THE UNIVERSITY
OF THE
PELOPONNESE

George Pagoulatos and Panayiota Kastritis

Theorizing and Assessing Civil Society:
A review of approaches

03/2013

THE
JEAN
MONNET
PAPERS
ON
POLITICAL
ECONOMY

George Pagoulatos is Professor of European Politics and Economy at the Department of International & European Economic Studies, Athens University of Economics & Business and Visiting Professor at the College of Europe in Bruges. He is member of the Board of Directors of ELIAMEP and Academic Fellow at the European Policy Centre.

Panayiota Kastritis is a senior student at Tufts University, double-majoring in Economics and International Relations.

Theorizing and Assessing Civil Society:
A review of approaches

George Pagoulatos and Panayiota Kastritis

This research has been co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund – ESF) and Greek national funds through the Operational Program "Education and Lifelong Learning" of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) - Research Funding Program: THALES - Investing in knowledge society through the European Social Fund.

Executive Summary

The paper offers a literature review on civil society. The first part of the paper summarizes the main theoretical approaches on civil society, and the second addresses the question of evaluating civil society. Regarding theoretical approaches, civil society is conceptualized as: (a) coterminous with government and the rule of law; (b) associated with bourgeois society and a byproduct of capitalism; (c) identified with a pluralistic sphere of democratic and civic values; (d) identified with active citizenship and a "third sphere" of the voluntary non-profit sector. A strong civil society entails autonomy and a balance between the major institutional spheres or subsystems of modernity. The second part of the paper provides an overview of existing approaches on evaluating the performance of civil society, singling out the important crucial dimensions, discussing methods of evaluation, and outlining the main problems and prospects in measuring civil society.

Like many key concepts in the social sciences, civil society is notoriously polysemic; its meaning varies with the shifting contexts, the changing theoretical and practical debates with which it is associated. Indeed, there is a wide range of conceptualizations of civil society, some interrelated and akin in tradition, others being mutually exclusive.

This essay has two parts. The first part reviews the theoretical terrain on civil society, attempting a taxonomy of the main existing theoretical approaches. The second part addresses the issue of assessing and evaluating civil society by looking at the existing literature.

I. Reviewing Theoretical Approaches on Civil Society

a. Coterminous with government

One central tradition of literatures on civil society defines the term in a comprehensively macrosociological, though strictly state-centric, sense. In the historical debate on the dynamics and ways of overcoming absolutist forms of domination, civil society was conceptualized as a system of relatively autonomous associations interposing themselves between ruler and ruled -- as *corps intermediaires* protecting the people from state authoritarianism (Alexander 1998: 3-4). The most archaic conception within civil society literature delineates civil society as a neutral arena of public life operating within the legal boundaries of the state. Here, civil society is viewed as a political entity that serves to manage public affairs and enforce the laws for the state's citizenry (Harris 2008: 133), impersonal in essence and indiscriminatory in jurisdiction. According to this narrowly-defined approach, civil society, or *societas civilis*, is portrayed as virtually coterminous with government, the rule of law, where legitimate violence is monopolized by the state, and the cluster of institutions that exist to manage public affairs within "the state" (Harris 2008: 131; Kaldor 2003: 7).

b. Bourgeois society and capitalist economy

In the context of overcoming the obstacles the feudal or patrimonial state posed to the development of industrial capitalism, another distinct approach identifies civil society with "bourgeois society", as in the works of Marx. Having evolved from the notion of civil society as a law-abiding state, this version extends beyond the notion of being a simple entity of state jurisprudence and civil law, into being a byproduct of the capitalist system. This approach identifies civil society as the sphere of *private* property rights, commercial capitalism, and the various legal, institutional, and cultural support-systems that these entail (Harris, 2008: 131). Alternatively, civil society is delineated as an arena of ethical life between the state and family, composed of individuals who were propelled together by capitalism into a neutral sphere outside the commercial economy of the state (Kaldor, 2003: 7). Still viewed as an object of the state's political culture, this

approach portrays civil society as the characteristic arena of private business and commerce operating within the institutional framework of legal principles. Ultimately, civil society is viewed as a neutral sphere of political association based on free contract and consent between citizens, identified not with "government," but with the quasi-public, quasi-private activities of the self-interested, competitive, private sphere of the bourgeois commercial economy (Harris 2008: 135).

c. Civil society as pluralistic sphere, of democratic and civic values

Similarly distinct from traditional state-centric notions of civil society, another approach identifies civil society in a pluralist and universalistic sense, citing civil society as the "enunciation of universal standards of democracy, fair procedures of the rule of law, and respect for human rights" (Harris, 2008: 132). This notion encompasses the sum total of all human affairs, diverging from the private individualism and the rational conception of politics that traditional state-centric notions of politics had entailed. Ultimately, civil society becomes the cluster of common, civic, legal, ethical, and visionary norms that embrace the whole human race, and serves as a prerequisite to goals of distributive justice and structural change (Harris, 2008: 135).

Such broader view identifies civil society with the democratic sphere, viewing it among others as an arena of pluralism and contestation (Kaldor, 2003: 8). G. B. Madison conceives of civil society in terms of democratic theory, taking on a polycentric, pluralistic, and interdisciplinary approach. Citing civil society as the "core concept of democratic political theory," Madison (1998) identifies the term as an all-inclusive concept designating the "ensemble of sociopolitical arrangements which are expressly based on the principles of democracy and human rights" (Madison, 1998: xi). According to Madison, the notion of civil society designates a specific kind of institutional regime, one that encompasses the economic and political structures, along with the sociocultural arrangements, germane to society. Within this realm, human rights are institutionalized and individual freedoms mutually protected, and consequently the institution of civil society becomes the sound basis of political praxis, grounding policy in ethical theory (Madison, 1998: 11). Unlike other civil society scholars, Madison chooses not to view civil society as an entity intermediate between the family (i.e. purely private life) and the state (i.e. political life), but rather as society organized into a socially "whole" and irreducibly pluralistic sphere; as such, the institution of civil society becomes the necessary condition of a polycentric democratic order. Echoing the words of Lefort (1986: 366), the heart and soul of civil society is "a mutual recognition of liberties, [and] a mutual protection of the ability to exercise them". Along such lines, civil society is also conceived of as an ideal project that aims at creating a non-traditional solidarity based on a logic of universalistic inclusion into the "imaginary community" of the nation-state (Alexander 1998).

d. Active citizenship, "third sphere", voluntary non-profit sector

Over the recent decades, as the key political and social debate tends to focus on ways of limiting both the profit logic of the market and the authoritarian/ bureaucratic logic of the state, civil society is conceptualized as a "third sphere", as a space of voluntary, non-profit organizations performing vital functions by following a logic of solidarity (Cohen and Arato, 1992). Indeed, in contemporary discourse, civil society is typically viewed as the "third sector" of society, separate from the public and the private sectors. In that sense, it is easier to provide a negative definition of civil society, in terms of what it is not (neither government nor market) than a positive one in terms of what it is.

In its "hard" version this approach provides an explicitly apolitical conception of civil society, depicting it as quintessentially composed of "voluntaristic, non-profit-making, civil and mutual-help movements, coexisting with but nevertheless quite distinct in ethos and function from the spheres of both states and markets" (Harris, 2008: 131). Here, civil society is distinct from the political realm, with a clear bifurcation between the traditional state-centric notions "political society" and "civil association". Civil society is thus identified as the distinctive sphere of altruism, communalism, and voluntary cooperation; that is, civil society is classified as separate from the formal structures of government and state (Tocqueville, 1966: 232-40, 671-6).

Cohen and Arato (1992) identify civil society as an intermediate sphere between the economy and state, yet retain Madison's liberal democratic framework of reference. Presenting a comprehensive definition of the term, civil society is viewed as a distinct realm of social interactions that includes the intimate sphere (especially the family), along with the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication (Cohen and Arato, 1992: ix). Cohen and Arato (1992) distinguish civil society from the political society of parties, political organizations, and political publics, yet also extend their definition to explicitly separate civil society from the state's economic society. By approaching the concept in such a fashion, both authors essentially distill their definition down to the dynamic concept of social self-mobilization and self-constitution, arguing that modern civil society is institutionalized and generalized through laws (especially subjective rights) and independent action, rather than through channels of the state and private sphere.

While Cohen and Arato present an apolitical and market-free conception of "civil society," their differentiation of the term from both political and economic spheres does not automatically position civil society in opposition to the economy and state; on the contrary, both authors adamantly reject the view that civic culture in a modern civil society is one based on civil privatism and political apathy (p.18). Building on the thesis of de Tocqueville, Cohen and Arato (1992) cite the key role of civil society (with its norms of individual rights, privacy, voluntary action, plurality, publicity, and free enterprise) in sustaining a vigorous democratic political culture, and argue that without *active* participation on the part of citizens (in *egalitarian* institutions and civil

associations), "there would be no way to maintain the democratic character of the political culture of social and political institutions" (p.19). In short, since modern civil society is based on egalitarian principles and universal inclusion, the practice of articulating political will and collective decision-making is crucial to the very reproduction of democracy itself (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 19). In other words, this approach could be considered as a version of the previous broader approach under (c).

Some suggest that *informal* aspects of civic engagement must also be included within the scope of civil society. Proponents of this approach believe that civil society is better defined by a set of functions rather than as a mere compilation of formally recognized groups operating within the "third sector" (Sotiropoulos, 2004: 11). Larry Diamond (1994) describes civil society as "a network of formal *and informal* groups, voluntary, self-generating, largely self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and representing different social, political, professional and economic groups." Diamond notes that 'civil society' is distinct from 'society' in general in that "it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests…exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable" (p.6).

Similarly, Mary Kaldor's (2003) activist version of civil society states that "civil society refers to active citizenship, to growing self-organization *outside formal political circles*, an expanded space in which individuals can influence the conditions in which they live both directly and indirectly through political press" (p.8). Both definitions hold a broad view of what encompasses "civil society," arguing that the groups that constitute civil society should be categorized in regard to their level of civic engagement, and to the extent that these collectivities fulfill the traditional functions of formally conceived civil society actors within the public sphere.

Ann Florini also emphasizes the distinction between formal organizations and informal associations, arguing that although the terms tend to be used interchangeably, NGOs and civil society are not the same thing (Florini, 2008: 676). One the one hand, NGOs are formally constituted, legally recognized entities that pursue public purposes, but are not the only constituents of a civil society. Florini (2008) states that "civil society is a much broader term that includes NGOs, but can also include a wide array of other types of associations" (p.676).

According to this binary, functionalist stance, the traditional conception of civil society as a set of social interactions taking place in the public space between the individual household and state apparatus is misinformative, as not all groups within this arena are politically relevant (i.e. contribute to the public sphere). To be considered an element of civil society, only those groups whose functions are to perform collective actions such as aggregation, intermediation, or representation of material and "ideal" interests, should be deemed to constitute civil society (Sotiropoulos, 2004: 11). As such, civil society is best defined by a set of *functions*, so as to include informally mobilized groups or loose collectivities that are as equally active in the public arena (i.e. expressing their views and

making demands on the state) as formal voluntary organizations. Ultimately, informal groupings or collectivities may fulfill the same functions as formal ones (as collective actors participating in the public sphere, expressing their commonly held views and making demands on the state); then they should be counted as instances of civil society, despite their informal, unofficial, or unregistered status (Sotiropoulos, 2004: 12).

As said, this forth version identifies civil society with active citizenship and self-organization outside formal political circles. Francis Fukuyama pursues this approach by theorizing civil society from the vantage point of social capital and liberal democratic theory. According to Fukuyama (1999), if a democracy is in fact liberal, then it by definition maintains a protected sphere of individual liberty (i.e. civil society) in which the state is constrained from interfering. The role of civil society is to uphold the principles of individualism by balancing the power of the state and protecting individuals from excessive state authority. As such, a dense civil society is a necessary condition for healthy and stable democracies, as voluntary associations and collective action foster trust and promote social solidarity.

In order to preserve the arena of civil society, Fukuyama cites social capital as necessary to produce and preserve the density of networks that compose a healthy civil society and create the conditions for democratic stability. Adopting the definition of social capital as "an instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation", Fukuyama (1999) argues that dense networks of voluntary associations and citizens organization generate trust and cooperation between citizens; this in turn leads to high levels of civic engagement and participation, creating bonds of social solidarity, conditions for social integration, and public awareness and action that are the basis for civil society and democratic stability. It is thus abundant stocks of social capital that serve as the indispensable foundation for collective action and social integration necessary for maintaining the sphere of civil society so imperative to healthy liberal democracies.

A strong civil society: autonomy and institutional balance

Drawing on Lockwood's (1964) distinction between social integration and system integration, one can argue that, in the conditions of late modernity, a strong civil society entails two basic dimensions. From the point of view of actors (or *social integration*), it entails the autonomous rather than heteronomous inclusion of citizens into the broad arenas (political, social, economic, cultural) of the nation-state. Autonomous inclusion entails the spread of civil, political, and socioeconomic rights to all citizens (Marshall, 1964), to which we would add cultural rights.

From an institutional or systemic point of view (or *system integration*), a strong civil society entails a balance between the major institutional spheres or subsystems of modernity, whereas a weak civil society always entails various forms of imbalance as one sphere "colonizes", i.e. imposes its own logic, on all other institutional spheres.

Following the 1989 collapse of the Eastern bloc, a stream of literature tended to euphorically identify the rise of market institutions with the strengthening of civil society. However, under the above mentioned systemic approach, the strengthening of civil society is not identical to the strengthening of the market. Though civil society should be regarded as inclusive of private economic activity, and though the abolition of hierarchical/ authoritarian social formations is facilitated by market liberalization, the subsequent hypertrophy of the market at the expense of other major institutional spheres may in effect undermine civil society strength (Mouzelis and Pagoulatos, 2005).

In Habermassian terms, the major pathology of late capitalist societies consists of a marked institutional imbalance between what he calls the "system" (the economy and polity) and the "lifeworld" (the social and cultural spheres). The fact for instance that those having economic capital can, via the ownership/ control of the mass media, buy more or less automatically what Bourdieu calls cultural capital is a clear indication of an institutional imbalance: the logic of the economic subsystem penetrates and colonizes the cultural subsystem. To move from imbalance to balance would entail a greater autonomy of the cultural subsystem. It would entail devising mechanisms which would give to the actual producers of culture (writers, artists, intellectuals) and to those who are its legitimate transmitters (teachers, priests, parents) more power than to the owners of economic capital. This pursuit is vibrant in the debate on strengthening civil society.

II. Assessing and Evaluating Civil Society

As can be seen, civil society remains an elusive and ambiguous concept, amorphous in nature and extremely difficult to define. Even multinational organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank hold fluid definitions of the term. For instance, the United Nations identified civil society as "the sphere in which citizens and social movements organize themselves around objects, constituencies and thematic interests…with 'NGO' reserved for formally constituted organizations which often do not represent sectors of the population but provide services and/or mobilize public opinion" (FAO, 1999: 3-4). However, since 2003 the UN's terminology has evolved to include the private sector within the category of civil society (United Nations, 2004: 74). It has cited that there are ample areas of overlapping between civil society and the private sector, with private organizations pursuing their economic interests but, at the same time, promoting social values and visions that extend beyond the profit motive (McKeon, 2009: 14). Moreover, it has been argued by authors such as Mary Kaldor that civil society extends beyond the national to the international level, to what has been labeled a "global civil society" within today's world of increasingly strong cross-border ties.

In such context of conceptual fluidity and functional imperatives, and in a world of limited resources, it becomes even more important to be able to assess and evaluate the performance of civil society. According to the United Nations Development Program

(UNDP), civil society assessment is "a process of understanding and analyzing the context and organizational dimensions of civil society organizations (CSOs) based on a set of principles, indicators, and other information. Such assessments may be initiated by various actors, including governments, donors, academic researchers, intergovernmental organizations, or civil society networks or organizations themselves" (UNDP, 2010: 1).

Not all observers agree that civil society can, or should, be measured. Some contend that civil society is primarily a theoretical, normative, and abstract notion without any clear, distinct, or measurable empirical manifestation in social life (Tester, 1992). Others consider that, while such an assessment would be useful, measuring civil society is simply not possible "given the current lack of consensus about its nature, and with the enormous diversity in how it is understood and manifested in different contexts around the world" (Malena and Heinrich, 2007: 339). While these doubts are justifiable and these challenges unequivocally present, there are nevertheless compelling reasons for persisting to measure and compare civil societies.

Malena and Heinrich (2007) argue that a key reason for measuring civil society is to test whether or not civil society is, in fact, just an abstract idea, or whether it is also a meaningful real-life phenomenon (p.339). Appropriately conceptualized and operationalized, efforts to evaluate civil society can enrich our empirical understanding of human society as a whole. Another reason for measuring civil society is to explore the proposed link between civil society and important social and political goals (e.g. democracy, development, good governance, poverty reduction, social justice) (Malena and Heinrich, 2007: 339). Actively seeking out empirical evidence regarding these links can inform our understanding of civil society and its postulated contribution to the human condition. Finally, measuring civil society should help promote comparative learning among civil-society actors. By comparing the relative conditions of civil societies in different countries over time, this process "could help activists, citizens, and volunteers to improve their understanding of the specific strengths and weaknesses of their own civil society, to learn from the experience of others, and to use these lessons to improve their own work" (Malena and Heinrich, 2007: 340)

According to the UNDP, evaluating civil society is important for a variety of reasons. Firstly, assessments enable CSOs to enhance the quality of their performance. By exposing where improvement is necessary and demonstrating results, CSOs can use these assessments to determine whether their activities are in line with their mission, to inform donors and the general public about programming decisions and about how funds are used, and to improve overall organizational efficiency, as warranted. Overall, assessments are crucial to understanding grounds for improvement, and for helping maintain civil society as an effective force in general. Another benefit of civil society assessment is that such evaluations help improve a CSO accountability, transparency, internal governance, and legitimacy. Assessments allow CSOs to be scrutinized,

dispelling doubts and improving public perceptions, even if the results expose weaknesses.

In addition, as argued by the UNDP, the assessment process itself can make civil society stronger, as learning how to implement an assessment often strengthens CSO capacity to conduct and disseminate research, in addition to enhancing the connections between CSOs through promoting cooperation and mutual support. Lastly, civil society assessments can help improve conditions for civil society as a whole. By examining the external political, economic, and cultural environment within which civil society functions, CSOs can extract valuable information about the external challenges they face, be it weak public support, financial strain, or an antagonistic regime. Civil society assessment can lead to a plethora of positive outcomes for the civil society arena as a whole, along with the individual CSO members and stakeholders themselves (e.g. civil society evaluation can result in modified legislation, a change in policymaking, increased donor support for CSOs, and CSO capacity-building from increased interrelations between multiple CSOs, and between CSOs and the government).

Dimensions of Civil Society Assessment: A Framework for Evaluating Civil Society

While defining civil society is one thing, identifying empirical indicators for measuring and evaluating the presence, influence, and success of civil society is another. In order to assess civil society in a comprehensive manner, a multidimensional approach is clearly required, as there is no single indicator that can encapsulate the intricate nature of the concept (Uphoff and Krishna, 2004; Dekker and van de Broek, 1998).

UNDP (2010: 37) singles out the following dimensions as critical:

- *Capacity* (human and financial resources, networking)
- *Engagement* (socially based and political)
- *Environment* (economic, political, and cultural context in which civil society operates)
- *Governance* (the commitment to democratic decision-making, fair labor practices, transparency, democratic governance, and environmental standards)
- *Impact* (on social and policy outcomes)

Malena and Heinrich (2007) propose the following dimensions [*Appendix A*]:

- *Structure* (composition)
    - "Explores the overall size, importance, level of organization, and resources of the civil-society arena in a given country; it also seeks to assess the main characteristics of civil-society actors, and the relationships among them" (p.341)

    - Sub-dimensions: breadth of citizen participation, depth of citizen participation, diversity within civil society, level of organization, interrelations, resources
- *Environment* (legal, political, constitutional, economic, social, and cultural factors)
    - Environment for action; arena in which civil society exists and functions
    - Intended to show how enabling or disabling the external environment is for civil society and citizen empowerment
    - Sub-dimensions: political context, basic freedoms and rights, socioeconomic context, sociocultural context, legal environment, relations between the state and civil society, relations between the private sector and civil society
- *Values*
    - Assess the values/principles that are practiced, adhered to, nurtured, and promoted within the civil society arena; extent to which these values serve the common good
    - Civil society's values have often been considered positive, progressive, or democratic by definition; however, we must acknowledge that the civil society sphere is characterized by a plurality of social values and norms
        - Thus, consider the ratio of tolerant vs. intolerant, progressive vs. fundamentalist, pro-poor vs. anti-poor; prevalence of values such as democracy and transparency vital for measuring civil society's credibility and legitimacy
    - Sub-dimensions: democracy, transparency, tolerance, non-violence, gender equity, poverty eradication, environmental sustainability
- *Impact* (of civil society actors on people's lives and on society as a whole)
    - Each sub-dimension represents an essential "core function" of civil society; assesses how active and successful civil society has been in fulfilling each defined role
    - Implies a broad notion of "impact" (refers not only to end result—influence, particularly regarding governance and developmental goals—but to the process—how actively civil society has engaged in its arena)
    - Sub-dimensions: influencing public policy, holding the state and private corporations accountable, responding to social interests, empowering citizens, meeting societal needs

Methods of Evaluation

CSO assessments cover internal capacity, program impact, engagement with beneficiaries, and accountability and other internal governance features, along with examining the legal and political context within which individual CSOs operate (UNDP, 2010: 10). According to the UNDP, CSO evaluation is split into two sets of binary categories: external versus self-assessment, and quantitative versus qualitative assessment.

- To address the former, individual self-assessment is CSO evaluation conducted by the organization itself, whereas external assessments are evaluations conducted by government, donors, academic researchers, intergovernmental organizations, or other civil society organizations, all agents outside of the scope of the CSO (UNDP, 2010: 11)
    - Self-assessment demonstrates commitment to accountable programming, and is integral to self-regulation of the civil society sector; self-regulation improves CSO performance along with external perceptions towards transparency and betterment
    - Classes of self-assessment: qualitative SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats); focus on standards and long-term developmental goals; comparison to international standards (e.g. human rights watch, etc.)
    - Aside from donor examinations, another popular method of external assessment is a social audit, a form of public opinion survey that monitors the impact of an organization's operations by consulting the people these activities were intended to reach
        - The great benefit of such audits is that survey data results are quite malleable, in the sense that the data can be disaggregated into different categories such as gender and economic class
        - Additionally, by reaching out to the public, this method of external assessment allows the general public to measure CSO performance, thus enhancing CSO accountability and transparency (UNDP, 2010: 11)
- Quantitative vs. qualitative
    - Quantitative assessment methods are much less common as an assessment method than qualitative descriptions
    - Pros: numerical indicators facilitate straightforward comparison between agents over time; numbers can be an easier reference than qualitative narratives (useful for audiences such as the media and donors)
    - Cons: there is less space for elaboration, and quantifying the "amorphous" entity that is civil society gives rise to data problems and omissions; not all information can be quantified

Malena and Heinrich (2007) parse the methodological landscape in a different fashion than that of the UNDP. Their proposed research and scoring methodology is based on a combination of research tools, both quantitative and qualitative primary and secondary methodologies. They aim at presenting a comprehensive procedure for collecting the pre-existing empirical data and knowledge on civil society from which the various aforementioned indicators can be assessed and scored in an informed and accurate manner.

- The first main characteristic of their assessment framework is employing a multi-faceted and participatory research strategy. According to Malena and Heinrich (2007), "in order to draw on the knowledge of civil-society actors and to

promote stakeholder learning, the research process should be implemented and controlled by in-country civil-society actors. Tapping into first-hand stakeholder experiences and knowledge, and providing opportunities for collective reflection and deliberation, can simultaneously serve to enhance the quality of research findings and maximize the changes that research findings will be acted upon by key stakeholders" (p.347)

- Secondary data review: "the research process should begin with a thorough review of all reliable existing data on civil society, related to the four identified dimensions; this should include exploring potentially relevant surveys, as well as seeking out unpublished, but potentially useful, data on civil society, such as donor assessments, internal CSO reports, surveys, and directories prepared by CSO umbrella bodies or government agencies; the findings of this review can be used to identify data gaps and determine primary research needs" (p.347)
- Stakeholder consultations: "a core aspect of the proposed research methodology is the organization of group consultations with civil-society stakeholders in different parts of the country or territory of study; these stakeholders should be drawn both from within and outside civil society (government, donor, and private-sector representatives with knowledge of civil society should be included)" (p.347)
    - Must be carefully selected to ensure equitable representation of diverse sectors, viewpoints, and social groups
- Population sample survey
    - "Ideally, stakeholder consultations should be complemented by a survey asking a representative sample of ordinary citizens about their perceptions of, and participation in, civil society" (p.348)
    - Important to cross-check the views of the general public with those of civil-society "insiders"

Problems and Prospects in Measuring Civil Society

While literature on and attention to civil society has consistently been on the rise, there still exist numerous obstacles that continue to challenge the ability of agents to measure and evaluate civil society in a sound manner. The United Nations Development Program outlines six key challenges that must be overcome when conducting civil society assessments. These are: financing; capacity for data gathering and analysis; political environment (e.g. facing a regime hostile or antagonistic to civil society, or being in a context of violence and conflict); availability of data (e.g. due to poor communication and weak transportation infrastructure); maintaining international standards at the local level (i.e. standards on how to implement sound research techniques); and difficulty in assessing impact given the numerous factors at play (UNDP, 2010: 33) [*See Appendix C.*] While such obstacles can certainly hinder the assessment process, they are by no means insurmountable challenges, and such prospects should not deter an assessment from not being carried out at all.

Malena and Heinrich (2007) also offer points of consideration for those undertaking the take of civil society assessment.

- Does civil society exist?
    - "If we acknowledge civil society as a complex and heterogeneous arena, where divergent values and interests interact and power struggles occur, is it then possible (or logical) to treat civil society as a measurable entity?" (p.349)
- One size does not fit all
    - "Concepts and realities of civil society vary greatly around the world, and any effort to measure and compare civil societies in different countries must therefore strive to strike a balance between comparability and contextual validity. In other words, there must be a balance between establishing universal benchmarks and maintaining adequate flexibility to ensure that country-specific factors are taken into account" (p.350)
        - "The immense variety of social, cultural, and political contexts in which civil society functions around the world means that it is more realistic to aim for broadly *equivalent* rather than *identical* assessments"
    - The failure to develop adequate frameworks and tools for conceptualizing civil society in terms that are operationally relevant has had serious repercussions for operations to support civil society, and for the development of the concept more generally
- Normative content
    - One major dispute about civil society is its normative content; some scholars contend that, in order to belong to civil society, actors must be democratic (e.g. Diamond 1994) and oriented towards the public good or at least adhering to basic civil manners
        - Such operational definitions omit the informal, but politically significant, actors within civil society
    - "In real civil societies, the scope of interests advanced collectively in the public sphere, and the methods used by those actors, is broad; it includes democratic, progressive, and civil interests and methods, as well as undemocratic, fundamentalist, and uncivil ones, such as violent demonstrations, hate speeches, or deal-striking behind closed doors" (p.340)

Given the vast ambiguities and elusiveness of civil society, these definitional problems give rise to operational and data problems as well. After all, it is very difficult to measure and evaluate something whose parameters are not agreed upon.

In conclusion, through history, civil society has taken on many forms, evolving in scope and gradually building up a diversity of meanings. The concept remains polysemic, malleable, and contested, and will likely continue to be so given the ever-changing shifts in our institutions, values, visions of civilization, and moral culture. Such intellectual challenges are compounded by the real-world "practical" imperative of grasping and

assessing the “on the ground” functioning and effects of civil society institutions and organizations. Both types of challenges, theoretical and practical, this review essay has attempted to address.

References

Alexander, J.C. (ed.) (1998) *Real Civil Societies*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Anheier, H. & Hawkes, A. (2008) Accountability in a Globalizing World: International Non-Governmental Organizations and Foundations. In: Albrow, M., Anheier, H., Glasius, M., Price, M. E. & Kaldor, M. (eds.) *Global Civil Society 2007/8*. London, SAGE Publications Ltd., pp. 124-143.

Bourdieu, P. (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Cohen, C. and Arato, A. (1992) *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Boston, Beacon Press.

De Tocqueville, A. (1966) *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer and M. Lerner. New York, Harper and Row.

Dekker, P. & van de Broek, A. (1998) Civil society in comparative perspective: involvement in voluntary associations in North America and Western Europe. *Voluntas*, 9 (1), 11-38.

Diamond, L. (1994) Rethinking Civil Society: Towards Democratic Consolidation. *Journal of Democracy*, 5 (3), 6-17.

FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) (1999) *FAO Policy and Strategy for Cooperation with Non-Governmental and Civil Society Operations*, FAO, Rome.

Florini, A. (2008) International NGOs. In: Rhodes, R. A. W., Binder, Sarah A. & Rockman, Bert A. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*. New York, Oxford University Press Inc., pp. 673-690.

Fukuyama, F. (1999) Social Capital and Civil Society. In: The International Monetary Fund. *Conference on Second Generation Reforms, 8-9 November 1999, Washington, D.C.* The Institute of Public Policy, George Mason University.

Harris, J. (2008) Development of Civil Society. In: Rhodes, R. A. W., Binder, Sarah A. & Rockman, Bert A. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*. New York, Oxford University Press Inc., pp. 131-143.

Kaldor, M. (2003) *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Lefort, C. (1986) *The Political Forms of Modern Society Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*. Ed. Thompson, J. Cambridge, MA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

Lockwood, D. (1964) "Social integration and System Integration" in G.K. Zollschan and W. Hirsch (eds), *Explorations in Social Change*, London, Routledge.

Madison, G. B. (1998) *The Political Economy of Civil Society and Human Rights*. London, Routledge.

Malena, C. & Heinrich, V. F. (2007) Can We Measure Civil Society? A Proposed Methodology for International Comparative Research. *Development in Practice*, 17 (3), 338-352.

Marshall, T.H. (1964) *Class, Citizenship and Social Development*, New York, Garden City, Doubleday.

McKeon, N. (2009) *The United Nations and Civil Society: Legitimating Global Governance – Whose Voice?* London, Zed Books Ltd.

Mouzelis, N. and Pagoulatos, G. (2005) "Civil Society and Citizenship in Postwar Greece", in F. Birtek and Th. Dragona (eds) *Citizenship and the Nation State in Greece and Turkey*, Abington, Routledge.

Newton, K. (2001) Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy. *International Political Science Review*, 22 (2), 201-214.

Sotiropoulos, D. A. (2004) *Formal Weaknesses and Informal Strength: Civil Society in Contemporary Greece*. Discussion Paper, The Hellenic Observatory, The London School of Economics and Political Science.

Tester, K. (1992) *Civil Society*. London and New York, Routledge.

United Nations (2004) *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the United Nations and Global Governance: Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations*, UN Doc. No. A/58/817, United Nations, New York, 11 June.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2010) *A User's Guide to Civil Society Assessments*, UNDP Civil Society Division, New York.

Uphoff, N. & Krishna, A. (2004) Civil society and public sector institutions: more than a zero-sum relationship. *Public Administration and Development*, 24 (4), 357-72.

Appendices

Appendix A.
Multi-Dimensional Assessment Indicators (*Malena and Heinrich, 2007*)

DIMENSIONS	SUB-DIMENSIONS & INDICATORS (*italicized*)
Dimension 1: *Structure* Examines overall size, importance, level of organization, and resources of the civil-society arena in a given country. Assesses the characteristics of and relationships among civil-society actors	1. Breadth of citizen participation (size and strength) *Percentage of citizens who (i) undertake non-partisan political actions; (ii) donate to charity; (iii) belong to a CSO; (iv) do volunteer work; or (v) participate in collective community activity* 2. Depth of citizen participation (frequency and extensiveness) *(i) how much people give to charity; (ii) to how many different CSOs they belong; (iii) how much volunteer work they do* 3. Diversity within civil society (equitable representation) *To what extent traditionally marginalized groups participate in (i) CSO leadership and (ii) membership; (iii) the geographic representation of CSOs* 4. Level of organization (infrastructural stability and maturity) *(i) the existence and effectiveness of CSO umbrella bodies and support organizations; (ii) efforts to self-regulate; (iii) the proportion of CSOs with international links* 5. Interrelations (between civil-society actors) *Extent of (i) communication and (ii) cross-sectoral cooperation/alliance-building among actors* 6. Resources (capacity) *Extent to which CSOs have adequate (i) financial, (ii) human, and (iii) technological resources to achieve their goals*
Dimension 2: *Environment* Assesses political, constitutional social, economic, and cultural factors enabling or disabling the external environment for civil society and citizen empowerment	1. Political context (backdrop establishing activities' parameters) *Extent of (i) citizens' political rights; (ii) political-party competition; (iii) rule of law; (iv) public-sector corruption; (v) state effectiveness; (vi) decentralization* 2. Basic freedoms and rights (ensured by law and protected in practice) *(i) basic civil liberties (freedoms of express, assembly, association); (ii) information rights; (iii) freedom of the press* 3. Socio-economic context (situation's impact on civil society) *Presence of a range of conditions considered seriously disabling to civil society (i.e. widespread poverty, civil war, severe ethnic or religious conflict, severe economic or social crisis, severe socio-economic inequity, pervasive adult illiteracy)* 4. Socio-cultural context (extent to which socio-cultural norms and attitudes are conducive to civil society) *Levels of (i) trust, (ii) tolerance, (iii) public-spiritedness among members of society* 5. Legal environment (effect of legal environment on civil society) *(i) CSO registration procedures; (ii) legal constraints on CSO advocacy activities; (iii) CSO tax exemptions; (iv) tax benefits to promote philanthropy* 6. Relations between the state and civil society (nature and quality) *(i) CSO autonomy; (ii) state-civil-society dialogue; (iii) relationships of cooperation and support between the state and civil society* 7. Relations between the private sector and civil society *(i) private-sector attitudes towards civil society; (ii) levels of CSR and (iii) corporate philanthropy*
Dimension 3: *Values* Focuses on the principles and values adhered to, practiced by, and promoted by civil-society actors. Reflect a set of universally accepted	1. Democracy *(i) extent to which CSOs practice internal democracy (in selecting leaders and decision-making) and (ii) how actively CSOs are involved in promoting democracy within society at large* 2. Transparency *(i) corruption; (ii) financial transparency within civil society; (iii) civil-society actions to promote*

social and political norms	*transparency at the societal level* 3. Tolerance *(i) balance between tolerant and intolerant forces within civil society; (ii) extent to which civil society is engaged in promoting tolerance within society at large* 4. Non-violence *(i) presence of violent forces within civil society; (ii) efforts by civil society to promote non-violence at the individual, household, and societal levels* 5. Gender equality *(i) gender-equitable practices within CSOs; (ii) actions to promote gender equity within society* 6. Poverty eradication *Extent to which civil-society actors engaged in addressing poverty issues and promoting pro-poor policies (considered important indicators of civil society's values)* 7. Environmental sustainability *Extent to which civil society is actively engaged in promoting environmental sustainability, by protecting the environment and promoting sustainable forms of development that meet the needs of both current and future generations*
Dimension 4: *Impact* Assesses how active and successful civil society has been in fulfilling each of its 'core functions'	1. Influencing public policy (activity and success) How active/successful civil society is in influencing (i) public policy, (ii) the national budget process 2. Holding the state and private corporations accountable ("watchdog") *Extent to which civil society is active/successful in monitoring and holding to account (i) state and (ii) private-sector actors* 3. Responding to social interests *(i) how effectively civil society responds to priority social concerns; (ii) the level of public trust in civil society (considered a proxy indicator for civil society's responsiveness)* 4. Empowering citizens *Civil society's impact on (i) informing and educating citizens on issues of public interest; (ii) building capacity for collective action; (iii) building social capital by promoting trust, tolerance, and public-spiritedness* 5. Meeting societal needs *Civil society's performance in (i) meeting pressing societal needs directly and (ii) in lobbying the state for improved service provision; (iii) civil society's relative effectiveness in meeting the needs of marginalized groups, as compared with the state*

Appendix B.
UNDP: How to conduct a civil society assessment

- (1) Determine your objectives
  - Determine what you are trying to accomplish and who your target audience is
- (2) Quantitative vs. qualitative
  - There are many reasons to include numerical indicators as part of your assessment process, and whether you include them should be determined by your objectives
    - E.g. if your objective is to raise awareness through a media campaign, quantitative results may be attractive, as they are most likely to be picked up in news stories; likewise, if you intend to demonstrate improvement over time, numerical results will be easier to compare; quantitative data can also be more useful in effecting policy change, as government officials are often swayed more by numbers than by anecdotal evidence
    - On the other hand, it may be more challenging to generate quantitative results; some concepts are too abstract or complex to be effectively measured in numbers
- (3) Dimensions
  - Necessary to determine which dimensions of civil society should be evaluated to meet your objectives
- (4) Challenging contexts
  - While every environment in which civil society functions presents its own unique challenges, some contexts merit particular attention through methodological adaptation (e.g. in circumstances such as a weak system of rule of law or a conflict or in situations where CSOs are perceived as partners of the state)

Appendix C.
UNDP Obstacles to Conducting a Sound Civil Society Assessment
Challenge 1: Financing
Challenge 2: Capacity for data gathering and analysis
Challenge 3: Political environment
Challenge 4: Availability of data
Challenge 5: Maintaining international standards at the local level
Challenge 6: Difficulty in assessing impact with so many factors at play

The **Jean Monnet Papers on Political Economy** is a joint initiative of the Jean Monnet Chair on EU Integration and Policies (Department of Economics) and the Jean Monnet Chair on EU Relations with Less Developed Countries (Department of Political Science and International Relations) of the University of the Peloponnese.

These Occasional Papers are free-access online publications appearing in the two Jean Monnet Chairs' websites:
http://jmonneteuintegration.wordpress.com/ and
http://jmonneteuldcs.wordpress.com/

(a limited number of hard-copies are distributed to university libraries upon request).

Guidelines for Authors:
The Jean Monnet Papers on Political Economy welcomes solicited and unsolicited papers on all aspects of political economy with at least a partial focus on European integration. An ideal size should be around 5,000 words. References should follow the Harvard system. Submissions must include an executive summary. Authors must also include, separately, a curriculum vitae statement of 70 words. All submissions undergo rigorous peer review by at least two peer reviewers. The editors maintain final discretion over publication of all papers. Correspondence address: jmonnet@uop.gr