, agnostics and believers, Christians and Jews, enhanced the importance of of civil society institutions. Conservatives highlighted the importance of „intermediate bodies." Left-wing doctrinaires envisaged the public sphere renewed with feminist, ecological, consumer and many other social movements.[8] Eastern European reformers faced the challenges of transition from Communism and integration into the European Union with the civil society concept. The Catholic Church highlighted the importance of market and culture for a „full liberation" ideal.[9] Anglo-protestant trends defended the individualism. In developing countries, civil society was seen as a support to state and nation building.

Out of this excursus into the intellectual history of the concept of civil society, we may sort out three theoretical traditions.

The first, best represented by Locke, envisions civil society as a domain against the intrusion of the state and for the organizational and institutional defence of individual rights. Albeit extending the notion of individual rights to collective human rights, this trend reflects the old liberal tradition, taking the individual as the sole source of social balance. We find such proposals in European liberals: to Dahrendorf and Popper civil society is a school where citizens learn rights and initiatives and rebuild leaderships and forms of solidarity; in the new French political thought of Jean-Marc Ferry, Alain Renaut, Pierre Manent and others. In the Anglo-American sphere the distinct liberalisms of Rawls, Dworkin and Ackerman are well known.[10]

A second tradition stems from Marx and envisions the disappearance of the state. Organizations constitute themselves as civil society, on the basis of their connection to the state. The most convincing 20th century conceptualization of this tradition is formulated by Gramsci in *Quaderni de Carcere*. For him, civil society is instrumental for the transformation of the state without engaging in a frontal assault of the „state apparatus". It is the channel to reform the state and its policies, using the organized pressure from society, and without limiting the process of democratic representation to elections and formal politics. This is the approach of German socialists like Habermas; of cosmopolitan authors such as Jean Ziegler, Manuel Castells and Anthony Giddens.

The third tradition, associated to Tocqueville and Max Weber, refers to the process of self-management of issues by people organized autonomously from the state, but within the framework of democracy. In the social teaching of *Centesimus Annus*; in the „intermediate structures" mentioned by Europeans like Vittorio Possenti and Rocco Butiglione, or American such as Michael Novak, Peter Berger, Mary Ann Glendon and Robert Putnam;[11] in the reassessment of community in a „liberal" like John Rawls; and in the enhancement of the individual in „communitarists" like Charles Taylor and Michael Sandel.[12]

3. From Local to Global and Back

In an age where „networks" have replaced the „tabula rasa", there is no single relationship between the private and public, the social and the political, the state and non-governmental, the national and the international, the local and the global spheres.

In the narrowest sense, civil society is the domain of voluntary local communities: local and regional interest groups, trade union associations, philanthropic, recreational, cultural and parish associations, and environmental-, heritage-, rights-, consumer- and local-protection organizations. One step further, stand churches, non-governmental organizations, social movements and

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[8] Gramsci 1975

[9] Arrow 1992; a preparatory study for the Centesimus Annus encyclical.

[10] Taylor 1997, 245ff.

[11] Amongst conservatives, Berger and Neuhaus 1999. Evans and Boyte 1992 is a feminist- and populist-based overview of „free spaces" in American civil society that expanded the frontiers of democracy „empowering" communities in different historical phases.

[12] Cohen, Arato 1995, ch. 1: „The Contemporary Revival of Civil Society"; Berger, Neuhaus 1996; Henriques 1996

movements of public opinion with an international or global reach. In its widest sense, global civil society refers to a highly diverse field of organizations quite different and even contradictory in their goals and effects.[13] The mapping of global civil society requires the collection of data sets covering globalisation, international law, civil society organisations (OSC's). In both senses, indeed, the cultural, civic, religious, social and economic institutions are superimposed thanks to their mutual ties and interwoven by multiple micro-powers.[14]

Civil society is a network of associations that generate rules of trust. Citizens learn to cooperate to their mutual benefit, in line with the concept of „social capital" introduced by Mancur Olson[15]. It is an essential corrective mechanism in democratic societies, a new form of state action that supports the democratic construction of association.[16] According to this circumscriptive definition, networks of associations socialize participants according to rules of reciprocity and trust, and facilitate joint standards for action. Sports clubs, cultural associations, self-help societies, heritage-, environmental- and consumer-protection organizations, mutual assurance companies, neighbourhood organizations, religious parishes, youth and elder-citizens' groups and welfare organizations form horizontal networks with their own particular forms of relationships. Society becomes more governable because citizens attach themselves to a range of organizations that go beyond social barriers and political and business divisions.[17]

The configurations of civil society depend upon very diverse cultural and historical horizons. Even the term „West" is a „political hieroglyph" that masks a difference between America – a centralizing federal nation state – and European states, governed by the principle of subsidiarity. The very names „United States" and „European Union" are misleading because they disguise the different dynamics of civil societies in the two „Wests". In the North American tradition of community organization and civic engagement, civil society is rather complementary to government in the conduct of public affairs. It thrives under the protection of the democratic state, and in return nurtures democratic politics by making citizens responsible for the management of their own lives without becoming dependent on the government. In Europe, civil society is an essential bond between citizens and the state within the nation-state framework. This concept seeks to harmonize public and private ends; it punishes policies that are too closely tied to government action as the only way of pursuing distributive justice; and it punishes policies that are unconcerned about the destructive impact of economic globalization.

Inside Europe there are strong variants. Eastern Europe, valued civil society as a sphere of action independent from the state that can boost activity. Having challenged the soviet-style state, the Dissidents (*inakomyslyashtie*) fought for personal autonomy in civil society. Vaclev Havel's „anti-political politics" and Charter 77; Poland's *Solidarnosc*; Solzhenitsyn's great revelations about the recreation of the „Russian House"; according to Thadeus Masowiecki, the „power of the powerless" follows the same model, as highlighted by Aleksander Smolar: the anti-political approach of Eastern European dissidents mobilizes citizens against despotic power.[18] Scandinavian democracies come closer to the belief in the importance of people's autonomous organization, as in the works of labor unions, farmers cooperatives, community organizations, churches, and the like. They seem to work more efficiently than any other institutional systems in the world. In South Europe the doctrines and programmes of political parties increasingly cater for the aspirations of civil society as a way of using participatory citizenship to compensate for the shortcomings of participative democracy, bringing them closer to a democracy of proximity.

Strengthening of the participatory dimension of citizenship at the expense of representative values and ideals is typical of the US.[19] New forms of voluntary activity are making up for the dehumanization of health care; organizations are emerging to defend rights overlooked by the political class and the media; the freedom to teach and learn is shouldered by non-governmental organizations, because secularism has become an expression of faith like any other. The arguments of those who say that macro-social effects result from the action of political associations must be compared to Putnam's argument concerning the depoliticizing effects of non-party associations.[20]

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[13]   Yearbook of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance, London School of Economics

[14]   Schumacher 1989

[15]   Olson 1982 criticizes the „society of interest groups".

[16]   Michael Walzer, „The Civil Society Argument", in: Mouffe 1992, 89-107

[17]   Bellah 1985

[18]   Foley, Edwards 1996; Cohen, Arato 1993

[19]   Eberly 1994.

[20]   Foley and Edwards 1996, 38-52, contradict Putnam, by insisting that the politicization of society is decisive for the success of civil society.

Indeed, the sociological indicators gathered by Robert Putnam indicate that the „long civic generation" is dying out.[21] The time/busy occupation research indicates a gradual weakening of civil society since the 1960s. Mailing-list organizations may be growing – such as ecological and pacifist movements which, at the furthest limit, send out magazines in return for cheques; the socialization process, however, requires effective ties of relationship. There is a clear decline in traditional associations like the scouts and parents' and women's groups. Suburban mobility, time and money pressures, women's emancipation, rising separations and divorces, development of the welfare state, racial discrimination and human rights may all be contributing to increased individualism. And the improving education of the average American deepens the mystery surrounding this vanishing civic spirit. One of the „usual suspects" is television.[22]

The state's current crisis of legitimacy has led to the strengthening of civil society in other regional areas. In Africa, civil society offers new opportunities to countries with a deficient or failed state. Traditional African democracy lacks synthesis between the inherited past and modern democratic values, institutions and procedures. As Kwame Appiah has written, Africa will only solve its problems when it views them as human problems in an African context. The African tradition of consensus must be liberated from „the black man's burden" and transformed into African communitarism.[23] Its basic principle is to view human beings via the *ubuntu* principle: „a person is a person through another person."[24] The *ubuntu* principle does not deny individual political rights, as it respects the individual. It places the stress on human sociability and inter-personal relations, which is very different from possessive individualism; as a root of African humanism it still has to link up with democracy's universal principles.[25]

In Islamic countries there is a clear interdependence between the political and religious spheres, expressed in the concept of the community of believers (*oummah*). If we are to understand what is happening today in the Muslim world, we must appreciate the universality and centrality of religion as a factor in the lives of the Muslims.[26] Yet, the emergence of „new voices of Islam"[27] or „new Islamic thinkers"[28] shows that using necessity (*darura*) as an excuse for circumventing secularism is no longer sufficient. The majority of Muslims take the benefits of modernity and the secularization of public life for granted and they do not want the benefits of development to be destroyed by the Sharia. In this sense, they are slowly marching towards civil society.[29]

In South America, community organizations have become an important part of the social landscape, Christian religious groups playing a specific role, as do ethnic movements. All kinds of organizations have created support networks in the poorest communities, sometimes in exchange for „patronage" or forced protection. Age-based, environmental, women's and other groups are emerging, and are organizing in order to be heard and to have their identities recognized. According to UN indicators for South America, however, those voluntary ideological associations seem to be waning. On the other side, changes in the South American political systems are being brought about by the formal and informal values shared as a source of collective action and socio-political influence.[30]

4. A typology of institutions

We saw that communities are about the sharing of meaning and values. Through joint deliberation we accomplish our identity as free beings. And the accomplishment of our freedom as essential for the affirmation of identity needs common instruments of decision, that is, institutions. Authority is essentially grounded in the sum of current institutions. The concept 'institution' is here employed in its broadest sense as «the sum total of the ways of cooperating that commonly are understood and commonly are accepted». „*Example defines roles and points to tasks. Custom fixes requisite qualifications and links consequents to antecedents. So in the home and in the educational hierarchy, in the learned professions, in industry and commerce, in politics and finance, in church*

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[21]   Putnam 2000. The study gave rise to the website http://www.bowlingalone.com/

[22]   Marshall et al. 1995, with essays and case studies on American civil society

[23]   Appiah 1992 on the cultural clash between African and Western values

[24]   In Xhosa language, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*

[25]   Shutte 1993

[26]   Lewis 1981, 11

[27]   Esposito 1983, 3-5

[28]   Benzine 2005, Introduction

[29]   Henriques in „Natural Right in Islam: a Bridge to Modernization", in: Henriques, Khachani 2006

[30]   Castells 2005

and state there develops a vast and intricate web of interconnections that set the lines along which cooperation occurs and uncooperativeness is sanctioned."[31]

Institutions changes slowly, for a new common understanding and a new common consent are not easily developed. Thus, we may speak of institution when practices are stabilized, when human acting becomes „normal" and sometimes „normative" and these more or less regulated forms are acknowledged as obligations.[32] The formalization of institutions before regulated by a legal code can be developed in several ways, and materialised in diverse forms.

The interwoven and superimposed institutions form a network alongside the states and the international community.[33] Their public purpose differentiates them from private-sector and economic activity. They prosper when private-sector liberties are institutionalized and associative life, participation in public life and standards of civility emerge: the autonomous organization of interests and other forms of participatory citizenship, develop according to the motto „as much society as possible, as much state as necessary."

Taking into account these parameters, I propose a typology of institutions according to a hierarchy of human functions: care, culture, capital and citizenship.[34] Institutions of *Care* involve functions of proximity. *Cultural* institutions include leisure, sports, universities, museums, foundations, and the media. Institutions of *Capital* include professional associations, trade unions, and employers' and business associations, promotimg the rights of their members in the market. *Civic* institutions promote human rights, environment, heritage, and consumers' interests.

Institutions of „care" range from family protection to protection for children, the elderly, the homeless, the economically destitute, the disabled, drug addicts, the socially marginalized, prisoners, hospital assistance, and basic and advanced health care. To be strong, the care sector must have funds to carry on programs granted by the stateThe meandering of state social welfare, aid and education programmes must be partly tackled with devolution to civil society of tasks usurped by the state. The global protection of all forms of life runs all the gamut of institutions from Médecins Sans Frontières, Oxfam to World Wild Fund and Greenpeace.

Educational, religious, aid, media, sports, artistic, scientific, philanthropic, cultural and leisure institutions answer the identity issue of communities. The urge of modern democratic politics is to recover the significant differences of community. .Joint deliberation and the recognition of minorities is essential for social cohesion and union. The acknowledgement of the equivalent value of different cultures, is issential to affirm their merits. To deny a cultural inheritance it is to deny the capacity of authenticity and of the identities of the members of a community. A free people need a moral atmosphere to bring up its children and fulfil its destiny. The call for cultural assets by creators of culture is of particular importance. The most important cultural assets are those with no price or tangentially free, and upon whose which is possible to schools and universities, research institutes, foundations and cultural associations.

Institutions with a social role in the market: professional and business groupings, trade unions, employers' groups and all forms of organization related to projecting the interests of capital, be it labour, financial, business or human capital. Their role is to ensure the economic and social interests of members by interacting with the state. The troubles of trade unionism result from accepting the class-struggle model, rather than promoting human capital. New concerns about sustainable development, employability, quality of life and consumerism bring new responsibilities. As regards the private economic sector, civil society does not include the market, because a business is not institutional; its aim is to create wealth and not to pursue permanent ends. The existence of corporations is a natural requirement, but the existence of a specific corporation is not. Only after its successful integration into the market, a corporation pursues social ends. As trade unions, employers' and professional's associations have a social function and they depend on the relationship between ownership and society.

As stated in *Centesimus Annus*, „a nation's quality and depth of culture can be deduced through what that nation produces and consumes". *Centesimus Annus* proposes „full liberation", democracy and, in a specific sense, capitalism (§42). The market is an important instrument for liberation because it enables the creativity of all men and women. The Encyclical criticizes the assault on humanism by „bureaucratic social assistance". The 20th century political debate has been settled in favour of democracy, and the economic debate in favour of capitalism; yet, the emerging social issue is about freedom and security, and the struggle between the employed and the excluded.[35]

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[31]   Lonergan 1985, 45

[32]   Taylor 1993

[33]   Civitas Yearbook is an inventory of the civil-society institutions of a vast array of countries.

[34]   Henriques 2005

[35]   John Paul II 1991, Chapter 5

Institutions that project civic and political functions: non-governmental organizations defending universal values and human rights, environment, heritage; social movements and pressure groups operating along political parties may increase the transparency and governability of society as a whole.

The defence of human rights has led to the emergence of thousands of OSC's that encompass the entire range of human experiences: poverty, illness, hunger epidemics, women's rights, child protection, landmine removal, saving animal species. They are reasonably popular and well-funded through donations and voluntary work and support by public institutions. They use direct-action methods, focusing on practical issues, and specific cases: saving children from hunger, protecting a forest region, freeing a political prisoner with a name and a face, stopping the stoning of a woman, or halting the destruction of an indigenous culture. The aim is to act to remedy an ill or to do good, at a specific moment. Global media are key targets of their campaigns, as so OSC's strive for getting the attention of global communication.[36]

Social movements participate in the globalization process via action networks and proactive organizations. By creating new values and interests they contribute to the process of global governance. Public-opinion movements use personalized media with no central control, and spontaneous mobilization. The Internet and telecommunications have become a public arena and forum for debate and dialogue; yet no collective decision-making has ever emerged.

5. Community and Governance

This typology of civil society built according to the main functionalities of human existence helps to explain why institutions share a middle ground between governance and communities and reinforce the democracy of proximity. Institutions increasingly play the traditional role of social integration;[37] they supply communities with a common identity, and they expand the primary focus of citizenship beyond party democracy and power politics. I will enlarge these two arguments.

Community is the locus of personal relationships embedded in judgements about what is valuable. As persons emerge as choosers, they meet other persons who incarnate similar interests and values. Community enshrines the shared values of a group through its laws, its costumes, its polity, its economy, and its sustenance of human rights. It renews the socio-political balance as embodied in universities, the media, business and professional associations, trade unions, sports clubs, workers' bodies and interest groups in each country; public opinion movements and non-governmental organizations give it a global and international impact.

Bernard Lonergan and Charles Taylor developed a philosophy of consciousness and self-understanding as the starting point to build and share a community of intent and responsibility, a „cosmopolis" that counterbalances power.[38] The concept of individual identity tells us how a person is defined, what basic characteristics make him a human being. Such outcome is dependent upon a set of values that constitute him and that are taken into account for its intrinsic value and not only because there is a freedom of choice. As we find common values that help to form our identity, we create groups, associations and communities and we demand respect for this identity that we share with others. We find those common values through self-interpretation. Each society must understand what values are significant. Human desires imply a reflexive evaluation binding them to values which may be ranked according to ethical and moral criteria and communicated through dialogue.

In this context Taylor speaks about „strong evaluation",[39] and Lonergan about „being responsible".[40] Both individual and community reflect a reality that is not instrumental to our desires. The accomplishment of our desires is enabled by the creation of a „moral world" that exists independently of our intentions. We access it through self-reflection. We belong to it through a set of moral orientations that constitute us and that we differentiate gradually through reflection. We manifest it in our attitudes and behaviour. Such a world is supported by the community to which we belong; it is expressed in the language and history that we share inside this community; it is objectified in the institutions that envelope our life in society and is the particular form through which the individual reflects about the values contributing for the constitution of his own identity.

As existential finalities are not the product of an arbitrary choice but the product of a contextualized self-interpretation of our situation in a cultural horizon that precedes us, they are weaved into

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[36] Castells 2005

[37] The World Values Survey, run by Ronald Inglehart at Michigan University, showed that from 1997 to 2001, most citizens felt that their governments were run by a few major self-centered interests.

[38] Voegelin 1951. This assessment began in the neo-classical school

[39] Taylor 1989, 4

[40] Lonergan 1985

individual history and manifest in culture. Each culture moulds the identity of its members supplying a common language, a history, a narrative, and institutions of socialization, a set of occupations, styles of life, distinct artistic traditions and shared habits. We belong to a culture, we do not acquire it. Each one of us is conditioned in the way we form our identity and exert our freedom. On the other hand, identity results of personal commitments. The articulation between moral commitments and cultural horizons concurs for the formation of a recognized identity expressed in communities.

As regards governance, the state has become, since long, „too big for the small tasks, and too small for the big ones", to use Daniel Bell's classical formula.[41] In international relations, the balance between the two superpowers has given way to the new polyarchic order, with changing international and national powers. Individuals' multiple attachments – arising from personal and collective freedoms – are the foundation for new institutions of various scales and this reflects upon the civil society's dimension and scope. Conversely, the strengthening of civil society must be envisaged alongside what Robert Dahl called the „third democratic transformation" and Samuel Huntington „the third wave of democracy".[42]

The dividing line between civil society and agents such as public opinion movements, social movements and pressure groups is fluid. The activity of interest groups achieves political ends that can both strengthen or reduce social cohesion. Civil association can encourage local involvement to the detriment of national participation; or national to the detriment of global; or global as opposed to national. Citizens' habits can encourage cooperation and civility just as they can be a counterweight and obstacle to the state's power. They can even give rise to groups and factions and degenerate into a conglomerate of interests. Alongside the modern spectre of Leviathan, we see the shadow threat of Behemoth.[43]

6. Conclusion

As governments are national, and the main issues to be managed are both national and global, states have set up their networks of global governance, and civil society organizations have expanded their territorially bounded turfs, going global. As the strengthening of civil society increases governability, the benefits of institutional networks and civic engagement may suggest an undue optimism regarding citizen's capacity for initiative and a general lack of faith in the state. Yet, the erosion of civil-society institutions and the erosion of the welfare state may beget depoliticization. Interest groups find it hard to mobilize members beyond local issues; youth organizations merely provide recreational services, such as „youth cards"; poor institutional attendance reinforces models of social failure; mass media both help and hinder the public's capacity to decide; new information technologies can limit other forms of communication; universities can channel information without being able to innovate and create; many new social movements balkanize identities in the name of ethnicity, gender, age, etc. If it is true that peoples take their strengths as given, and identify the weaknesses they would like to correct.[44]

Global civil society is growing but so do local communities. In the new scope of civil society, communities represent a permanent form of human association that gains or loses importance according to their empowering value. Among them operates what Spruyt called a „Darwinian process of institutional selection." As Jean-Luc Nancy summarized, *la société n'est pas faite sur la ruine d'une communauté.*" Communities are the result of multiple allegiances, the blossoming of civil society in an environment challenged by the contemporary crisis of work and meaning: *„la communauté, loin d' être ce que la société aurait rompu ou perdu, est ce qui nous arrive – question, attente, événement, impératif – a partir de la société.*»[45] A democracy of „proximity" brings a more active participation and a social integration compatible to personal identity without denying a diversity of components.

Empowering the network of institutions in civil society involves strengthening citizenship. By encouraging basic freedoms in the private sector, civil society invigorates democracy and it fights back the „iron law" of oligarchies. As individual freedoms are rooted in nation states, the state's powers – administrative, economic, legal and military instruments – are legitimised. To the state's administrative and governing techniques, civil society brings the advantages of participatory citizenship. And to the struggle for hegemonic power played in the arena of international governance, civil society brings its own softpower resources. Contemporary political philosophy dismissed the „tabula rasa" theoretical approach; civil society is empowering communities and establishing the centrality of the individual in a world of shared governance.

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[41]   Bell 1960

[42]   Dahl 1989, 311ff.; Huntington 1991, 3-5; Schmitter 2003

[43]   Schambra 1994, 32-38.

[44]   Some suggestions in Macedo, Maltez, and Henriques 1999

[45]   Nancy 1986, 34

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