

**FROM DELEGATION TO PARTICIPATION
THE THIRD SECTOR AND THE STATE IN
ASSOCIATIVE NETWORKS**

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I. Introduction

Delegation, participation and representation are key topics in contemporary studies of democracy, the state and civil society in Latin America. In fact, regional scholarly debate is increasingly concerned with the new forms of participation and representation which have been emerging since welfare-state retrenchment. Particularly, in countries such as Argentina where the state has played a central role in welfare provision, it is crucial to analyze the links between CSOs and the state in the aftermath of the collapse of traditional mechanisms of social policy. Argentina has been going through political upheaval for months and violence has become a key resource for a growing number of socially excluded people. Democracy is fragile and both political and social actors are fragmented. In this period of acute social, economic, political and institutional crisis in our country, CSOs and associative networks, i.e. public-private partnerships which shape policy decisions, are gaining a voice in the design and implementation of social policy.

In this paper we describe and analyze how associative networks are contributing to the development of new ways of governing based on participation, co-operation and shared responsibility. We begin with a discussion of the role of associative networks in the processes of political representation and participation, taking into account the specific structures of representation in the Latin American region. We then analyze the degree and quality of participation and consider the differences between “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches to forming associative networks. We also deal with the possibilities and limitations of associative networks insofar as they are new structures of representation. We discuss the shift from delegation to

participation, focusing on how citizens and CSOs are involved in decision-making. Finally, we address two issues emerging from associative networks which contribute to strengthening citizenship: participation and the shared responsibility for common issues.

The empirical evidence which supports our analysis is based on in depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of the government and CSOs who are participating in associative networks. We also take into account numerous observations from CSO leaders who have attended workshops on the Third Sector and associative networks. Additional information was gleaned from analysis of reports, organizational records and institutional publications.

II. Theoretical Framework

Today, novel forms of participation and representation are being adopted in our country to ameliorate some of the most disturbing results of the structural adjustment measures and to overcome the weaknesses of traditional forms of political representation, i.e. political parties, trade unions and parliaments. These initiatives generally involve the third sector, whose goals are often associated with social capital building. Bresser Pereira and Cunill Grau (1998) from CLAD (the Latin American Council for Administration and Development) characterize the third sector as an intermediate public space between the state and the market, *the non-governmental public (lo público no estatal)*. Non-governmental public organizations not only produce collective goods or deliver social services, but they also defend collective values. And though many of these organizations are motivated by private interests, they are endowed with the capacity to modify established ways of governing through the accountability over public policies and the advocacy of the public interest. Moreover, they play a vital role in the processes of political reform by strengthening governance.

Many authors have described the interaction between the government and CSOs as a relationship based more on interdependence and collaboration than on competition. Gidron, Kramer and Salamon (1992) observe that in the early studies of the welfare state, the predominant idea of nonprofit sector-government interaction was that it involved a competitive relationship of either state dominance or third sector dominance. But the empirical approaches to comparative research have shown that, in fact, the ideological construction of the competitive paradigm fails to explain reality. On the contrary, empirical analysis of different forms of government-third sector interaction suggests that *cooperation* is more usual than conflict. In fact, in almost every country in which the issue was examined, there has been a long history of cooperative relationships between the state and the third sector. A similar pattern has prevailed in Argentina. Another conclusion to be drawn from cross-national comparative research is that over the last few years, the extent of experimentation with collaborative models is remarkable. Consequently, it is of utmost importance to explore the patterns of interaction, the cross-national variants, the impact on shaping public policy and the tendency to further collaborative models.

The concept of *associative network* is useful for explaining public-private partnerships in Latin America, where we find mainly non-formalized patterns of interaction between the third sector and the state rather than highly formalized types of public-private relationships. The network metaphor helps us to understand how actors in society are linked. As Chalmers (1997) shows, 'the associative network links state and societal actors in relatively open-ended and problem-focused interactions'. Associative networks are distinctive not only in the way they connect people with decision-making centers, but also because of their multiplicity and relatively rapid reconfiguration over time. Chalmers, Martin, Piester and Vilas (1997) have all made significant contributions towards the understanding of

associative networks in Latin America by locating them within the theoretical perspectives of delegation, participation and representation. These authors suggest that in Latin America popular sectors are redefining the issues around which they organize. Simultaneously, these sectors are rearranging the structures through which they gain a voice in decision-making. Consequently, there is a trend toward a reconstruction of popular participation and a reconfiguration of popular representation (Vilas, 1997).

According to Chalmers (1997), structures of representation are 'the sets of individuals or organizations that make claims and, second, the mediating entities that debate, reshape, and transmit claims and pressures to authoritative decision-making centers.... A structure of representation is... a set of actors that are linked to decision-making centers through an ensemble of procedures and organizations in which bargaining and cognitive exchanges occur, influencing the policies adopted by that center.'

Chalmers identifies five ideal types of structures of representation in Latin America: clientelist, populist, corporatist, political parties and the associative network. He calls a situation *clientelistic* when an association through its leadership exchanges services and favors with a protector or patron in the government or the private sector. Clientelism is also frequent in relationships between elites and poor people, in which the patron gives resources or benefits in exchange for votes or political support. Clientelism is generally characterized by having no formal organization. *Populism* is a structure of representation based on the interplay between the leader's charisma and the demands of the masses. In the classic forms of populism, such as the peronist regime in Argentina, this kind of link was strengthened by organizations (the leader's political party) and often reinforced by clientelistic 'machines'. Populism has often been followed by another formal structure of popular representation: corporatism. An extended definition of

corporatism is when organizations (usually labor, business or professional associations), even though they remain nominally autonomous, are dependent on, or are 'colonized' by state bureaucracies and form privileged partnerships with government agencies (i.e. iron triangles or bureaucratic rings). *Political parties* have played a less central role in Latin America than in advanced industrial democracies. Political parties in our region are more instruments for winning elections than for exercising power or mediating popular demands. All of these four structures of representation are centralized, vertical and hierarchical. On the contrary, *associative networks* are constructed around multiple centers of power.

STRUCTURES OF REPRESENTATION IN LATIN AMERICA (Chalmers)	MAIN FEATURES
Clientelism	Exchange of favors or services through an extensive patron-client network
Populism	Interplay between the leader's charisma and the demands of the masses; expressed only partially in formal organizations
Corporatism	'Colonization' of organizations by government bureaucracies
Political parties	More often instruments for winning elections than for exercising power and mediating popular demands
Associative networks	Actors linked through interpersonal, media and/or interorganizational ties

Tanja Börzel (1998) has pointed out other features of associative networks. They involve relatively stable, non-hierarchical and autonomous relationships which link a great variety of actors who share common interests and exchange resources. Therefore, in associative networks cooperation is considered the best way of meeting social needs.

One of the greatest strengths of associative networks is that they are attractive instruments for addressing the crisis of governance. They provide new

solutions to public problems and incorporate civil society actors in the management of collective goods. Segarra (1997) defines *governance* as methods of management that include linkages between state and non-state actors who seek to overcome a lack of resources by combining degrees of cooperation and/or coordination in a context of competition. Today, since the central government cannot keep its social commitments, responsibility for both governance and the provision of public goods has been shifted mainly to the local level. This means that although decentralization has brought decision-making closer to the people, cities are often saddled with more responsibility than they are willing or able to accept.

Associative networks help local governments to find a way out of the crisis of governance by encouraging citizen involvement in the decisions that affect their own lives. In fact, in order to facilitate governance, local authorities are promoting the formation of associative networks and developing the necessary expertise to negotiate and implement them. One challenge for the future is to design a policy which would establish procedures and evaluate the real impact of associative networks in solving the problems of our cities.

TRADITIONAL STRUCTURES OF REPRESENTATION	ASSOCIATIVE NETWORKS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralized • Hierarchical • Rigid • Bureaucratic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralized • Non-hierarchical • Flexible • Non-bureaucratic

III. Public-private partnerships in Argentina

Gidron, Kramer and Salamon (1992) point out that in public-private relationships *a partnership is produced when CSOs enjoy a significant degree of discretion, whether intentional or not, in the operation of public programs*. The degree of discretion, and consequently, of autonomy, depends on the nature of the activity and the type of relationships established. With this working definition in mind, we have found that in Argentina public-private partnerships in the field of social policy have mainly the following functions: delivering social services; designing, managing or supporting a social program; influencing collective decision-making or shaping public policy.

In Argentina, public-private partnerships aimed at the delivery of social services such as education and health have had a long history in social policy-making. Traditionally, the social partners have been large institutions such as orphanages, schools or foundations for hospitals, which are often dependent on the Catholic Church or on private benefactors. These long-standing partnerships between the state and CSOs are mainly concerned with primary and secondary education, childcare and health. In this case, partnerships supplement and extend public provision with similar services, thereby filling a service gap. The government frequently provides financial support for CSOs, usually in the form of grants or contracts. A variation on this traditional type of partnership is when CSOs help the state to administer public institutions and seek funding for the sustainability of these institutions. One example is the *cooperadoras hospitalarias* or foundations for public hospitals, whose members pay a monthly fee, make donations or organise social events or campaigns to raise money, especially for new equipment or infrastructure.

Today partnerships are also being created for designing, managing or supporting a social program —especially the programs against poverty. Since the

80's a wide variety of programs and services designed for addressing specific or selected groups of people among those people with unsatisfied basic needs has been operating in Argentina. These programs are sponsored by the national and local government together with foreign donors. The partnerships emerging from these programs prepare projects and assist in community development. They also provide continued monitoring of the conditions of poverty in a given community. Examples of these partnerships in Argentina are the Program of Assistance to Vulnerable Groups (*Programa de Atención a Grupos Vulnerables - PAGV*) and the Program of Assistance to Underprivileged Children and Youth (*Programa de Atención a Niños y Adolescentes en Riesgo – PROAME*). The National Ministry of Social Development and Environment carried out both programs in conjunction with CSOs during the Menem and De la Rúa presidencies.

In partnerships created for delivering social services or for designing, managing or supporting a social program, the government plays a managerial role while CSOs perform the functions of administering funding or delivering services. Agreement on the delegation of responsibilities to CSOs is formalized through a contract. In the majority of these partnerships the most important functions of the state are to provide funds, training and information. The central task of CSOs is to contribute with their organizational capacity, human resources, flexibility and personal interaction. Whereas CSOs provide the services and are accountable to the government, the state controls the services provided and sets the patterns of functioning in accordance with the prevailing public policy. In these partnerships CSOs act on behalf of the state in some fields which are primarily public responsibility, thus helping the government to meet some basic goals.

Alternatively, other partnerships are being created for influencing collective decision-making or shaping public policy. The main difference between this type of partnership and that discussed above is that rather than delegating responsibilities

to CSOs, the government enlists the aid of CSOs in defining problems and in trying to solve them. For example, in urban agricultural projects (*huertas comunitarias*) the local government exchanges ideas with CSOs and the community about how to organize themselves to produce vegetables and herbs for their own families and to sell to others. The responsibility for the projects is shared between both sectors. Numerous other examples of partnerships designed for shaping public policy are being carried out in several cities in Argentina through the experiences of urban consultations, strategic planning and regional development agencies. As we have noted above, the concept of the *associative network* is useful for analyzing this kind of partnership.

Associative networks are new experiences in the field of public management in Argentina. But not all relationships between the third sector and the state constitute an associative network. Associative networks are primarily arrangements between the government and third sector organizations for setting the patterns of shared development projects. Experiences of associative networks differ in the degree of their commitment, which ranges from the mere recognition of potential partners to complete association. In associative networks, CSOs work together with the government in the areas of social and economic development, urban renewal the creation of employment, etc. Although associative networks are not created for providing services, they sometimes generate new entities for the financing, design, management or monitoring of local projects. This type of agreement encourages participation and includes social actors in local policy decisions.

In the development of associative networks the government functions as another actor. This is because there is no clear-cut division of responsibilities: both public and private partners can play interchangeable roles in the design and management of the projects. It is true, however, that the calls for proposals, the establishment of the procedures to be followed in developing an associative

network, and the majority of funding required to support the activities are primarily the responsibility of the local government in Argentina today. For CSOs a more active participation in these fields is a future challenge. In associative networks we find conflicts of power. In addition, responsibilities are frequently assumed asymmetrically by the partners.

TYPES OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN ARGENTINA	
Delivering social services	Partnerships supplement and extend public provision of traditional social services
Designing, managing or supporting a social program	Partnerships manage programs against poverty and assist in community development
Influencing collective decision-making or shaping public policy	Partnerships define problems and devise strategies for solving them

IV. A Conflictive Civil Society

Neoliberal structural adjustment measures based on the opposition State vs. Market have been implemented over the past twenty years in Argentina. These policies, originally aimed at curbing inflation, cutting the budgetary deficit and reducing foreign debt, have also increased social segmentation and exacerbated social and economic inequalities. Official unemployment figures were 20% in October 2001 with 14 million people living below the poverty line. Unofficial surveys for April 2002 indicate 26% unemployment with one half of Argentina's 36 million people living below the poverty line. This in turn has resulted in increasing levels of insecurity and violence. From an economic point of view, the neoliberal program has led to the destruction of the national industry and the dismantling of public services.

Representative democracy in Argentina is extremely weak. Processes of democratization have had difficulty integrating the claims and participation of social movements into the functioning of formally democratic institutions. Furthermore, at

the present time the traditional democratic institutions in Argentina have collapsed. This situation has generated the emergence of numerous spontaneous movements against judges, politicians, government officials, political parties and trade unions. In short, the Argentinian crisis is not only economic but also cultural, political, institutional, social and ethical.

Many new actors have emerged in civil society over the past year: popular assemblies —mainly in Buenos Aires, the national capital— *piqueteros* and *cacerolazos*. The neighborhood or popular assemblies propose, discuss and organize weekly protests against the government. People also express their discontent by banging on pots and pans in demonstrations (*cacerolazos*). ‘Picket organizations’ (*piqueteros*) is a recently created movement made up of the jobless who demand jobs or unemployment benefits. In order to achieve these goals, *piqueteros* unite different groups of socially excluded people to block access roads to urban centers and call attention to their plight. At the same time, the national government has called together civic, political and religious leaders to discuss and establish priority actions for overcoming the crisis. The *Mesa del Diálogo Argentino* receives technical assistance from the UNDP (United Nations Development Program). They advocate for public interest and promote a national agreement to rebuild democratic institutions and to strengthen the bonds of solidarity. All these efforts in turn have created new opportunities for civic involvement. In any case, these different expressions of self-organized movements are encouraging new types of participation in civil society.

These new movements coexist with numerous civic, religious, educational, professional, business, labor, and grassroots organizations that mediate between citizens and the government. They utilize voluntary staff and work mainly at the local level. Far from decreasing, in the present situation of crisis civil society is multiplying its cooperative action. The number and extent of associative networks in

Argentina is proof of the existence of powerful sets of social ties and the involvement of citizens in their communities.

V. Building associative networks

In order to analyze the way in which associative networks are being developed in our country, we will refer to the following questions: Are associative networks formed from the top down or from the bottom up? Do they represent the real interests of civil society? Or are they vitiated with the same flaws as traditional forms of representation —clientelism, corporatism or populism?

From our point of view, it is necessary to consider both top-down and bottom-up approaches to building associative networks. Associative networks are created from the top down when the national government or international donors incorporate CSO participation in their programs. This type of network is more susceptible to acquiring the defects of traditional structures of representation and doesn't necessarily respond to the interests of civil society. Even though the associative networks which emerge from these "top-down" agreements are opening up new opportunities for CSOs, they can be co-opted by the government and limited to formal participation. When associative networks are created from the bottom up, however, they result from the combined action of CSOs, local governments and individuals who unite to overcome some specific difficulty. Generally, associative networks formed from the bottom up are more effective in solving social problems and creating new alliances based on the real needs of civil society.

In Argentina there are numerous examples of each approach to forming associative networks. Here we analyze the Job Plans (*Planes de Empleo*), recently put into operation during the Duhalde administration, and the Solidarity Networks (*Redes Solidarias*).

A top-down approach: The Job Plans (*Planes de Empleo*)

Unemployment is soaring in Argentina, and recent economic measures have increased the number of socially excluded people. As part of a strategy to keep the social situation under control, the government of President Duhalde has implemented a nationwide program aimed at incorporating jobless heads of households in public or private works for a minimum wage. In addition, the program seeks to give the poorest of the poor some degree of buying power for food and basic necessities, in order to prevent outbreaks of violence by the starving masses. The innovation introduced by the program is the formation of associative networks, the Advisory Boards (*Consejos Consultivos*), in each city of the country to set the patterns of distribution, control and administration of the programs. These Advisory Boards are formed by workers' organizations, enterprise associations, grassroots organizations, religious organizations and governmental agencies.

The process of the formation of the Advisory Boards was conflictive because, in a brief period of time, the municipalities had to decide which CSOs were to be included and which excluded. In many cities of the country, local governments and CSOs have been greatly pressured by an increasing number of people who are jobless. Both have often had to bear the brunt of the anger of these poverty-stricken people who are competing for scarce resources. And though in some cities the existence of the Advisory Boards has promoted openness and transparency in the distribution of the plans, in many others corporatist and clientelistic practices have prevailed. Moreover, since the rules for establishing these associative networks have been set by the national government, it is difficult for CSOs to preserve their autonomy. Even so, the social situation has been so critical over the past year that CSOs have had to accept the conditions stipulated by the national government for the allocation of job plans.

A bottom-up approach: Solidarity Networks (*Redes Solidarias*)

CSOs are also organizing among themselves through associative networks with diverse objectives: exchanging ideas and information, organizing campaigns, formulating alternative public policies or mobilizing public opinion. The Solidarity Network is an important example of this type of network in Argentina. Created in 1995, the Solidarity Network seeks to provide a space for joining people and organizations in order to optimize social resources and improve the quality of life of the needy. The Solidarity Network is aimed at solving material needs with existing resources: providing food for people who are starving, obtaining medication or arranging emergency operations for the needy. It has little or no formal structure. The idea is to establish links between the poor and those institutions which can help them, so that the network does not require any additional funds to operate. Today, the network is staffed by 70 volunteers. It is open 24 hours a day to meet the demands of the people. More than 200 CSOs collaborate in the Solidarity Network, whose most important resource is trustworthiness. The Solidarity Network hopes to create a sense of solidarity among the members of civil society. The phenomenon of the Solidarity Network is being replicated in hundred of cities throughout the country.

VI. Examining the role of civil society in governance: from delegation to participation

The main hypotheses of our study are as follows:

- **Associative networks can constitute new structures of representation which involve the participation of civil society in governance**

When working in associative networks, the third sector is not only a public service provider: it also influences policy decisions. Rather than merely been delegated responsibilities, CSOs participate. Participation is a political activity in which CSOs

and individuals intervene in policy-making, sharing the responsibilities for both shaping the political agenda and carrying out the programs. And even though conflicts of power may exist, associative networks generally allow partners to negotiate and overcome conflicts, thereby recreating a public space and promoting civic involvement and solidarity.

According to Joan Prats, the new economic and political rules require the elaboration of new patterns of behavior for state and social actors. This means that we must transform the political agenda and the institutional system, which includes both the state and civil society. In order to do so, we must recover the importance of civic values and incorporate strong leadership to orient and encourage these transformations. In an era of social fragmentation, if associative networks succeed in uniting people around common issues and mediating between individuals and the state, they will constitute new structures of representation.

ROLE OF ASSOCIATIVE NETWORKS AS NEW STRUCTURES OF REPRESENTATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gain a voice in decision-making• Mediate between individuals, groups and the state• Shape the political agenda• Recreate a public space

- **Associative networks strengthen citizenship and produce social capital**

By citizenship we mean the relationships between all the members of a political society. As a citizen, the individual becomes an active member of a democratic political community and has civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights. Citizenship also guarantees 'third generation solidarity rights' including the rights to sustainable development, peace, a clean environment, and humanitarian assistance. We identify two key dimensions of citizenship: a formal dimension,

granted to individuals by the state; and a real dimension, which involves the participation of the members of a society in public decision-making. Associative networks encourage this latter dimension of citizenship.

Associative networks are becoming increasingly important in meeting social needs and in multiplying some resources such as solidarity, mutual aid and trustworthiness. Associative networks play a crucial role in the generation of social capital, i.e. the number of actual or potential resources which a person or a group of people obtain from their relationships. Associative networks produce collective goods so that people can receive the benefits of associative networks even if they do not actively participate in them. According to Putnam (1993), social capital requires the existence of trustworthiness between actors, civic commitment and the ability to associate, all of which are intangible resources. Bourdieu (1983) also points out that social capital is based on the possession of durable networks of more or less institutionalized relationships which generate a number of resources. Personal linkages are crucial in the process of building the network (Chalmers, 1997; Rovere, 1998).

- **Associative networks encourage partners to share responsibility for common issues, especially at the local level**

Associative networks unite people around common issues. By common issues we mean matters of public concern, particularly those which are related to the common good or the public interest. Even though in practice it would be difficult to reach complete understanding on what is in the "public interest", a community can come to an agreement about its goals and the extent to which any proposed action contributes to these goals. Responsibility for common issues is shared between partners which requires changing people's mentality. Generally speaking, the majority of associative networks are developed in micro-spaces at the local level.

They are complements to local decision-making and alternative channels for dealing with conflict. They are important initiatives for improving the design and implementation of public policy in an effort to ameliorate both social and economic inequalities. As they transform the traditional relationship between the state and CSOs, associative networks bring about radical transformations in both the actors involved and in the political education of these actors: the stakeholders gain synergy from their own cooperation; hence both public and private sectors can benefit by optimizing their resources.

Key challenges for associative networks

Associative networks must face certain challenges in order to overcome their own weaknesses. These are: respecting the autonomy of partners in the network, avoiding bureaucratization and bettering their perspectives of sustainability.

- **Respecting the autonomy of partners in the network**

The organizations which participate in associative networks are autonomous and don't necessarily lose their autonomy in the process of working together. Associative networks are connections of highly differentiated state and societal actors who maintain their identities, management styles and institutional goals. It is true, however, that in Argentina numerous CSOs are closely related to the state, because their activities are frequently supported or subsidized by government funds. The state in turn often enlists the aid of CSOs for carrying out social programs. This 'state-dependence' of certain CSOs limits their autonomy and hinders their capability of constituting an independent sector. Moreover, when associative networks are aimed at social and economic development, it is necessary for them to be centered in the state in order to maximize their efforts.

- **Avoiding bureaucratization**

Traditional structures of representation have often been criticized because of their inefficiency or incompetence. Large bureaucracies are frequently cumbersome and inflexible, with too many rules and too much red tape. They are often indifferent to the real needs of people. Associative networks tend towards bureaucratization when they become formalized, impersonal and hierarchical. To avoid bureaucratization, the most important challenge for associative networks is to keep in close contact with the real needs of the community. Bureaucratic organizations tend to isolate themselves from the context in which they operate and become a self-centered system in which the original goals turn out to be secondary. To be effective, associative networks should be developed from the bottom up. For associative networks to be successful, it is important for them to be flexible, to avoid bureaucratization and to avoid fragmenting actions.

- **Learning and communicating**

The formation of a network is only the starting point for political association. First, it is a learning process in which actors develop their social and political skills. The actors in the network learn to negotiate, to keep their commitments, and to develop the capacity for leadership —not only for managing people and institutions, but for encouraging others to join in their activities. Second, the members of associative networks must perfect their communication skills, provide access to information and facilitate the exchange of ideas. This is because effective communication must distinguish the network from traditional structures of representation.

- **Bettering their own perspectives of sustainability**

Perhaps the main problem confronting associative networks today is their own sustainability, which depends on two main issues: the motivation of the partners and the availability and continuity of funding. When creating an associative network, it is important to take into account what motivates the actors to participate, what they expect in the way of benefits, and what their needs and interests really are. The presence of strong leadership and the development of interdisciplinary technical teams are key elements for increasing motivation and for coping with some misunderstandings which arise on account of different management styles.

Another threat to the sustainability of associative networks is the discontinuity of funding. Because CSOs in Argentina are greatly dependent on government financing, partners must sharpen their skills for obtaining alternative sources of funding. Nowadays there are a variety of sources of funding for partnerships, from international to national and local funds, and from public financing to private sponsors. The problem is that prospective partners are not necessarily well informed about the availability of these funds.

Another important aspect to mention is the need to establish clearly defined rules and procedures which would help to achieve sustainability and strengthen motivation. Finally, we consider that the public sector itself cannot ignore its responsibility in improving the locally available information on sustainable associative networks. It must also eliminate the legal, political, and institutional obstacles to forming effective public-private relationships.

V. Conclusion

Any discussion about what civil society we would like to have involves reconciling new movements and new experiences of participation with traditional structures of representation. At a time when the fabric of society has been deeply damaged,

associative networks are becoming mediating structures between citizens and decision-making centers. Associative networks are promoting citizen involvement in common issues. This involvement in turn is creating bonds of solidarity between the members of civil society. We may not need a new institutional design for recreating civil society, but we *do* need to rethink and reposition CSOs and associative networks, which can constitute effective instruments for deepening citizen participation and strengthening governance.

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