

## The market for advocacy network research

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In many fields of human activity, there is a tension between pure science or generation of knowledge and its application to either solve problems or improve certain situations. In social sciences, the need to understand social relations and institutions is often related to the ongoing aspiration to improve living conditions of societies and individuals. In the case of third sector research, the underlying principles are heir to Enlightenment ideals of democratization and increasing social participation in public issues. It is an example of applied knowledge that feeds back into the public sphere, as is the trend in our 'information age'. Advocacy networks, furthermore, are coalitions of movements and organizations that have gained unprecedented levels of influence through their soft power strategies. Within the third sector, they have become key political actors in local, national and international arenas. The market for advocacy network research, therefore, is not limited to academics, specialists or government policymakers. It is also comprised of individuals and groups that act within the networks themselves who use its analyses and descriptions to enhance their own activities and aid for future plans. The models and language developed by some academics feeds the ongoing activities of such groupings of organizations and movements. The way such academic feedback is used, however, may vary widely. My doctoral fieldwork within two sets of advocacy networks (one in the Brazilian Amazon and the other one in Barcelona) allowed me to witness both risks and benefits of such use in terms of concepts, language and know-how. On the one hand, some members of civil society webs used certain academic classifications and language to justify their political advantage within the nets. On the other, lessons learned through academic insight did have an organizational advantage to those willing to put it in practice in their projects without it meaning any kind of unfair advantage. What seems to be the pattern with the two sets of networks I observed is that democratic cultures are taken for granted when there is civil society activity. But democracy can have many faces, several of which can even seem regressive instead of progressive. Self-interest or wider political interest can lead some actors to block negotiations, frustrate civil society organizations and thus minimize events what would have had wider implications. These were accusations from many members of the Mediterranean Social Forum, which took place in Barcelona in June 2005. On the other side of the Atlantic, in the Amazon, other types of accusations were directed at NGOs that were willing to negotiate with large soy producing business leaders who were demonized by social movements and other non-governmental organizations. In both cases, many members of such networks are academics or read books about these issues. It is common, therefore, for recent reflections to find their way into their projects and plans.