

GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY: FINDING COLLECTIVE VOICE IN DIVERSITY[®]

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ABSTRACT

The vast diversity in Global Civil Society (GCS) creates contentious politics among groups endeavoring to collaborate on international issues. Despite this diversity, GCS is a prime agent in progress on international regimes from human rights, international corruption, democratic governance, development and peace to environmental conservation. This apparent incongruity inspires the question of how civil society groups cross multiple divides to find common ground and act collectively toward a shared purpose.

The Convergence System is the primary contribution of this research. The Convergence System is based on the presumption that diversity is critical to coalition success and that it needs be employed to leverage its many benefits. The goal of the Convergence System is not to homogenize difference, but to employ GCS diversity to discern complementarity and discover points of convergence within coalitions, and to facilitate collective action toward shared objectives, thus enabling efficacious action by GCS within the international polity.

Introduction

Both scholars and practitioners agree: there is vast diversity in Global Civil Society (GCS)¹. In fact, Global Civil Society reflects the complexity and diversity in the world (Ritchie, 1996). Some sources of diversity and difference identified by scholars and research participants include resource disparities, perceptual and identity differences, the grassroots-elite divide, repertoire preferences, e.g., lobbying vs. networking, and organizational differences, e.g., established nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) vs. new grassroots organizations (Friedman, Hochstetler, & Clark, 2005; Hudock, 1999; Krut, Howard, Howard, Gleckman, & Dannielle, 1997; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). These multiple differences and divergences lead to differences in perspectives, opinions, problem and solution definitions and strategy selection (Kaldor, 2003). As the world's people come into closer contact via technology and travel, the interdependency and the complexity of Global Civil Society will increase, uncovering more differences and creating contentious politics (Barber, 1984; Coleman & Wayland, 2005; Robinson, 1992). This heterogeneity militates against forced unity (Keane, 1998).

Despite this vast disparity, Global Civil Society is a significant international force, exemplified by its sheer size, its infiltration into international governance organizations, its ability to generate global public opinion and its proven success in transforming policy issues into international regimes. Its growing status is further portrayed through changes in language, e.g., its designation as the *third pillar of modern society* (Galtung, 2000, p. 148), Boutros Boutros-Ghali's recognition of it as a full participant in international life (Weiss & Gordenker, 1996), and the United Nation's reference to it as a social partner, signifying equality of status with governments (Willetts, 2000). GCS theorists provide incontrovertible evidence of the active force of Global Civil Society in historic progress on international regimes from human rights, international corruption, democratic governance, development and peace to environmental conservation (Brown, Khagram, Moore, & Frumkin, 2000; Clark, 1995; Khagram, Riker, & Sikkink, 2002; Rosenau, 1990; Wapner & Ruiz, 2000).

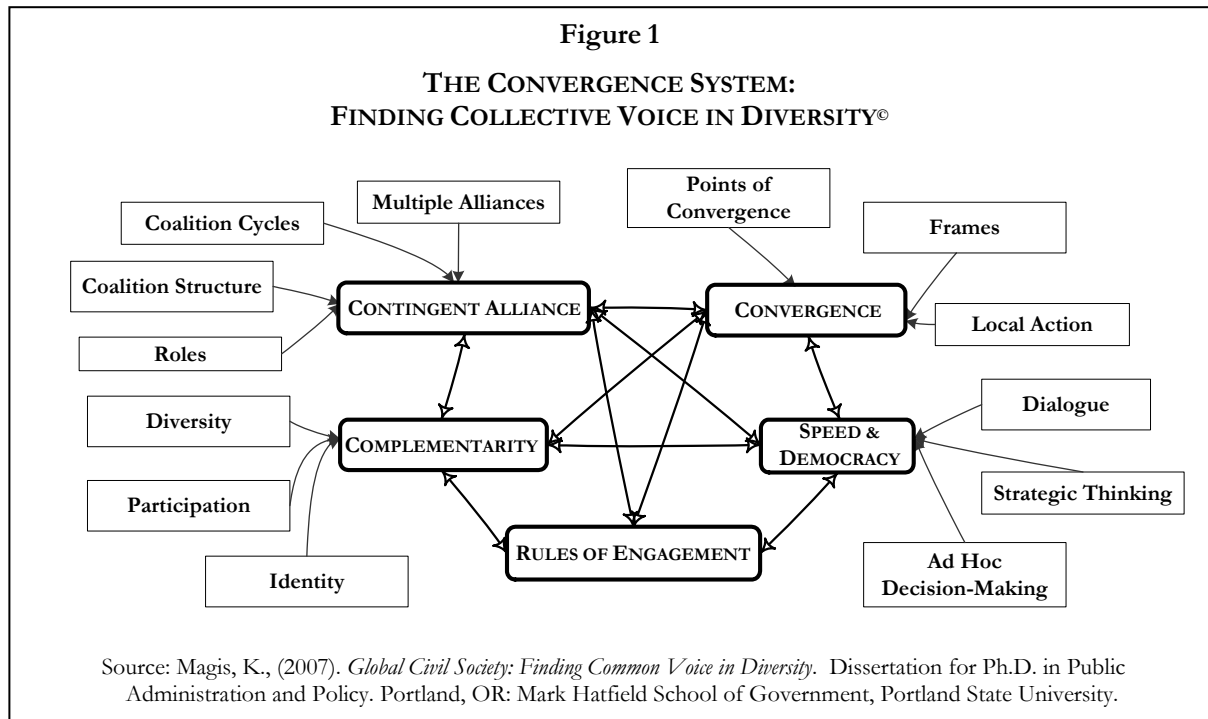
GCS's ability to effect international change despite its diversity gives rise to the question of how disparate civil society groups cross language, economic, political and cultural divides to collaborate on shared goals. Hence, the first objective of this research was to develop an empirically-based canon of knowledge on how civil society groups work through diversity to find common ground and to act collectively toward a shared purpose. The research was premised on the fact that Global Civil Society is characterized by significant diversity and difference, which can result in divergence and contentious politics. It, further, accepted Keane's (1998) assertion that unification, or homogenization, is not the appropriate answer to the challenges presented by difference.

The second research objective was to employ the canon of knowledge to advance the theoretical development of the emergent field of GCS, and to offer praxis-based support to those endeavoring through GCS coalitions to effect change in international policy. This article presents the two primary contributions of this research – the *Convergence System* and the *Convergence Framework* – and the empirical and theoretical bases upon which they are founded.

The Convergence System

The Convergence System, the primary contribution of this research, is an empirically-based and theoretically-sound model that employs GCS diversity to discern complementarity within GCS, to discover points of convergence within coalitions, and to facilitate collective action

toward shared objectives, thus enabling efficacious action by GCS within the international polity (see Figure 1).



Diversity and difference within Global Civil Society are commonly accepted facts. They, however, are often perceived to be problems. Hence, solutions are sought that include minimization and negotiation of difference. The Convergence System, in contrast, is based on the presumption that diversity is critical to coalition success and that it needs be employed to leverage its many potential benefits.

Five constituents populate the Convergence System; *Complementarity*, *Convergence*, *Rules of Engagement*, *Speed and Democracy* and *Contingent Alliance*. The constituents are illustrated as the inner circle in Figure 1 and are encased in bolded boxes. Each constituent is comprised of interrelated elements that further define the constituent and create the conditions under which the constituent is galvanized. Elements, portrayed as the outer circle in Figure 1, are encased in light boxes and are linked to their constituents with arrows. Relationships exist among all the constituents and elements, linking them together in an interrelated and dynamic system.

The Convergence Framework, a tool derived from the Convergence System, is designed with three purposes: 1) to facilitate the establishment, evaluation and improvement of coalitions; 2) to retain and convey lessons gleaned through praxis, and 3) to create bridges between coalitions. The Convergence Framework presents concrete, functional and feasible recommendations to facilitate successful coalition operations (see Table I).

Table I:
CONVERGENCE FRAMEWORK[®]: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRAXIS

Framework	Recommendations
Complementarity	Diversity integrated to find complementarity and create a unified whole
➤ Diversity	Invite, encourage and engage a diversity of people into the coalition. Engage them and intentionally watch for emergence of new understandings, the innovative ideas and strategies, the creative combination of resources and the leaps necessary to both develop internal integrity and to interact successfully with the environment, i.e., implement goals and objectives.
➤ Identity	Create intentionality around discerning, expanding and shifting identities. Provide opportunities for people to develop an understanding of the pertinent discourse, behaviors, culture, decisions and actions in the coalition. Encourage people to discern their relation to the coalition and to shift identities to engage successfully in the coalition. As frames and points of convergence are discerned, consciously reflect on the expansion or shifting of identities. Consciously identify differences that are inconsequential to the task at hand and commit to set them aside to allow progress in areas of convergence.
➤ Participation	Ensure equality within the coalition, specifically; equal access to resources, e.g., information or connections with targets, and equal opportunity, for example, to contribute input, participate in decision making and take action. Seek and give equal consideration to unique and diverse ideas. Capitalize on plurality and diversity for decisions, actions and social learning. Cooperate while respecting members' autonomy, different socio/economic/political circumstances and varying roles.
Speed and Democracy	Expeditious actions and democratic processes
➤ Dialogue	Create a culture of dialogue and use dialogue as a matter of course. Utilize Rules of Engagement to create the culture of dialogue and ensure quality dialogue ensues during all interactions. Engage people in dialogue around developing long-term strategy, unresolved problems, or issues where common understanding and agreement don't yet exist. Document new understandings, emergent ideas, frames and innovations, unresolved questions, etc.
➤ Strategic Thinking	Dedicate time and resources to strategic thinking, i.e., dialoguing about desired futures, the 'big-picture' and opportunities. Focus on effectiveness, innovation, breakthrough thinking and generative learning.
➤ Ad hoc Decision making	Ensure local and ad hoc decision making is aligned with metaframes and long-term intentions developed through strategic thinking processes.
Rules of Engagement	Interactions between all coalition members are guided by Rules of Engagement

Table I:
CONVERGENCE FRAMEWORK[®]: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRAXIS

Framework	Recommendations
Contingent Alliance	Associations of people defined by voluntary, provisional and temporary engagement
➤ Multiple Alliances	Support multiple alliances and create connections between them.
➤ Coalition Cycles	Intentionally watch the coalition maturation process. Discern appropriate operations for each cycle and watch for implications across the coalition of changing cycles.
➤ Coalition Structure	Focus on and maintain social structures, e.g., frames, rules of engagement, quality dialogue and quality participation. Design bureaucratic structures sparingly and only as they facilitate intentions and actions of coalition members and subgroups. Ensure bureaucratic structures are responsive, functional, fluid and flexible, locally defined and adapted, and temporary. Modify and/or disband structures as coalition needs change.
➤ Roles	Consciously define needed roles based on coalition purpose and locally-defined actions. Clarify members' preferred roles. Match coalition needs with preferred roles. Intentionally identify and create complementarity between various roles. Where there is misalignment, consider additional subgroups that might converge around similar or complementary roles. Take care that available roles adequately address and don't undermine coalition needs.
Convergence	People that are different, or even opposed, united around a common cause
➤ Points of Convergence	Watch for emergent Points of Convergence in many places, e.g., purposes, values, targets, strategies, etc. and during dialogue, strategic thinking, ad hoc decision making and local action. Encourage people to identify Points of Convergence around which they want to converge, regardless of differences they may have in other areas. Support development of subgroups around Points of Convergence.
➤ Frames	Highlight the import of frames for the coalition and intentionally watch for their emergence. Intentionally evaluate how specific frames might affect peoples' perceptions, the kinds of issues, problems and solutions they might highlight and the way in which events might be interpreted. Evaluate potential frames according to their alignment and complementarity with selected coalition frames.
➤ Local Action	Engage subgroups to maximize quality participation and to fully engage member expertise and resources toward specific local requirements. Ensure subgroups carry coalition frames, rules of engagement and products of strategic thinking into their deliberations and action planning. Maximize local self-determination and minimize imposition of controls. Create consistent opportunities for subgroups to interact to share lessons, innovations, emergent frames, new resources, etc.

Source: Magis, K., (2007). *Global Civil Society: Finding Common Voice in Diversity*. Dissertation for Ph.D. in Public Administration and Policy. Portland, OR: Mark Hatfield School of Government, Portland State University.

Research Design

The Convergence System emerged from empirical and theoretical bases. Global Civil Society is a nascent field of study. Most initial research and discourse centers on; 1) its existence and description, 2) its agency and impact on global politics, and 3) the methods it employs to effect change. Research does not directly address the question of finding common ground amid diversity within the context of GCS coalitions. The dearth of research on this question necessitated collection of primary data from people with expertise and experience in GCS coalitions. To enable the development of empirically-based theory, a Grounded Theory approach guided the design and administration of the interview guide, the interview process, the sampling procedure and data analysis.

An interview guide was designed to discern the characteristics that research participants defined as critical for coalitions to succeed in finding common ground and acting collectively toward a shared purpose. The interview guide utilized a mix of a guided interview and standardized, structured interview strategies. The guided-interview strategy ensured that basic lines of inquiry were addressed in each interview, while enabling the interviewer to pursue new avenues emergent in the interview. The structured-interview strategy ensured consistency across interviews, facilitated data analysis and enabled future replication of the study. The combined approach provided the flexibility necessary to pursue emergent patterns, yet maintain basic consistency in the data. The interview was focused on the process with which the participant had experience and expertise, and the participant's perceptions of how it worked. The interview process was designed to be iterative, wherein data from each interview was utilized to modify the constructs and questions for the next interview. The Interview Guide was modified twice.

The universe of potential interview participants is extensive: at least 40,000 international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and many other organizations house individuals with expertise on Global Civil Society (Edwards & Zadek, 2003). The population size precluded building a sampling frame from scratch. Hence, the initial sampling frame was designed by enlisting experts to identify potential organizations. As the project proceeded, a snowball technique was utilized to identify additional potential participants. After each interview the participant was asked to introduce the researcher to other potential participants. Fifty-seven potential interviews populated the final sampling frame.

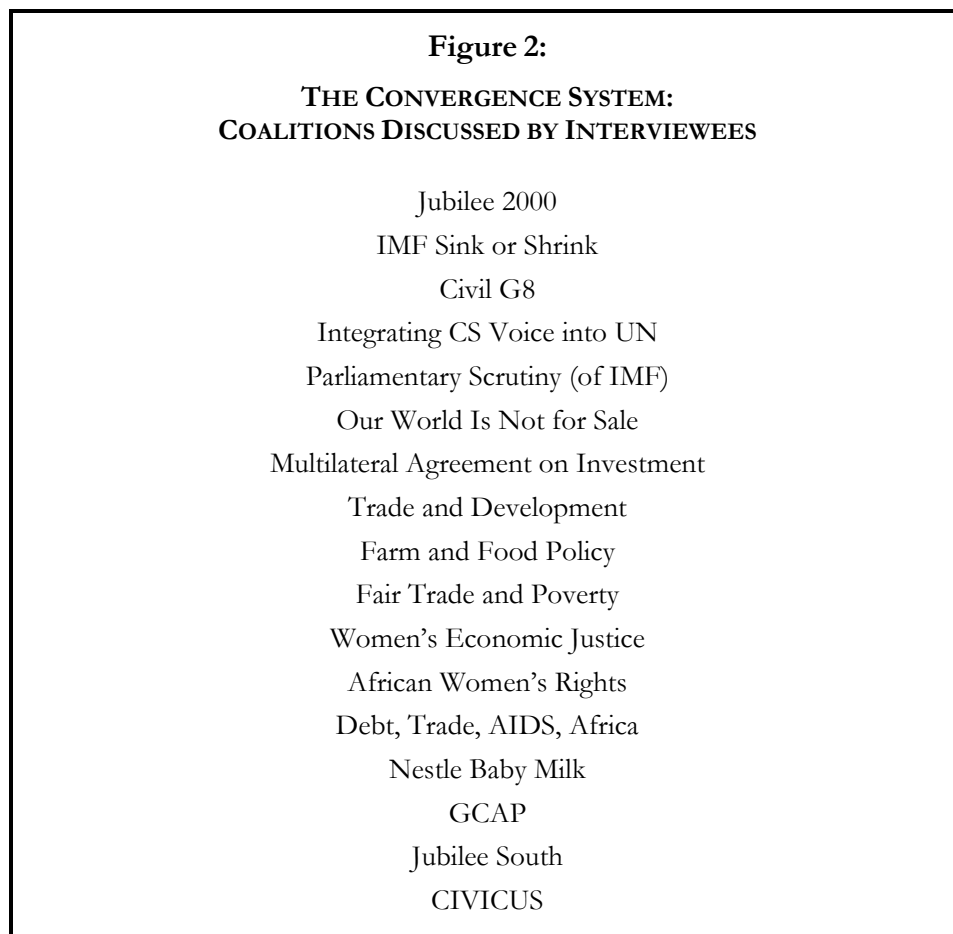
Critical Case, a purposive sampling technique, was utilized to select interview participants from the sampling frame. The technique ensures that interview participants have information and experience necessary for detailed exploration of the research question, and that the sample provides sufficient depth and breadth in coverage of the issue. Two sets of criteria were used. The first criteria addressed; the South-North divide, International nongovernmental organizations (INGO) and Networks, and Substantive Policy Domains.

The literature indicates a division within Global Civil Society between southern and northern perspectives (Hudock, 1999). When such divisions exist, stratification is utilized to introduce heterogeneity into the sample, thus ensuring that issues are covered as comprehensively as possible (Czaja & Blair, 2005). People from both south and north were interviewed. The stratification allowed illumination of the debate regarding the divide and ultimately generated a more complex and multifaceted understanding of extant divisions within Global Civil Society. It also generated critical characteristics that more adequately represent both perspectives. Of the 15 interviewees, 5 (33%) reflected a southern perspective, 7 (47%) reflected a northern

perspective and 3 (20%) reflected an international perspective.

International nongovernmental organizations and network processes are distinctive. INGOs utilize organizational structures and policies to define and circumscribe decision-making processes. Networks and coalitions are comprised of various autonomous organizations as well as individuals and so are challenged by issues of diversity and complexity without the benefit of organizational structures to regulate the decision-making process. Hence, networks must develop creative and innovative strategies to ensure successful processes. As organizational processes are well studied and documented, sampling in this study was weighted toward networks. Out of 15 interviews, 13 focused on coalition processes run through networks and 2 focused on coalition processes run through INGOs.

Finally, the purpose of this research was to discern emergent characteristics that may apply across policy domains. Hence, coalition processesⁱⁱ from various policy domains were studied to create as diverse a data set as possible. From the 15 interviews, 17 different coalition processes were explored (see Figure 2).



The second criteria for participant selection addressed the individual's capacity to respond to the interview. It included: 1) the organization employed people with experience and/or expertise with a process; and 2) those personnel were authorized to speak on behalf of the organization. Utilizing Critical Case sampling, 29 people were selected from the sampling frame

to request an interview. Of those, 15 (52%) were interviewed; 5 (17%) agreed to an interview but didn't follow up; 1 (3%) agreed to an interview, but couldn't find a date; and 8 (28%) did not respond. The 15 participants were from Africa, China, Lebanon, India, England, Switzerland, Canada and the United States.

Two other data sources were triangulated with interview data to provide substantiation of constructs emerging from the interviews. They included proceedings from a conference of GCS experts, and papers commissioned and written by GCS experts for that conference. The conference, *Voices of Global Civil Society*, was hosted by the Centre for Global Studies and the Centre for International Governance Innovation in October, 2006 with generous support from the Ford Foundation. Thirty-three experts in Global Civil Society from around the world gathered to consider issues facing GCS and the necessity of articulating the voice of GCS in various international policy settings and decision-making arenas. Twelve papers were written in preparation for the conference. Extensive notes were taken on the entire conference from which a final report was generated. The papers, conference notes and the final report were analyzed for this study.

The Convergence System emerged from three levels of analysis. The first level of analysis produced the nine critical characteristics. The second yielded the constituents and elements. And the final generated the Convergence System. In the first stage of analysis, data from the interviews, conference proceedings and the conference papers were examined via analytic induction to discern emergent themes, patterns and relationships. From the analysis, nine characteristics emerged as critical to coalitions that succeed in finding common ground and acting collectively toward a shared purpose. The characteristics are; form and function, diversity and difference, dialogue, democracy and decision making, convergence, platforms and frames, political opportunity, legitimacy: representation vs. participation, and coalition evolution.

In the second stage of analysis, literature from Sociology, Social Movements, Political Theory, Organizations, International Relations and Systems Science was investigated to identify theories that could enrich understanding of the characteristics. In the tradition of Grounded Theory, empirical data directed the theoretical research. Salient theories were enfolded with the data to generate a theoretically- and empirically-based portrayal of the characteristics. Integrating theories into the analysis accomplished several purposes. First, it generated a holistic portrayal of the characteristics, combining the expertise and experience of study participants with the rich foundation of knowledge extant in various disciplines. Second, the data provided an empirical basis for the selection of specific theories that could prove useful in understanding this particular research question. The power of utilizing empirical data to direct theoretical research was evidenced by the immediate identification of Systems Theory, which significantly influenced the entire project. Finally, the integration of theories with the data resulted in a contribution to the theoretical development of the emergent field of Global Civil Society.

The final stage of analysis included two steps. In the first step, the characteristics were analyzed again to eliminate duplication and to examine and synthesize emergent phenomena. The analysis began by centering on the purpose of coalitions, namely, to effect change. The characteristics were then examined as they related to coalitions' purpose. Emergent themes and patterns were noted and duplication was eliminated. The characteristics were synthesized into five constituents and their associated elements. Each constituent and element was then described.

In the second step, an analysis was completed to discern the relationships between the constituents and elements, and to discern if and how they might comprise an integrated and coherent system. A tool called the Interrelationships Diagraph (Brassard & Ritter, 1994) was utilized to complete a relational analysis on the constituents and elements. The Interrelationship Diagraph (ID) is not a statistical analysis like the Variable Path Analysis. Rather, it is a conceptual analysis used in highly dynamic and complex situations wherein a large number of interrelated factors exert influence on a system. The product of the analysis is a conceptual diagraph illustrating the direction of relationships between the constituents and elements. The results of the Interrelationships analysis are useful for several purposes. First, the number and complexity of relationships among all the elements provides substantial evidence that, in fact, they comprise a larger system. Second, while the identification and explication of the constituents and elements is necessary, their descriptions are incomplete lacking an exploration of their relationships. The relationships provide a critical dimension to the explication of the various constituents and elements. And finally, the strength of the relationships provides vital information for generating interventions in the system and thus adds to its value in praxis.

The Convergence System

Early in the data analysis, clear evidence of systems' attributes emerged through: interviewees' assertion that diversity must be respected and retained; their acknowledgement of the importance of relationships; and their articulation of convergence as a primary goal. These data inspired research into systems theory, which proved very useful in describing various phenomena in the data and which ultimately suggested that GCS coalitions were, in fact, systems.

Coalitions are Convergence Systems. Coalitions are comprised of the constituents and their elements and are affected by the many relationships between them. Hence, coalitions can be facilitated to maximize the constructive potentiality inherent in the constituents, elements and relationships of the Convergence System. As the constituents and their associated elements are introduced herein, it will be helpful to examine the recommendations in Table I to discern the practical implications they have for coalition design and operations.

The **Complementarity Constituent** refers to the engagement, combination and integration of diversity with the intent of discerning how people complement each other and how, through their integration, they create a unified, effective whole. In the international environment, policy issues are negotiated at multiple levels and in various locales in overlapping and highly dynamic policy networks. The wealth of diversity extant in GCS can be leveraged to engage governance in its many locales. To leverage the wealth, however, GCS must discern and develop complementarity across diversity. The Complementarity constituent consists of three elements critical to discerning and acting on Complementarity, i.e., *Diversity, Identity and Participation*.

The Diversity element refers to the inclusion of the full range of voices relevant to the policy issue. It presumes ever increasing inclusivity, especially of those who are disenfranchised, marginalized and voiceless. The Identity element refers to the various and integrated identities constituting any individual which create the flexibility and adaptability necessary to discover common ground in diversity, bridge between disparate groups, and set aside differences and focus on commonalities. The Participation element refers to the quality involvement of members in coalition endeavors. Quality participation requires: 1) equal access to resources, e.g., information or connections with targets; 2) equal opportunity, e.g., to contribute input,

participate in decision making and take action; 3) equal consideration of unique and diverse values and ideas; and 4) cooperation while respecting others' autonomy, different socioeconomic or political circumstances and varying roles.

The **Convergence Constituent** refers to the uniting of people who are different, or even opposed, around a common cause. Convergence occurs through the intentional combination and interaction of diversity and difference, the identification of points of convergence, and the decision by coalition members to engage together on particular points of convergence. The import of the Convergence constituent rests on its dependence on and employment of diversity and difference as well as on its generative capacity to build strength through that diversity. Elements of the Convergence constituent include *Points of Convergence*, *Frames* and *Local Action*.

The Points of Convergence element represents situations wherein coalition members discern commonality amongst difference. The commonality allows: 1) development of cohesion and camaraderie; 2) identification of shared aims, strategies or tactics; 3) development and engagement of frames; 4) expansion and shifting of identities; and 5) potential for joint local action. Points of convergence can be found in any number of places, e.g., purposes, values, targets, and strategies. People can act from any point of convergence, regardless of differences along other dimensions. The more points of convergence a coalition discerns, the greater potential for its effective operation, as it will more completely and effectively leverage and employ the wealth offered by the diversity of its members.

The Frames element refers to frames which act as filters through which life events are perceived. Frames organize what is perceived in any given event as well as the way in which that event is interpreted, thus attributing meaning to the event. As people find points of convergence, they develop shared frames which then assist them to find points of convergence. The Local Action element refers to the combination of coalition members into subgroups to take specific action. Through local action, subgroups generate solutions tailored to local requirements. The expertise and resources members bring regarding the specifics of the situation enable subgroups to respond effectively and expeditiously to local political opportunity structures and particular policy windows. Their interaction and association with the environment connects the coalition closely to the many environments in which it functions.

The **Rules of Engagement Constituent** refers to social structures, i.e., patterns of relation or practices and procedures encoded in routine interactions of groups and organizations. In short, rules of engagement are agreements regarding how people interact with and treat each other. The import of the Rules of Engagement constituent lies in the fact that it makes accomplishment of the other constituents possible. Rules of engagement guide and lend consistency and predictability to the quality of people's behavior in coalitions. They are embedded in the coalition from its inception and practiced throughout its lifespan by all members and at every level. Rules of engagement are critical in developing trust and nurturing relationships across organizations and people. Establishing this basis of trust is necessary to enable joint effort. Moreover, they create social capital that endures beyond the coalition and can be employed to initiate and engage new coalitions.

The **Speed and Democracy Constituent** refers to the simultaneous requirement for rapid decision making and democratic decision-making processes. In the volatile and unpredictable international environment, many decisions have to be made quickly or the coalition will compromise its ability to influence policy discussions. However, coalition members expect

quality participation. Further, the coalition is dependent on the voluntary association of its members. Both factors compel coalitions to utilize democratic decision-making processes. The slow nature of democratic processes juxtaposed to the rapid evolution and temporality of policy windows in the international environment create a speed vs. democracy quandary.

The elements of the Speed and Democracy constituent, *Dialogue*, *Strategic Thinking* and *Ad hoc Decision Making*, together comprise a viable strategy to address the needs for rapid and democratic decision making. The Dialogue element refers to a process wherein differently situated people engage in reciprocal sharing of ideas and opinions with the intent of creating mutually agreed upon social arrangements. The Strategic Thinking element is distinguished by thinking within a future-oriented, big-picture and holistic frame of reference. The Ad Hoc Decision Making element is based on immediate- and short-term issues, concrete and practicable actions, problem resolution, efficiency and an on-the-ground perspective. To be effective, it needs to be aligned with long-term visions and intentions.

The **Contingent Alliance Constituent** refers to associations of people defined by voluntary, provisional and temporary engagement. All members are free to engage at whatever level, in whatever way and for however long they choose. The alliance is functional in that it provides a structure in which people can coalesce to accomplish specific objectives. It is temporary in that it continues only as long as members validate its existence through their association. And, it is evolutionary in that it develops through life cycles, with initiation, maturation and closure. The Contingent Alliance constituent is comprised of four elements: *Multiple Alliances*, *Coalition Cycles*, *Coalition Structure* and *Member Roles*. The Multiple Alliances element refers to the perpetual development of new alliancesⁱⁱⁱ within GCS. The Coalition Cycles element references the temporary and evolutionary nature of coalitions. The Coalition Structure element refers to social structures established to operate the coalition. Finally, the Member Roles element refers to the parts coalition members play.

The Study's Contributions

This research extends theory in the nascent field of GCS. First, research and discourse on GCS center on the existence and description of GCS, its agency and impact on global politics, and the methods it employs to affect change. This study broadens the field of study to include exploration of GCS coalitions, specifically with regard to how collective voice is found in diversity. Second, GCS theorists look to various disciplines to describe and explicate GCS, namely Sociology, Social Movements, Political Theory and International Relations. In addition to those fields, this study investigated Organizations and Systems Science.

The introduction of Systems Science to this study fundamentally altered its foundations and outcomes. The influence of systems theory was evidenced in an analysis comparing the Convergence System to several prominent GCS studies. While there are similarities between the Convergence System and the other studies, the Convergence System alone identifies the constituents as part of an interrelated system. Additionally, systems theory changed the perception and approach to the central problematic of this study, i.e., diversity and difference. Diversity and difference within GCS are often perceived to be obstacles to GCS collaboration and effectiveness. Hence, solutions are sought that include minimization and negotiation of difference. System's theory, however, challenges this perception with its concentration on difference and diversity as natural and necessary for flourishing systems. Hence, the Convergence System regards difference and diversity as natural and necessary for a coalition's

strength and effectiveness as well as for the continued vitality of GCS. Systems theory also provides the theoretical basis for the Convergence System's unconventional response to difference, i.e., diversity is intentionally employed to discern complementarity, to discover points of convergence and to enable collective action toward common objectives.

The import of this study's contributions is derived from three bases. First, the contributions are empirically-based, i.e., they emerge directly from the experience of people immediately involved with GCS coalitions. Second, the contributions build on the substantial theoretical foundations of theories from Sociology, Social Movements, Political Theory, Organizations, International Relations and Systems Science. Third, the study offers a unique, integrated and holistic approach to the study of GCS and to the specific question of finding common ground in diversity.

Forward Research Agenda

The research agenda going forward from this study is threefold: 1) test the Convergence System and the Convergence Framework; 2) test the theories integrated into the Convergence System; and 3) test specific questions arising from this study. Though the following research ideas are presented individually, they are woven into an integrated research agenda. The agenda is integrated with regard to a balance between detailed exploration of individual system constituents or elements and associated theories, and exploration of the Convergence System as a whole. It, additionally, is integrated via a mix of applied and theoretical research, which will ensure the system is theoretically sound and that it offers concrete, feasible and functional assistance to those endeavoring to create change for the public good.

The Convergence System needs to be tested to ensure it accurately reflects the reality of GCS coalitions. Although the Convergence System emerges directly from the experience and expertise of practitioners, no individual spoke to all its constituents and elements, of its many relationships, or to its totality as a complete system. In this sense, the Convergence System is a new and untried methodology. To test its accuracy in reflecting people's experience, a Confirmatory Analysis is recommended. The Convergence System needs to be deconstructed to develop specific hypotheses about constituents, elements and relationships. These will then be transcribed into a survey format and administered to a broad range of GCS activists.

The Convergence Framework needs to be tested in praxis to discern its concreteness, feasibility and functionality. Various constituents and elements will be integrated into GCS coalitions and evaluated to discern their influence and impact. The lessons from praxis will generate improvements in the model, making it more valuable to coalitions. Further, coalitions will benefit from utilizing the Framework. Finally, applying this research model across coalitions and sectors will result in enhancement of the model's applicability in various settings.

Theories integrated into the Convergence System need be tested. First, they need be examined in more depth and within the larger context provided by the discipline from which they commence. Then, their applicability to the context of GCS coalitions needs be discerned. Finally, research needs be completed to adapt and incorporate the theories into the field of Global Civil Society. Two theories, in particular, need be exposed to this scientific rigor, i.e., decision-making, and frames and platforms.

Specific questions arising from this study need be investigated, namely power and hierarchy within GCS, the coalition/interaction effect, and the trajectory of Global Civil Society

development. One hypothesis arising from this study is that the GCS hierarchy created by power and resource imbalances between various groups is countered by the conditions created by the Convergence System. The interaction between Multiple Alliances, Rules of Engagement, Participation and Dialogue creates this counterbalancing force. This hypothesis can be tested via in-depth case studies of GCS coalitions which experienced significant power imbalances, as well as in those where the power imbalances were intentionally averted as part of the coalition design and operation.

A research question day lighted by this study regards the coalition/organization interaction effect. Research findings demonstrate that coalitions develop into social organizations that are fundamentally different from many of the organizations that comprise their memberships. The integration of coalitions and member organizations creates a coalition/organization interaction effect which significantly challenges both. The interaction further complicates the already complex environment of GCS coalitions and can radically alter their ability to operate efficaciously. Likewise, the interaction affects member organizations, challenging them in a number of domains, e.g., structure, vision, operational processes, resources, and personnel. This question can be researched via a broad-based survey or in-depth case studies which investigate coalitions and their member organizations.

While research recommendations detailed herein are preferred first steps in this research agenda, the interrelated nature of the system allows research to be taken up at virtually any point. The key to future research, however, follows from one of the primary lessons gleaned from this study, i.e., while questions, constituents, elements and associated problematics can be explored individually, they cannot be fully understood less an integrative analysis focusing on their relation to the overall system. Hence, the final recommendation is that all future research be couched in a systems perspective and be designed to illuminate the relationships and emergent phenomena so critical to the Convergence System.

Conclusion

This study was inspired by the juxtaposition of two contradictory phenomena. There is vast diversity in Global Civil Society which leads to significant differences and creates contentious politics among civil society groups endeavoring to collaborate on international issues. Despite this diversity, however, GCS is a significant international force and an active agent in historic progress on international regimes from human rights, international corruption, democratic governance, development and peace to environmental conservation. GCS's ability to effect international change despite its diversity gives rise to the question of how disparate civil society groups cross language, economic, political and cultural divides to collaborate on shared objectives.

This study investigated this question through direct interaction with approximately 45 people with significant experience and expertise in GCS. The product that emerged, and the primary contribution of this research project, is the Convergence System. The Convergence System is an empirically-based and theoretically-sound model that employs GCS diversity to discern complementarity and discover points of convergence within coalitions and then to facilitate collective action toward shared objectives, thus enabling efficacious action by GCS within the international polity.

The Convergence System offers an empirically-based and theoretically-sound answer to the practical question of finding collective voice in diversity. Its functionality and feasibility for on-

the-ground praxis arise from its empirical basis. As such, it has great potential to directly and immediately assist GCS groups to develop, operate and evaluate coalitions. Its theoretical soundness arises from the integration of the data with salient theories from Sociology, Social Movements, Political Theory, Organizations, International Relations and Systems Science. The integration of theory and praxis, in fact, led to unique perspectives on certain questions and insight into new questions that challenge researchers and practitioners alike.

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Notes

- ⁱ Researchers have given various names to the same entity, e.g., transnational relations, international civil society, global social movements, Global Civil Society and transnational civil society. The term Global Civil Society is used herein. The definition of Global Civil Society is a much-debated topic. Global Civil Society is an amorphous, rich and dynamic concept that includes questions of space and process, historical precedence and contemporary uniqueness, its constitution, and its relationship with the state and the market. In a deep sense, Global Civil Society is irreducible, as in its reduction there is a necessary loss of richness and complexity that are fundamental to its existence (Anheier, Glasius, & Kaldor, 2005; Keane, 2003). Rather than attempt to describe it, it can be used as a heuristic device to understand important matters of social life (Ehrenberg, 1999). Wainwright (2005) recalls that the term *democracy* includes two concepts, *demos* and *kratos*. *Demos* refers to the people within a polity, while *kratos* refers to power. This definition implies, first, that a polity is to be ruled by the people, not an elite and, second, that all people must have equal access to decision making. History illustrates a persistent characteristic of civil society, that of people outside the realms of social, political and economic power pushing back on forces that threaten the independence and well-being of society, whether those be anarchical social forces, oppressive and undemocratic states, or globalized markets that strip hard-won democratic rights from both citizens and states. The term Global Civil Society is utilized herein to refer to agents outside both the state and the market, though it recognizes the interrelated nature of the three. It further excludes agents of uncivil society. It is used as an ideal type in an effort to describe and explain the endeavors of people engaged internationally in promoting the public good.
- ⁱⁱ The term *coalition process* is used broadly herein to reference endeavors of differently situated groups to work together around a particular policy issue. Though a common outcome is the development of a campaign, there are circumstances wherein the groups do not coalesce enough to instigate a shared campaign. The information offered by these cases adds important perspective to the research question. In this research, one coalition process did not lead to a campaign. The broad focus on coalition processes also enables exploration of processes utilized by coalitions to develop, build and manage the coalition itself. These insights also add important perspective to the research question.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Coalitions are one type of alliance.