ARMANDO CHAGUACEDA NORIEGA*

CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION AND ASSOCIATIVE SPACE [1]

"What does non-governmental mean in a country with a traditional State? Why not use the associations as a better criteria for evaluation, given their concept of participation and more importantly, the way they promote community involvement?"
(Lopez, 1997)

Cuba is changing. While caricatured by certain newspaper articles, a complex transformation is unfolding, affecting lifestyles and spiritualities, consumption habits and status symbols, family roles and political cultures. Although the institutional and regulatory frameworks linger behind –more than is advisable– a transformation is underway, rejecting dogma imposed by the neoliberal claudication and bureaucratic inactivity, both forms of historical fatalism. If one wishes to accurately approach the depth of change under way, we can find a privileged and seductive scenario for analysis in *associative space* (*espacio asociativo*), which is understood to be the social dimension that *hosts relatively autonomous forms of groupings and collective action, outside the political and economic institutions, that channel the voluntary activity of citizens in disparate areas of particular interest, characterized by the logic of reciprocity, solidarity, symmetrical interaction and the defense of common identities.*

* Political historian, a professor from the University of Habana and investigator for the Juan Marinello Center. He is a member of the Cátedra Haydee Santamaría project and neighbourhood activist. Email xarchano@yahoo.es.

1 This article has been inserted, together with a CLACSO-ASDI project, as the central investigation topic for the authors future doctorate. Preliminary versions have already been published at www.inprecor.org.br, www.lescahiersdelouise.org and it is currently being edited by Sur-Sur de CLACSO program.

During recent years in our country participatory experiences in associations have expanded, contributing to the process of gradual democratization of diverse agencies of political society (especially local government branches), which perform an important part of the inspection, coordination and material support of the forms of association -- which is a source of synergies and conflicts. (Suarez, 2000). The process is not exempt from contradictions and setbacks, derived from exogenous variables (U.S. harassment) and domestic variables (synonymous with underdevelopment and State traditions), which illustrate a dynamic tension between traditional leftist democracies and bureaucratic trends, typical of a socialist State system. In analyzing these collective groupings, their traditions and organizational imagination, we need to evaluate their political nature, their ability to build alternative or functional paradigms to the domination found within each social context.

A key element is the study of the associations, analyzing participation as a variable of great importance in democratic functioning (Vergara, 1988), (Pateman, 1970). Broadening participation is considered a crucial contribution to social integration, strengthening the legitimacy of consensus and communication policy, along with the construction of an active citizenship. From participation, the citizen is not only understood to be the subject of constitutionally guaranteed rights but as acting in a responsible manner and being involved in the reproduction of social coexistence and its constraints (Chaguaceda, 2007). This process embodies and unfolds not only in State institutions but also in so-called Civil Society (CS).

The context of Participation: Civil Society as space and discourse

CS is a concept that serves simultaneously legitimate, mobilization, policy and descriptive roles, among others. It expresses an independent self-organization of society, made up of volunteer action and public activities within a context of legally defined relationships between the State and society (Wergle and Butterfield, 1992) [2]. It can be considered the basis for legitimacy and political confrontation of political projects, which reorient (without substituting) the traditional state-power relationships (monopolizers of legitimate violence) towards the areas of culture, daily-life and exchange. It is simultaneously a subject – universal, like a citizen's community, or particular, including specific groups or individuals that make it up – and is a way to organize social relations and express ideologies of power – a kind of inter-subjective relation where diverse hegemonic relationships are constructed (Núñez, 2005). It adopts local, national and transnational expressions (Serbin, 2004) with different degrees of fragmentation, heterogeneity and interconnection of components (Neveu and Bastien, 1999).

2 Wergle and Butterfield recognize an institutional component in CS which defines the legal framework guaranteeing its autonomy and permanency, and likewise its relationships with the state and other dimensions which define their own character, feelings and methods.

Some authors have defined it as the area for relationships between individuals and social classes outside the institutional power relationships characteristic of the State (Hernandez, 1994), and as the social dimension characterized by being centred around processes of permanence, organization and consensus of associate members on collective purposes. At its heart is "(…) the set of organs commonly considered private, that facilitate the intellectual and moral direction of society by forming consent and the adhesion of the masses, … [and includes] cultural, educational, and religious social organizations, but also political and economic ones", that offer "a legitimate space for the confrontation of aspirations, desire, objectives, images, beliefs, identities, projects and projects that express the diversity of the social component." (Acanda, 2002: 248 and 257). Its agencies have standard non-profit goals, external financing (public or private), rely profusely on voluntary contribution and produce collective goods, intervene in social politics and call for solidarity and democratization. (Keane, 1992). However, they do not escape the negative processes of bureaucracy. (Linares et al, 2006).

In their disparate interpretations, the notion of CS has an intimate relationship with the fundamental problems of modern political reflection and action: the internal articulation of society through the voluntary cohesion of its members, the legitimacy and workings of institutionalized mechanisms of explicit power (Alonso, 2002; Azcuy, 1996), the pretension of neutrality and universality of the modern State, the de-politicizing of particular interests and the domination-hegemony articulation (Acanda, 2002). Therefore, it expresses a contradiction between conflict, social control and its liberating potential.

In my case, I define CS as an *area of plural social interaction (families, associations, social movements, etc.) that articulates hegemony through everyday specific civic actions, within socialization, association and public communication structures that are not integrated in the political and economic systems*. This assumes essential traits such as *plurality* (connecting various human groups), *publicity* (expanding cultural and communicative institutions), *legality* (promoting forms and general principles that mark its area of action versus the economy and State) and *individuality* (an area for self-development and moral choice), among others (Arato and Cohen, 2000). Recent, more sophisticated visions recognize a pentagonal social design where CS interconnects with economic and political systems through interfaces that would be economic and political society (Isunza in Olvera, 2006).

Faced with the fact that a complex "really existing" CS, various authors have highlighted the risks of confronting resulting distortions like de-politicization -withdrawing in the face of actions of the political system- or over-politicization of CS, presumably framed and homogenized around a sole anti-state agenda and struggle. This has led some analysts to invalidate the analytical usefulness of the concept. In my case, I believe it is equally naive to abandon the concept without reflection, or to use it indiscriminately: what is necessary is to define, in each

context, the sociological content and mobile economics, the worldview paradigm and the current ideology to which it subscribes – in summary, the political project that is intertwined with each particular reading of CS, assumed as a concept to designate a wide region and diffuse social issues. Thus, we shall assume the need to overcome the phraseology that mobilizes everyday scientific analysis without preventing its political conditions and its potential propositive function.

There are currently various approaches to civil society, which can be summarized in four main paradigms, expressed within the western paradigm (hegemonic) and its diverse transpositions and worldwide alternatives. The neo-conservative approach is business, anti-statist and exclusive -- looking to compensate social inequalities through occasional charitable actions -- which claims a distinction between CS and State, binary and organic, from the exterior. The liberal pluralist -- which may be accompanied by an occasional denunciation of capitalism and demand for social reforms -- defends independence and co-determination with relationship to the State, emphasizes the idea of a particular "a society of lobbyists" identity, and is focused on NGOs. (Burchardt, 2006: 168 and 169).

Anti-neoliberal perspectives offer another reading of this phenomenon as an asymmetrical, diverse (in capacities and discourses) space for the articulation of hegemonies. (Hidalgo, 1998). CS, a terrain of non-state oriented social actions, where new questions, demands, legitimacy and civic cultures are generated (Gallardo, 1995), is considered to be a landmark that is useful to rebuild associative ties in de-politicized spaces, capable of overcoming the alienation and fragmentation in authoritarian contexts, and in hands of the people, it can legitimize processes of democratization (Romer, 2006), (Houtart), confronting dominant groups, purging political and administrative corruption, and activating patriotism (Meschkat, 2002). These views run counter to what has been called *the myth of pure virtue* of CS, which is slowly being abandoned by more sophisticated and realistic social liberals, for compensatory mechanisms such as a diverse-range of institutional designs.

However, the heterogeneity of CS includes non-civil and less than democratic actors according to Western standards, expressing their own forms of action, identities, projects, etc.. (Dagnino et al, 2006). The criticism of the universalist Habermas model of CS – that it is perceived as an area governed by *communicative action* (Habermas, 1987) – provides evidence that there are other visions of CS (putting more weight on the spiritual and communitarian rather than the secular and individual), anchored in the contexts of ethnic and aboriginal communities and religious movements. From this perspective, the historical non-Western experiences (that is most of the human endeavour, in terms of time and scope) demonstrates the existence of collective forms of action that fall outside of State institutions, which are able to meet individual demands (Revilla et al, 2002). This is important to point out as we are seeing surprising vitality and growing discourses, such as those by the Latin American indigenous peoples, the Islamic religious groups and Afro-Asian rural communities -- all this despite the

liberal paradigm being extended as a universal phenomenon capable of permeating regional experiences.

However, defending the relative independence of the components of the social whole means recognizing a certain inter-penetration of its individual logics in the operation of their respective structures[3]. Assuming this recognizes that in each context exists a specific type of relationship and strong correlation between these actors. Therefore, the influence and traits of a national CS can also be assessed based on the scope, nature and logic of its State counterpart. In fact, the idea of administration policy as a factor in mediating between citizens (represented in its CS) and the modern State -- which occurs as a result of the rise of class struggle -- provokes contradictory results by encouraging, through forced government intervention, the recognition and expansion of the scope of CS itself -- a process illustrated by the expansion of rights frameworks and citizen's participation (Neocleus, 1996).

The types of relationships between CS and State (Kramer, 1981) whose expressions can be identified in the case of Cuba, are *pragmatic cooperation*, through which the State subsidizes or provides material and moral support to associations for their social role and political importance; and *public sector monopoly*, which generates a model called "State-led" that is marked by the prominence of the State's role. The State administers citizen's welfare and becomes virtually the sole provider of social services, while civil society is only responsible for identifying needs, subordinating its associations to the State planning. Studying the types of interrelationships between CS and State as processes of inter-penetration and simultaneous separation (Armony, 2005) is useful because it helps determine in each case: degrees of State autonomy types of dominant actors -- located on a spectrum ranging from local to national -- and styles of more or less competitive interaction that exist between these actors. It involves analyzing the relationship between the administrative, coercive and symbolic State dimensions and their resources, and the socioeconomic base, organizational mobilizing capacity and internal dynamics – ideologies -- that inspire any CS (Armony, 2005).

The emergence of CS (and particularly of associative space) is related to the tensions and dynamics of change that impact from and on State space. Internationally, successful experiences have been recognized where "(…) civil society actors marked by anti-state suspicions and State actors imbued by an anti-participatory culture have had to create mechanisms for joint work (…)" (Isunza in Olvera, 2006: 308). In Cuba, the weakening of the State monopoly on the production of legitimate values (the hegemony of decades past) can not be recovered by activating the coercive dimension but rather by preserving the

3 Likewise a minister could support transnational contaminant affecting a neighbourhood; the same community could ask for help from the public sector (universities, courts, social assistance) to counteract the impact of this action, an alliance of associations could promote economic support to the neighbours, etc.

consistency and cohesion of the national project, by inserting CS demands and agencies into ongoing or potential policies. That is why today any tendency that recommends overextension of the same, at the expense of action deployed from within the associations, is irresponsible. We need to expand even further a notion of complementarity of responsibility 'State-associations' to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex and heterogeneous society (Collective of Authors, 2003), with trends towards pluralism (Boves, 2005).

The Cuban associative context: a brief outline.

The revolution in 1959, coming in from the socialist process of national liberation, integrated organically and originally the ideals of the National Martí Project (*Proyecto Nacional Martiano*) -- social justice, political independence and economic development – mixing with it a renewed dose of democratic and civic commitment. (Fernandez, 1999). In the 60's, the Cuban Revolution gave rise to a sui generis CS , where millions of people "found themselves", participating enthusiastically: they entered politics, were socialized and experienced a sense of belonging to a cause greater than themselves; transforming themselves along with their reality. With the disappearance of the many forms of social associations that existed before the revolution, the gaps were filled by *new mass organizations or people's organizations*, which over the course of time were accompanied by other *professional associations and civil rights' groups*. Metaphorically, we could consider that the revolutionary people -- the vast majority of the Cuban population – recognized as *Voluntad General*, signed a sui generis *Social Contract*, which created a specific type of socio-political participation in the 60's -- through numerous associations and political organizations -- capable of combining massive ratification on large popular congregations with the centralized execution of leadership, and no classical, recognizable rule of law (and of constitutionality). (Chaguaceda, 2007), (Prieto, Perez, Sarracino, Villabella, 2006).

This functioned for the early needs of the project – succeeding to undertake titanic tasks (educational, health, defense) with large masses modestly educated and of high political commitment. However, soon signs of exhaustion were revealed and an institutional restructuring was required, close to the Soviet Union model, which took off in the second half of the 70's. (Garcia, 1998). Unfortunately, this process was mediated and did not achieve its democratic promises (Dilla, 1995), however it did, parallel to the opening of new coded spaces and stable citizen's action, strengthen the bureaucracy and achieve enduring personal and centralized traits of social conduct. In this context, reserve towards democratic institutional mechanisms, reinforced by the incompetence of the bourgeois republican institutions and its disruption by two periods of right-wing dictatorships, and the urgency of major changes, continued to legitimise the existence of a strengthened State with its immense bureaucratic apparatus and control of the nation's material and human resources. (Burchardt 2006).

Despite this, the libertarian component (Martinez Heredia, 2005) of the revolutionary project did not succumb completely to statism and therefore, soon after, processes of Latin American popular participation and self-organization began

to have an impact on Cuba (Sandinista Revolution, the experiences of Popular Education) and leave their mark on the organizational and personal experiences of many Cubans. This meant that in the 80's, reanalyzing the direction of Cuban socialism, there was an attempt to rescue the associative and participatory components in order to meet the demands arising from processes of heterogeneity and socialist social mobility. One of the first changes appeared in the legal field.

From 1976, the right to association in Cuba was recognized in Article 53 of the constitution as a means through which citizens can hold multiple scientific, cultural, recreational, solidarity and social benefit activities.[4] This was regulated by Law No. 54, in effect since December 27, 1985, which stated "(…) transformations in the country require the reorganization of association records at a national level and the approval of a new legislation adjusted to current needs, that responds to the growing interest shown by the people with regards to the formation and development of associations for the social good", and thus opened up a channel for revolutionary association.[5] The nature of these should be for social benefit, non-profit and their essential purpose should be directed to the development of science, technology, education, sports, recreation and different cultural events. As well, it included promoting relations of friendship and solidarity between peoples and studying their history and culture, leaving space for any other sphere of action not included in those previously mentioned, provided that the proposal was of social interest.

However, the Law of Cuban Associations has many deficiencies, for example, despite proposing the proven internal democracy of associations as a condition for its existence, the norm -- and its implementation -- favors the stability of associative elites. It leaves enormous power for decision-making in the hands of related organs and relatively few mechanisms for appeal against potential abuse of these conditions. It establishes conditions that affect less organized people's groups. It is sufficiently ambiguous as to accommodate in one space NGOs, foundations and community experiences, making less formal experiences invisible, among others. In addition, its existence has not prevented the unfortunate State resistance to enrolling new associations -- a position that has existed now for a decade. The public interest in self-organization advocates that different participatory plans are welcomed into State associative institutions and associations created, or in areas of contact between the two (for example, through socio-cultural projects), conducting activities whose performance occasionally exceeds the formal and logical objectives of the former.

In the 90's, an explosive revival of associations was witnessed in Cuba , simultaneously attributed to the crisis resulting from the collapse Eastern Europe, the retreat of the State as a socio-economic agent, the ideological and practical discrediting of State socialism, and the emerging debates (legitimized by the Appeal to the 4th Congress of the CCP) on the future of the Cuban project. This also prompted

---

4 Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, Official Bulletin No. 3. January 30th, 2003.

5 Associations Law No 54/85 Official Bulletin of the Republic of Cuba, La Habana, 1985.

a boom of global and regional decentralization processes, the growth of solidarity movements with Cuba, the emergence of new problems and reclaiming discourses (environmental, gender, ecumenical and popular religion, urban participation). During these years, the combined efforts of communities, various foreign actors and the State mitigated the effects of the crisis and promoted the associative boom.

Currently associative space can be classified according to several types[6], depending on the reference used. I propose to start by recognizing four clusters: para-state associations (PA), anti-systemic associations (ASA), sectoral or professional associations (ASP) and territorial or popular associations (ATP). Some of their traits will be described below.

The PA (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution - CDR), Central of Cuban Workers (CTC), Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), Federation of University Students (FEU) and Federation of Education Students (FEEM) have a structure, missions and a symbolic repertoire closer to that of State institutionalism, covering, under its umbrella, all major social groups in the country. A phenomenon typical of "State socialism" experiences, they are national and monopolize the representation of certain interests and associative identities. Useful to the political system -- as mechanisms for mobilization and propaganda -- they are also social organizations that should formally represent the interests and views of their members before the State. Certain conventionality, uniformity and inertia have been enthroned in the styles of several of these organizations, although some do retain dynamic participatory bases or possess more legitimacy and are potential revivors (FEU), but they need to promote distinct, autonomous discourse of the sectors they represent.

The ASA (opposition groups, certain centers are linked to the Catholic Church and its hierarchy, etc.) is considered the "political opposition" and has an internal membership and influence of dissimilar impact and a high-profile overseas. This phenomenon is not related to the counterrevolution restoration of the 60's and 70's, shares exogenous (promoted by Western governments) and endogenous (dissent from the sector of society opposed to the regime) matrices, has no mass base and its various groups are polychromatic, but the majority are aligned with U.S. and / or European policies. (AGE, 2003).

On the other hand, there are sectoral or professional associations – ASP – represented symbolically by NGOs, civil associations, training centers and ser-

---

6 An "authoritative" sector is talked of -- a State which would include PA and most of the authorized ASP and other "democratized" groups, which are minorities, legally precarious, transparent and predominantly of the ASA. (Puerta, 1996). This is also the case with top-down organizations, that have community connections, and entities oriented towards citizen empowerment, with levels of contact with the State apparatus, in a kind of fluid and diffused relationship. (Gunn, 1995). Other authors offer a suggestive taxonomy expressed in: fraternal, cultural and sport associations; mass social organizations; churches and religious gatherings; developmental NGOs, and academic publications and centres; community movements: dissident groups; cooperatives and new economic actors. (Dilla y Oxhorn, 1999). There are also authors who prefer to offer a general evaluation of the phenomenon without putting forward precise classifications (Friedman, 2006).

vices –- including some religiously inspired -- foundations, fraternities, lodges, etc. These entities are characterized by a tendency of professionalism and institutionalization. Some have significant operating expenses and the capacity to fundraise external resources, and they tend towards stability and selective membership, included in this employed staff and client populations. As a rule, the most powerful implement complex workplanning (programs, projects) in various areas and, have formal leadership and significant levels of professional qualifications. (Herranz, 2005) Frequently they mediate between governments and international cooperation, on the one hand, and various grassroots entities, usually depending on external funds (from private or governmental agencies).

Other visible actors are the territorial or popular associations – ATP – in the first place, those known as neighbourhood movements; associated with structures such as Integral Neighbourhood Transformation Workshops (Coyula, Olivares, 2002) and various community projects promoted by Cuban and foreign NGOs (Colectivo, 2002). They have local interests at heart and the groups are not essentially connected, as they tend towards informality and territoriality. They have limited access to economic resources and depend on exogenous sources, and therefore have a self-management calling and aim for a comprehensive transformation of communities based on socio-cultural considerations. They have a modest thematic agenda characterized by their focus on problems and have a massive, casual membership, which hampers the goal of collective leadership. They display a "diffused" exercise of coordination and activism -- different to the logic of leaders and members of more formal associations -- with a high prominence of women, professionals and ex-leaders.

In its shaping, the State has played a contradictory role. (Dilla, Fernandez and Castro, 1998) On the one hand, it disseminates technology and material resources (urban organic agriculture, alternative constructions), provides specialists in these and other fields (psychologists, planners) and pays wages to team leaders. But while it implicitly recognizes the existence of these movements, it prevents their legal recognition, rejects the formation of popular economy experiences and tries to absorb local production ventures. Yet these experiences have shown relationships of reciprocity (help from neighbors, sharing food, gifts), promoting community assistance by some of the workers, of their own accord, and cooperative arrangements to hire their services for project activities.

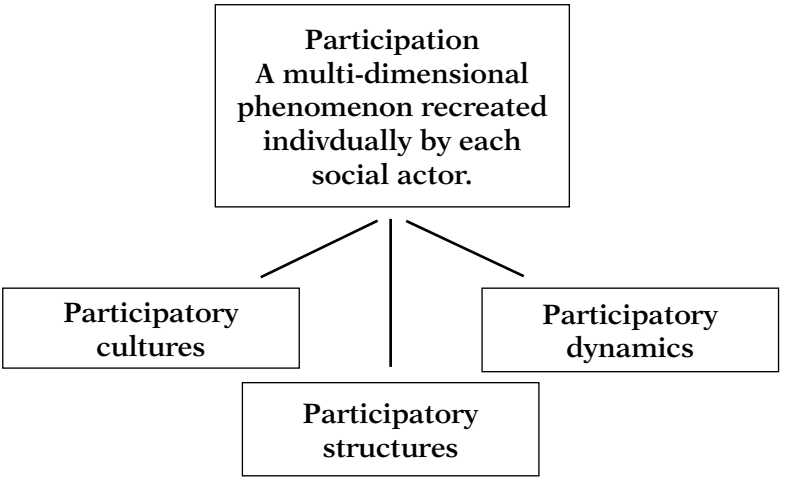
Participation: between the conceptual debate and programmatic dispute

Within the agendas and approaches of the associations, the participatory component is a leading issue. Any form of collective action has its own participatory wealth --expressed in participatory structures, dynamics and cultures -- built from their specific experiences of organization and struggle. In them, the vertical, instrumental or hierarchical character of their mobilizations confronts growing forms of democratic and autonomous action. Broad or restricted ideas of power are are discussed. The repertoire of democratic rights and non-conventional

forms of political participation are constrained or expanded. Demands and conflicts are expressed, related to questions that were once considered purely accessories: moral, environmental or cultural.

When we talk about participation, we refer to another polysemantic term, endowed as well with an ontological sense, which allows it to focus on itself, often ignoring contexts, motives and actors of said action. (Olvera, 2006: 368). This concept refers to forms and processes of social action where subjects who share a given situation, have the opportunity to identify common interests and demands, and translate them into forms of collective action. It integrates popular knowledge and capabilities, looks for a comprehensive transformation that goes beyond the relationship of dependency and subordination of communities members in relation to specialists and leaders. It involves several basic factors: knowledge (akin to culture), power (formal right and effective capacity) and desire (motivation and commitment) to participate.

Based on these factors, different timely *participatory plots* develop in each territorial or sectoral context, which can be analyzed as scenarios of the participation of their citizens, or they can even become subjects of participation when interacting with other entities in *participatory networks* in each interactive process (through overlapping, integration or intervention) that links two or more participatory plots. These would channel their respective *participatory cultures* -- that is, the web of ideas, values and beliefs about participation recreated by each social actor. They have *structures,* or a set of more or less formalized and regulated organizational spaces, where the diverse forms (direct, delegated, activism, among others) of participation take shape. They develop *participatory dynamics* (a sequenced set of actions through which participation unfolds) in which the protagonism of the subjects involved is essential – which leads us to emphasize the term citizen.



Participation as a process is complemented by bodies of representation, through which certain groups participate indirectly in institutions, maintaining more or less stable and functional relationships with those represented, and legitimized according to the mechanisms used and the interests defended. Such participation is related to economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital that illustrates the web of styles and preferences of a class or social group (habitus), and allows us to classify, perceive and articulate the system of these actions in the midst of an interactive area and dynamic power relationships (social field). (Burchardt, 2006). It must be studied in a specific socio-historical context, assuming the decentralization of powers and resources, which implies the development of strong local power and popular control over the national bodies of power.

It is necessary to define the type of participation assumed here. The notion of *social participation* is too ambiguous a term (every actor is social) and only makes sense if it is confined to entities (NGOs, social movements, etc.) of the associative space. This would assume the notion of a total social system divided into watertight compartments with different logics, and separated into subsystems, and political, economic and cultural activities, etc.[7] However, we run the risk of ignoring or diminishing the political meaning of this participation, since associations contain, even if unintentionally, socialization spaces and citizen's formation.

On the other hand, it is obvious that here we are not referring to the actions of political institutions (government, parties, parliaments) classified as *political participation*. The main functions it is traditionally "responsible" for are the development of political communication processes, social inclusion and the removal of the elites, through activities undertaken by private citizens that are more or less directed at influencing the selection of government personnel and the actions they take. (Verba and Nie, 1972). An understanding of the orthodox notion of political participation reduces our focus to the performance within spaces of the political system and excludes people's processes and political influence deployed from within the heart of the associations.[8]

Even in the field of cultural action, participation has been recognized as having political implications on many occasions -- it hides strategies of domination,

---

7 Thus "(… systematic analysis produces a vision of society being artificially ordered into spheres of distinct action, separated, enclosed for good or bad in a great "social totality" organized and coherent" recognizing that "some researchers have taken illustrative graphic schemes, whose unique function was to allocate functions in a political system … using the same explanation as political behaviour …)" (Lagroye, 1993: 134)

8 Political participation, recognized as a variant of social participation in the public sphere, proposes many definitions with larger or smaller differences and approaches. Its particularity, according to Juan Valdés Paz, lies in that (…) it should make itself effective in the political system, that is to say, in the institutions of the political system that "really exist". (Pérez, 2004: 73). For Marisa Revilla Blanco, political participation is the activity of influencing and mediating the behaviour of political power and actors for the conservation or modification of the existing order. (Revilla 2002)

whose implicit purpose is to demobilize subordinate sectors, to attract them and to incorporate them into their socio-political project. (Perez in Linares, 2004).

The relationship between participation and citizenship are visible when the former is synthetically defined as the ability of citizens to influence decision-making processes beyond electoral participation, transforming power relations and reducing the gap between decisions and their executors. (Dilla et al, 1993) Therefore, it claims a concept of citizen's participation that emerged from pre-political levels of collective action, hosting the *activity of conscious and active involvement of the subject(s) in socio-political pr*ocesse*s related to the establishment, exercise and ratification of power in institutional and associative spaces, and in the distribution of resulting resources*. It is a process that is expressed as much in action from within the political institutions (partisan, State) as within the various specific associations that host the subjects.[9]

Many authors talk about popular participation, which we conceive as part of citizen's participation. Even Cuba, whose rates of integration and social equity are high, shows cultural, social class, territorial and other kinds of differences that hardly make certain associations equivalent to the notion of popular participation, regardless of their noble actions.[10]. This way any popular participation qualifies as citizen's participation -- even in those contexts where the differences and exclusions are reduced almost to the formality of voting or the precarious legality of the protest action of the poor -- but not all citizen's participation is popular.

Popular is a category that, in our regional contexts, identifies individuals who suffer social asymmetries, and in mobilizing movements are likely to become liberators. (Gallardo, 2005). The notion of a popular subject covers a range of sectors and social classes which are susceptible to being easily integrated into a project of anti-capitalist changes, related to communitarian, taking into account an identification with minimum levels of organization and autonomy from the market and the State: unions, neighbourhood associations, women's or youth organizations, cultural clubs with public presence, etc. [11] (Dilla, 1996). For another

---

9 We found many elements that build bridges and at the same time promote a distinction between the action of the political organizations and their non-political counterparts, such as associations. They all contribute to the socialization of the people, which construct reference groups and can serve as a framework for selecting leaders and spreading beliefs -- all this despite differences in working methods, logical functioning and action areas, as they develop reciprocal recognition of interests rights and particularities. (Lagroye, 1993: 276)

10 It should be discussed whether the client-population of certain NGOs, even sharing the framework of popular participations, develop autonomous actions that help to define it and show leadership roles regardless of the subordinates and liabilities allowed by the entities.

11 This is unlike the concept of "civil society", which involves groups outside the place they occupy in the social hierarchy, ignoring the asymmetries and related ideologies that precisely surround the popular subjects.

researcher, popular participation is defined as the capacity and activity of large majorities to act in decision-making, in relationships of power and influence, at different levels of social development.[12]

Undoubtedly, there are many readings of the alluded phenomenon. Even references to the so-called "popular participation" have become invoked more frequently since the mid 90's, within the frameworks of the reformist version of Latin American neo-liberalism[13]. This calls for effective and efficient administration of public policies in contrast to the paternalistic and bureaucratic models, which leads certain communities to assume a management pattern not consistent with their emancipating emphasis. Such participation, turned into a tool of management, with a technical element and a supposedly neutral re-distributive focus of on action, also adds its ideals to the political culture of national associations. (Olvera 2006)[14].

The culture of participatory associations: side notes.

In its various spaces, the political culture of association frequently reforms ideals and modes of undemocratic action (authoritarianism, patronage, co-modification), although their entities incorporate alternative practices (popular education, participatory diagnosis, community work) and aim for a more participatory and democratic society. In fact, relationships between these associations are as complex as the rest of the components of the social system -- they reveal collaborative relationships, competition and conflict in their interactions.

The actors, by using various themes privileged by international cooperation (gender, environment, culture of peace, participation), look to leverage material, methodological, analytical and organizational resources, in order to effectively guide their collective action, and build capacities and sensitivities for social participation processes and resistance to crisis. Luckily, the metaphoric and cautious language of many of these associations does not always express attitudes of merely fear or opportunism. In many cases, it reveals the real power dynamics between these actors and the State and the desire to sustain spaces -- even if minimal -- of social transformation, avoiding generalizing and direct criticism, in order to allow for commitments and alliances with certain State institutions on timely matters.

These factors lead to various views on the opportunities and challenges of operating associations in Cuba. According to Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada, the veteran chairman of the National Assembly of People's Power -- a Cuban legislative body -- "These organizations and others -- such as farmers, or professionals

---

12 Olga Fernández Ríos, Cuba: participación popular y sociedad, in Dilla, 1996.

13 See the use of the Promising Popular Participation Act of 1994 under Bolivian right-wing governments of the past decade. (Thevoz, 2006)

14 In this perspective, a logical instrument is deployed, where "practical problems are reduced to technical problems solvable by a formal calculation". Lechner, Norbert, "Especificando la política" in Cabrera 2004: 28-29.

or neighbourhoods -- have a vital, natural role in the direction of society. It makes sense, therefore, that they should propose candidates for national deputies and provincial delegates. They are not only heard, but are directly involved in decision-making. Among other examples that could be mentioned are: the Law of Taxation, that, before its submission to the National Assembly was subject to an extensive review by workers' unions , which produced significant modifications to the original text; the Agricultural Cooperatives Act, an initiative presented by the National Association of Small Farmers, was discussed by hundreds of thousands of members in all cooperatives and from that discussion came the final draft that was considered and approved by the Assembly.. "(Serrano, 2003).

However, as the sociologist Juan Valdes Paz points out: "Developments in the decentralization of authority, resources and information for non-state sectors or local State entities, have not been enough. To a large extent, the institutional order shows high levels of centralization in all systems, which is partly a result of the environmental conditions in which they operate, and partly a result of their institutional design and high centralization of political power; (…) the systemic objective of popular participation in all its moments and increasingly, in decision-making, is blocked by the tendencies of bureaucratic institutions of each system, which are understood not only as an excess of staff and procedures, but as decision-making without democratic control. Advances in the decentralization and rationalization of the institutions in political and economic systems, have been insufficient in reducing bureaucracy. "(Valdes in Chaguaceda and Coderch, 2005).

In such an environment, mobilization and consultation are presented as basic levels of participation appreciated in Cuba, both in the institutional and associative realms. Given the shortcomings of the socio-political institutions, although the associative universe seduces as being an area of communication and democratic demands and feelings, not everything is idyllic. In many cases, the teams leaders are elected by the grassroots, but afterwards their roles are decisive and poorly controlled, leaving a passive role for the members. Often, directives are given special attention by institutions that express their consent or dissent, and in concrete cases show dissatisfaction with candidates who, once elected, perform discourses and actions that are more autonomous than that which is "officially acceptable" (even when they are systemic), usually based on uniform and monolithic traditions.

This affects the nature of the relationship, the ideological foundation of its discourse, the intellectual formation of its leaders, the role played within the bureaucracy; for instance, the approaches of the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment are not identical. Each association has to defend their unrestricted margins of autonomy, the ability to negotiate tactically, the ability to build bridges and win allies within the spectrum of associations, and with their foreign counterparts and, obviously, with the Cuban State, their power to mobilize public opinion around decisive conflicts, etc. It should be noted that the participation and commitment of members is a precondition for the vitality and respect which associations enjoy, but the opposite is also true.

In the context of different, coexisting cultures, in which none are intrinsically "bad" or "good", but they simply have different concerns (historical, class, cultural), more traditional, passive approaches (self-informing, awareness raising and mobilizing) can be found, which are preferred by many of our institutions whose reason for being is historical and, despite the need to be overtaken, still retain great force. We have another type of participation, "active", with several occasions where the community meets, brainstorms problems, defines an agenda of priorities, makes a plan, delegates the power to execute it, and later controls it. It is a complex process that does not reject the knowledge of experts -- it is no utopia where everybody decides all of the time, as some would try to portray it in order to discredit it -- but is an experience where everybody can participate, just not on every issue all of the time.

Occasionally, members are unaware of the participatory possibilities (potential or actual), and their attitude is one of passively expecting material, cultural, identity, socialization or other types of benefits, and they allow certain types of behaviour by their leaders. The actions and traits of these leaders depend on their individual backgrounds, levels of literacy and education, as well as, obviously, personal traits. It is necessary to deconstruct dangerous myths, such as the one that implies there are specific profiles (ethnocentric, sexual orientation, occupational, etc.) that allow, for example, a young, environmentalist, black, poor, lesbian leader to run for leadership as an *inherently emancipating subject*, given the enormous number of contextual and personal settings that can bring a range of undesirable surprises.

Within the associations participation is satisfactory, connected to the central issues on the agenda -- and a wide range of personal expectations, including professional, livelihood, affective and communicative dimensions, etc. The members continue to participate in their dynamic associations despite external difficulties (material shortages, legal constraints, institutional interference), which demonstrates their commitment to the group. This continues despite the strenuous and lack of effective results of a certain "multiple militancy" characteristic of Cuban society [15]

At present, within the associative spaces, there are various ways to assume and deploy participation, which are translated into participatory projects. Some identify participation as mere *mobilization*, define its subjects as *mass* and reduce its role to that of implementing policies designed by the State. Others project an image of professional, urban and efficient *NGO activists,* who provide services to client-populations and dominate the sophisticated language of project management and the latest agendas of international cooperation (gender and violence, local development, the environment and participation and citizenship).

Finally, there is a third group who sees participation as a from of *solidarity, autonomous and self-managing*, (D Angelo, 2005) which defines the actors as

15 See "Poder más allá del poder: reflexiones desde la experiencia cubana", Elena Martínez Canals in (Chaguaceda 2005).

active *citizens* and expands the vision of a responsible associative space which shares and co-manages activities with the State institutionalism, from the perspective of a critical commitment to the socialist project. These positions have complex generational, territorial and cultural correlations that place them in different points on our spacial and human planes. Its defenders are found in texts, debates and processes laid out by different scenarios of the nation. (see table)

Table 1

Participatory Projects / Orientation	Traditional -- Socialist paradigm or the state, anti-neoliberal	Citizens - Democratic paradigm, anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist, socialist	Business paradigm - professional, assistentialist and mercantile
Involved subjects	Mass / Workers	Workers / Citizens	Citizens / Clients
Associated ideas and values	Discipline, Commitment, Unity, Solidarity.	Responsibility, Initiative, Autonomy, Solidarity, Citizenship	Efficiency, Solidarity, Philanthropy, Subsidiarity
Action	Mobilization and Consultation	Co-management and Implementation	Consultation and Consumption
Role of State and Civil Society (ideally)	Active state, passive Civil Society	Proactive state, co-responsible Civil Society	Passive state, active Civil Society
Central Objective	Implement / (evaluate et post) public policies	Co-design and perfect public management	Re-distributive, focused, and assistential social intervention

For those who are interested in the study and development of participation within associative spaces, all of this presents a set of theoretical and practical challenges, among which are highlighted:

- The imperative to renew the debate surrounding the concept of civil society, placing its components in the context of a system of social relations, especially in its interaction with State and party institutionalism (Mirza, 2006), by inserting the notion of associative space.
- Studying the types of CS and State interrelations as simultaneous processes of inter-penetration and separation, evaluating the relationships between the administrative, coercive and symbolic dimensions of the State (and its resources), and the

socio-economic base, the organizational-mobilizing capacity and the internal dynamics – ideologies -- which animate any CS (Armony, 2005).

- The incorporation of concepts such as *socio-state interface (or others of similar meaning)* in order to raise awareness of the participatory traits integrated into resources, interests, social and State actors involved in concrete public policies (Isunza in Olvera, 2006).
- The need to delimit / define the content of the diverse participatory cultures (class, cultural, technical, generational, racial, territorial, environmental, etc.) in each case.
- The sine qua non requirement of evaluating the diverse components of the participatory projects, and jointly (for example, those of the same project) with their context.
- The usefulness of identifying visions and/or contact zones (false or real) between the participatory projects undertaken by the associations, addressing the warnings expressed by researchers on what has been called "Perverse Confluence", between participatory democratic discourses and so-called "solidarity participation."
- Integrating, strategically, the orientation of genuinely emancipating participatory traits (and their content) with the national project, and its Cuban anti-capitalist expression (Armony, 2005; Martinez Heredia, 2006; Olvera, 2006).
- The political value of identifying multiple connections from the associative space with transnational actors and trends (Moller, 1990; Revilla, 1999).

Bibliography

Acanda, Jorge Luis (2002). *Sociedad civil y hegemonía.* La Habana: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinillo.

Alonso Tejada, Aurelio (2002). "La institucionalidad civil y el debate sobre la legitimidad", *Temas,* 29, April-June.

Arato, Andrew and Cohen, Jean (2000). *Sociedad civil y Teoría Política.* México D F: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Azcuy Hernández, Hugo (1996). "Estado y sociedad civil en Cuba", *Temas*, 4.

Fernández Bulté, Julio (1999). "Tras las pistas de la Revolución en cuarenta años de Derecho", *Temas*, 16-17.

Burchardt, Hans Jurgen (2006). *Tiempos de Cambio: repensar América Latina.* San Salvador: Fundación Heinrich Boll.

Cabrera, Carlos (comp.) (2004). *Sociología Política.* La Habana: Félix Varela, T 1 y 2.

Coderch, Gabriel and Chaguaceda, Armando (2005). *Cultura, fe y solidaridad: perspectivas emancipadoras frente al neoliberalismo.* La Habana: Editorial Félix Varela.

Colectivo de Autores (2003). *Los cambios en las estructuras socioclasistas.* La Habana: Ciencias Sociales.

---------- (2002). *Participación y desarrollo local.* La Habana: Ayuda Popular Noruega.

Constitución de la República de Cuba (2003). *La Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba*, Special Edition, January 31st.

Cornejo, Romer (comp.) (2006). *En los intersticios de la democracia y el autoritarismo, Colección Sur Sur.* Buenos Aires: CLACSO.

Coyula, Mario, Olivares, Rosa and Coyula, Miguel (2002). *Hacia un nuevo tipo de comunidad en la Habana: los Talleres de Transformación Integral del Barrio.* La Habana: Grupo para el Desarrollo Integral de la Capital.

Cuarto Congreso del PCC (1992). *Discursos y documentos.* La Habana: Editora Política.

Chaguaceda, Armando (2005) (comp.). *Cuba sin dogmas ni abandonos.* La Habana: Ciencias Sociales.

---------- (2007). "Nada cubano me es ajeno. Notas sobre la condición ciudadana", *Temas*, 50-51, June-September.

D'Angelo, Ovidio (2005). *Autonomía integradora y transformación social: el desafío ético emancipatorio de la complejidad*. La Habana: Publicaciones Acuario, Centro Félix Varela.

Dagnino, Evelina, Olvera, Alberto J and Panfichi, Aldo (coords.) (2006). *La disputa por la construcción democrática en América latina.* México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, CIESAS, Universidad Veracruzana.

de Souza Santos, Boaventura (2006). A *Reinventar la democracia, reinventar el Estado.* La Habana: José Martí.

---------- (2006). *Renovar la teoría critica y reinventar la emancipación social.* Buenos Aires: CLACSO.

Dilla, Haroldo and Oxhorn, Philip (1999). "Virtudes e infortunios de la sociedad civil en Cuba", *Revista Mexicana de Sociología,* 61 (4), 10 to 12.

----------, Fernández, Armando and Castro, Margarita (1998). "Movimientos barriales en Cuba: un análisis comparativo", in

Aurora Vazquez and Roberto Dávalos (comp.). *Participación social. Desarrollo urbano y comunitario*. La Habana: Universidad de la Habana.

----------, González, Gerardo, and Vicentelli, Ana T. (1993). *Participación popular y desarrollo en los municipios cubanos.* La Habana: CEA.

---------- (Comp.) (1995). *La democracia en Cuba y el diferencio con los EEUU* La Habana: CEA.

---------- (Comp.) (1996). *"La participación en Cuba y los retos del futuro".* La Habana: CEA.

Friedman, Douglas (2006). "La sociedad civil en la Cuba contemporânea", *Temas,* 46 April-June.

García Brigos, Jesús P. (1998). *Gobernabilidad y democracia. Los Órganos del Poder Popular en Cuba. Reflexiones para un análisis a veinte años de su constitución*. La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.

Gunn, Gillian (1995). "Cuba's NGOs: government puppets or seeds of civil society?", *Cuban Briefing Paper Series* No 7, February, www.trinitydc.edu.

Gallardo, Helio (1995). "Notas sobre la sociedad civil", *Revista Pasos*, 57.

---------- (2005). *Siglo XXI: producir un mundo.* San José: Ediciones Arlequín.

Habermas, Jurgen (1987). *Teoría de la Acción Comunicativa.* Madrid: Taurus.

Herranz Bascones, Raquel (2005). "Sobre las Organizaciones no Gubernamentales*",* www.eumed.net.

Hidalgo F., Francisco (1998). "Alternativas, contrahegemonía y sociedad civil", *Revista Pasos,* 78, Segunda Época: July-August.

Houtart, François. "Hacia una sociedad civil globalizada: la de abajo o la de arriba", www.rebelion.org .

Keane, John (1992). *Democracia y sociedad civil.* Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

Lagroye, Jacques (1993). *Sociología Política.* México D. F: FCE.

(1985). "Ley de Asociaciones No 54/85", *Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba,* 19.

Linares, Cecilia, Correa, Sonia and Moras, Pedro Emilio (1996). *La participación solución o problema.* La Habana: CIDCC.

----------, Rivero, Yisel, and Moras, Pedro Emilio (comp.) (2004). *La participación. Diálogo y debate en el contexto cubano.* La Habana: CIDCC.

López Vigil, María (1997). "Sociedad civil en Cuba: diccionario urgente" *Envío,* 184, June.

Martínez Heredia, Fernando (2005). *En el horno de los 90.* La Habana: Ciencias Sociales.

Meschkat, Klaus (2002). "Una crítica a la ideología de la "Sociedad Civil"", *Revista Pasos,* 101, Segunda Época: May-June.

Mirza, Christian Adel (2006). *Movimientos sociales y sistemas políticos en América Latina.* Buenos Aires: Programa de Becas CLACSO ASDI.

Moller, Alois (1990). "Organización popular y clientelismo internacional", *Revista Pasos,* 32.

Neocleus, Mark (1996). *Administering Civil Society. Toward a theory of state power.*

UK: Mc Millan Press.

Neveu, Erik, and Bastien, Francois (1999). "Pour une sociologie politique des espaces publics contemporains", in *Espaces publics mosaïques: acteurs, arènes et rhétoriques des débats publics contemporains.* Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes.

Nuñez, Orlando (2006). *La sociedad civil.* Panama City: Ruth Casa Editorial.

Pateman, Carole *(*1970). *Participation and democratic theory.* Cambridge: University Press.

Pérez, Arnaldo (comp.) (2004). *Participación social en Cuba.* La Habana: CIPS.

Polet, Francoise (coord.) (2006). "État des résistances dans le Sud-2007. Points de vue du Sud, *Alternatives Sud*, 13 (4).

Prieto, Martha, Perez, Lissette, Sarracino, Giselle and Villabella, Carlos (2006). "Derechos Constitucionales y sus garantías", in *Temas de derecho constitucional cubano.* La Habana: Editorial Félix Varela.

Puerta, Ricardo. A (1996). "Sociedad civil y el futuro de Cuba: una vía no política para reducir el poder estatal", *La Opinión*, January 20th, http://www.cosodecu.org/.htm.

Revilla Blanco, Maritza (comp.) (2002). *Las ONG y la política.* Madrid: Ediciones Istmo.

Serbin, Andrés (2004). *Globalización, regionalismo y sociedad civil.* Caracas: CRIES.

Serrano, Pascual (2003). "La democracia cubana no se agota en la representación formal, sino que incorpora mecanismos y formas de la democracia directa", interview with Ricardo Alarcón, www.rebelion.org.

Suárez Salazar, Luis (2000). *El siglo XXI. Posibilidades y desafíos para la Revolución cubana.* La Habana: Ciencias Sociales.

Thevoz, Lauren (2006). *Concertación para la gestión pública.* La Habana: Ediciones Acuario.

Verba, Sydney and N.Nie (1972). *Participation in America political democracy and social equality.* New York: Harper and Row.

Vergara, Jorge (1998). "Teorías democráticas participativas: Un análisis critico", *Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales,* 4 (2/3).

Wergle, Marcia. A and Butterfield, Jim (1992). "Civil Society in reforming communist regimes. The logic of emergency", *Comparative Politics*, October.