

**Civil Society Organizations Advocacy: main findings of a comparative study between  
Brazil and the United States  
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Civil society organizations (CSO) are gaining importance in society and in academic researches. One of the roles that is standing out is the one of influencing public policies, also known as advocacy, policy advocacy and lobbying, depending on the context and country of analysis. What does advocacy mean and how this phenomenon is systematized is the focus of this study that through literature review, in depth interviews and case studies, seeks to compare the policy advocacy role of two civil society organizations in Brazil (Group of Institutes, Foundations and Companies - GIFE and Brazilian Association of Non Governmental Organizations – ABONG) and in the United States (Independent Sector).

These organizations are characterized for being associations that represent other civil society organizations and that accomplish policy advocacy as part of their strategy. This study analyses how these organizations advocate, what does advocacy mean in each country and the significance of this role through the scope of deliberative democracy that presumes the discussion and deliberation of citizens in the public sphere of matters of their interest, as for example, the elaboration, the put into practice and monitoring of public policies.

After analyzing Independent Sector's form of deliberating we identified that in the United States there are institutionalized mechanisms of interaction between Government agencies and Civil Society due to the country's path dependence. On the other hand, Brazil is starting to develop these mechanisms, but there still is a long path to achieve institutionalized and effective practices of deliberation. We accomplish that it is Government and CSOs role to develop deliberation mechanisms, to amplify and multiply them and also to identify asymmetries in the process of deliberation as for example "stronger voices", resource, abilities and information inequalities (GAMBETA, 1998).

It is possible to identify some challenges for the establishment of CSOs as participatory agents in Brazil: difficulty on finding resources for advocacy activities due to its long term results; lackness of knowledge and tradition on doing advocacy, and mainly, of the legislative and executive branches processes; absence of clear and transparent rules for policy advocacy in Brazil, as in the United States the Lobbying Disclosure Act, among others.

The study concludes that the advocacy role of civil society organizations, more specifically policy advocacy in a context of deliberative democracy strengthens the democratic process by bringing for the deliberation process in the public sphere CSOs that represent different groups in society so they can deliberate and expose their point of view about public policies and matters of their interest, making the process more participatory. However, this process also poses some risks and challenges that shall be taken into consideration. (DRYZEK, 2000; ELSTER, 1998; GAMBETA, 1998; HABERMAS, 1996).

Future research possibilities are many. This study aimed to better understand policy advocacy in Brazilian and North American context, contributing to research on the field.

References

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