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Civil Society for Sustainability

EHV

B. THEORY AND CONCEPTS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil Society as a System

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Introduction

Civil society is prominent in political rhetoric and scientific discourse. The so-called "third sector" between the institutions of the state and the institutions of the economy is thereby often ascribed almost magical features. Civil society appears to be the crucial element of ensuring or reinstalling legitimacy and acceptance of political decisions and their institutions, providing a voice for the disenfranchised social and ecological environment in economic reasoning of businesses, and bridging the divide between the more abstract systems of modern society and the "lifeworld" of its citizens. Especially when it comes to the problem complex of sustainability, civil society's abilities are conjured by politics and business. Of course, the very same actors in politics and business often complain about civil society protesting and blocking or slowing down processes in voting, planning or building infrastructure.

The importance and benevolent contribution of civil society and its organisations is founded only partly on profane scientific enquiry or on empirical evidence. To a much larger degree this belief in civil society is founded on its explicit mentioning in chapter 27 of the Agenda 21, where it is stated that it plays "a vital role", possessing "well-established and diverse experience, expertise and capacity" for turning un-sustainable into sustainable development.

But what is civil society? And does it have something intrinsically benevolent to contribute to pressing problems of (un-)sustainability, of climate change or energy consumption? The notions of "credibility" or "diverse experience", even the scientific concept of "social capital", do not add to a deeper understanding of the empirical phenomenon we call civil society. Civil society is real. Our understanding of what it actually is, or as what we can observe it, is still very vague. In this contribution we develop a coherent notion of civil society using Niklas Luhmann's social system theory (Luhmann, 1984; Luhmann, 1995) as a theoretical lens and a heuristic tool for inquiry into its nature. We will also shed some light on civil society's role in the great societal challenges we are witnessing today and conclude with some implications for anyone active within civil society and its organisations.

Social system theory as conceptual tool

The strength of social system theory for addressing the questions we pose in this contribution lies within its conceptual focus on communication as basal operation in any social system, as well as in its "nature" as being a theory of modern society (Luhmann, 1992). The concept of communication in Luhmann's theory enables us to observe communication as the unity of a difference between content, intention and addressee. In Luhmann's words: between information, utterance and understanding (Luhmann, 1986; Foerster, 2003). Communication is realised when all these differences occur and form a unity. Empirically, communication then can never be observed when it happens but only in retrospect. Text, notes from conversations, media coverage and so on can be used to analyse what kind of communication occurred, what its themes were, how they changed and connected to other communication, or how they faded and ceased to exist. Communication in this view is an event, it happens in a moment and then it is already gone. In order to stabilise, there has to be an on-going stream of communication. Communication has to provoke other communication in order to continue and form stable social systems. Human individuals are observed as social addresses in communication and constructed as persons, but they are not "a part" of communication. When two human individuals talk to each other, they are not in the talk. Their bodies remain in their physical position, their thoughts remain in their conceptual position "in one's head"; they do not miraculously transform into a stream of words. This is the conceptual trick of social system theory, to exclude the human individual from social analysis because it cannot be conceptualised in a clear enough and precise manner. Who are we talking about when we use the term "human individual"? Do we mean the physical body? The psychological activities within the human mind? The conversation we are following? These questions point to the problem that we are not talking about an individual, but a dividual: the human individual is multifold and in order to make a scientific inquiry we always have to be clear what our system of reference is. For analysing social phenomena, the system of reference is society and there are some features observable in society that allows us to speak of them as systems (Luhmann, 1995).

The greater structure of modern society — the economy, politics, law, science, education, religion, art and so on — can be observed as systems in this view. To be more precise, these greater structures take the form of function systems, delivering one specific function for the rest of society that no other part can deliver. This structure is different from that in the past. Until the end of medieval Europe, the dominant structuring principle of

society was hierarchy, dividing society in different social strata. On top were monarchs and gods, at the bottom peasants and slaves. The emergence of modernity from 1500 onwards broke up the stratified structure and different function systems developed with their own specific logic, modes of operation and organisations. In order to provide their function for the rest of society, they evolved into ever more independent parts with strict boundaries between them. The economy cannot operate politically, only politics can. If the economy tries to operate politically, we observe the social phenomenon of corruption; if politics tries to operate economically, we observe the social phenomenon of state capitalism. Civil society, if possible to be "systemised" as a function system of society, would then have to play a role that no other part of society can play.

Civil Society Systemised

In order to systemise civil society we have to observe the empirical phenomenon that is labelled as such. To observe in this respect implies the drawing of a distinction between civil society and the rest of society. The mark of distinction signifies civil society and in order to act as such a mark, we have to place everything else on its outside. Everything else is, according to textbook definitions and following Luhmann on his notion of functional differentiation, the totality of all observable function systems in society i.e. civil society is not: Politics, economy, science, education, religion, law and so on.

What we are left with on the one hand is *protest* (Luhmann, 1996). Protest in all its various forms does not reference any specific economic, political, scientific, judicial or other rationality. Protest operates in an "against" mode, often accompanied by fear, as in the case of anti-nuclear protests, and outrage, as can be observed with the current "Occupy" movement. Protest can give rise, on the other hand, to some more institutionalized forms like *citizens' initiatives* or full-blown *non-profit voluntary organizations*. Citizens' initiatives, however, have a more weak form of protest at their core, most often protesting against something "outrageous" in the spatial proximity e.g. building of a new road, closing of a local public service and the likes. The same can account for non-profit voluntary organizations addressing a social good e.g. protecting the natural environment or providing services the public or private sector is not. Both forms, citizens' initiatives and non-profit voluntary organizations, do not necessarily entail some form of protest, of fear and outrage. The local "Friends of the Earth" division or a local sports club can do just as well without. What these more institutionalized forms of civil society cannot do without, and what they have in common with protest,

is the provision of stability for joint collective action for something greater than just individual benefits.

Whereas the textbook definitions allow for a certain vagueness, this "difference view" helps to draw sharp boundaries. These boundaries are drawn along at least five lines that will be detailed in this contribution:

- The *problem* that is solved by civil society, and only by civil society and no other functional part of society.

- The specific *medium* in which civil society operates that is different from other societal media e.g. money or power.

- Civil society's *code* that enables it to process and focus communication.

- Decision *programs* providing answers to the question what to do and how.

- The form of civil society *organisations* and how they operate and can evolve.

Problem, medium, code, programs and organizations are of course also distinctions we choose in order to operationalize and observe civil society. If all can be identified with civil society, we can speak of a function system that is not in the "in between" of everything, as so many definitions claim, but that has a clear locus in society with a clear and necessary function.

The Problem of Civil Society

In modern society no part of society can act for the other. Every function system solves one and exactly one problem. This is its purpose. The economy solves the problem of scarcity by producing goods and services, by providing employment and income. Politics solves the problem of how to arrive at legally binding decisions for all of society. This is a severe problem, as modern society does not have a centre or clear head; this has been decapitated along with the kings and emperors of pre-modern societies. Politics solves this problem by producing voting procedures, political parties, elections and the dichotomy of majority and minority. Neither politics nor the economy can act for another.

Civil society, following the line of reasoning behind the drawing of its distinction, tries to solve those problems that are not solved by any other part of society. These problems have to be of a specific class and their solution needs to be in the blind spot of all other parts: They cannot see it properly (Luhmann, 1997). From an economy perspective, such a problem's solution has to be of only minor liquidity gains compared to other

investment options and probably too much risk of liquidity loss. For politics it has to be of uncertain power gains for winning or securing the majority and too much risk of losing power, e.g. by offending voters when introducing a "green tax" and thus becoming a target of the political opponent. Prime examples of such problems are climate change and the current financial crisis in Europe and North America. These problems are of course tackled by politics and the economy, but the results of international climate conferences in the past twenty years provide a sobering experience.

However, there has to be more to civil society and its specific problem than that. The already mentioned local sports club acts as a fruitful example. The problem it solves is not organizing personal fitness or physical health; a for-profit fitness club could also do this. The organisation of joint, collective action in a voluntary and "for the common good" environment appears to be the crucial factor here. It adheres to people's needs for social contact, for collaboration with and for doing something for others. This is done not as a side effect, as you could argue business is also doing something collaboratively (with a workforce) for others (their customers); it is the main purpose of these organised forms of civil society. In Stafford Beer's words: this is what they are doing and thus defines what they are (Beer, 1970).

None of the other function systems in society can deal with this problem of how to address their own blind spots by providing joint collaborative action for the common good and social coherence. Not only can they not see what they cannot see — however, they could hire political or economic consultants for that — but they cannot solve these "unseeable" problems in such a manner as civil society addresses them.

The Medium of Civil Society

Communication in society does not take place in thin air; it needs a medium through which it can take form. E.g. the English language is a medium and the sentences in front of the reader's eye are a form of the English language. Language is a very general medium for communication. Other media of communication include general distribution media, e.g. the printing press or the internet, and so-called generalised communication media. The latter are a specific kind of medium. Every function system in society has developed its own generalised medium for communication in order to make highly improbably communication probable. In the economy, money has evolved as such a generalised medium, making the unlikely event that a consumer chooses one product (buying it) more likely to happen. Without money, economic choice would be much harder to negotiate. For politics this role is played by power, for intimate relationships the generalised communication

medium is love. All these media give their specific communication a backdrop against which they can take a stable form and thus providing connectivity to an on-going stream of communication. You can argue that the medium of communication is the key anchor point for stability in social systems (Luhmann, 2006).

What enables the various forms of civil society — protest, citizens' initiatives, voluntary non-profit organisations — to materialise stable communication? When regarding the protests against nuclear or the recent "Occupy" movement, outrage and also fear appear to be contenders for the medium of civil society communication. Fear of nuclear risks, fear of anonymous financial markets ruling personal lives, in combination with a moral outrage against the feeling of being deprived and disenfranchised make a powerful combination for realising all sorts of communication. But how can the local sports club, that is also taking part in civil society communication, utilise fear and outrage? What other, more general generalised media for civil society communication can be observed? Apart from all forms of revolutionary rhetoric as a form of outrage, the same what has been argued for the specific problem of civil society holds here as well. When asked what motivates them to occupy Wall Street or London or Frankfurt, protesters also argue that it is the joint action of many different people they would not have met otherwise, sharing certain common ideas and gut-feelings about what is going wrong in the world.

The only feasible medium to provide an anchor point for all of these forms of civil society communication appears to be values. With values we do not mean a specific form values can take e.g. freedom or equality, but their abstract backdrop, their function within society as providers of coherence and obfuscation of contingency (Luhmann, 2008). In the hierarchical society of medieval Europe, values in the form as we perceive them today were of little value themselves. In a hierarchy everything is already decided, the cohesion is provided by the structure of society itself. There is no point in questioning the role of the king or the emperor or God. However, when modernity evolved from the 15th century onwards, not only kings and gods were decapitated but also the ontological security they provided was lost. In modern society everything is questionable. There is no single truth but a multitude of truths of what is the best way to govern, what is the best product to sell or buy, who is the best partner to fall in love with, and of course what is truth anyway. The notion of contingency captures this feature of modern society where in every given moment no single individual and no single communication can refer to a "point of innocence" that everything is all right the way it is. The knowledge that it could be otherwise, and this would then be just as right, is always communicated, thought and felt along.

This is the situation in which values become of value. At first, the notion and idea of something having a value is quite profane. It evolved from measuring goods against each other, from measuring real-world instances and categorising them. The power to measure and categorise could then also be used to measure and categorise what is right and wrong: the notion of value was taken from goods to good — and evil. When we speak of values today, we are not speaking of some instrumental form of it, of what something is worth, probably in monetary terms. We use the term deliberately to refer to something bigger than that, something bigger than what we usually are dealing with. Why should any two human individuals agree on anything in modern society, apart from cases like clearly given one-upmanship, if it were not for the values they share – or at least: the belief that they are sharing identical values? Values today act as a form of social glue, a meta-medium of communication, binding together, if needed, all other media like money, power, love, truth and so forth, while at the same time obfuscating their fundamental assumptions. The question always is: what kind of freedom are we granting to whom, and not: why is freedom — or clearer, but never formulated that way: should freedom be — valuable? Somebody asking that question immediately has to bear the burden of proof why a value is not valuable. In brief, values from a social systems theory perspective are acting as a meta-medium that provides orientation for communication. Values allow communication to take for granted certain assumptions, "faking" a non-contingent communicative context, thus enabling the continuation of communication. In a way, values are filling the gaps modernity has created between the different function systems in society. They have intra-systemic relevance — the value of freedom as freedom of economic transaction or freedom to vote — as well as inter-systemic relevance, reassuring and thus faking unity in a functionally differentiated society.

The Code of Civil Society

In order to establish and continue communication, social systems need a mechanism to decide what to do with communication. If you ask a scientist "is this true or not?" and she answers "it costs about five Euro" then you would have to rethink the situation and if you are truly talking to a scientist or if there has been a change of reference from science to economy. This answer would irritate and maybe even destroy the continuation of communication. With the help of codes, social systems canalise contingency, they enable them to construct information out of communication. Without the existence of codes, the decision how communication can connect to other communication cannot be taken — without reference to a code you could not even decide whether or not there was anything communicated. In

the economy the code is paying/non-paying, orienting all decisions taken in the economy towards securing liquidity in order to continue operation. In politics the code is majority/minority, orienting all decisions in politics towards securing power in order to continue operations. A code is giving orientation in decision situations to take those decisions in a way that secure the continuation of operations.

Given the medium of values, the code of civil society most likely will provide orientation how to continue value operations. The preferred side of the code is of course "value-laden" but we have to keep in mind that this means "value-laden for an observer". However what is of value to one observer need not be of value to another. Quite on the contrary, what is of value to one can be value-free or, more negatively, even value-less to another. The key feature of value as medium, its coherence provision through obfuscating contingency, is ensured through setting a value as a universal. There shall be no other values, that is the mantra of any value communication and this has deep impacts on the code and its operation. When civil society communicates along its own lines of values, it has to decide on which value to use as an anchor point and thus on what coin to flip. This explains why civil society communication is often so full of conflict with other kinds of communication. When you have values on your side, the other cannot have something similar on her side. There is always some form of dogmatism involved in civil society communication and this is not an aberration but constitutive for civil society as system. This holds for protest against nuclear or the financial markets just as much as it holds for the local sports club. At a local sports club, you are valuing doing sports together in a voluntary and local environment, with like-minded sports fans that enjoy doing their sport and organising it in such an environment with people like you. Everyone else who does not like to do that is excluded. Along values and its code, inclusion and exclusion are decided.

The Program(s) of Civil Society

Programs in social systems provide answers to the question how to reach the preferred side of the code. In the economy, the paradigm of Taylorism answered the question how to ensure liquidity and the ability to pay — instead of not paying — by means of algorithmisation of manual work, leading to large-scale automisation of manufacturing industries and in fact the large-scale corporation that came do dominate the better half of the last century. In politics, social democracy used to be a program ensuring power and government by proposing mass welfare across all income groups, especially lower and medium ones. Programs can lose their ability to direct

communication to the preferred side of the code in the system of reference; this then triggers evolution of other programs and in fact a battle of programs against each other. In science the clash of different paradigms in the Kuhnian sense (Kuhn, 1962) represents such a programmatic battle and depicts the general form of evolution of programs within society's function systems.

A good civil society program brings about more of it, more value communication through strengthening communication about values and getting "more value". Like Taylorism not only brought about an almost endless amount of literature and projects about itself, it also brought more liquidity for Taylorist organisations – at least in the short run. Values as medium are always giving form to more or less dogmatic communication, revolving about what has value and what is clearly atheist regarding values. Value communication thus resembles moral communication very closely, especially insofar as value communication is about having the right values. In everyday language the adjective "ethical" can be used to turn almost everything into a civil society program, you could even think of something like "ethical taylorism" that could be used by civil society activists to overcome traditional taylorism — which then would probably stop being an economic program. Similarly "green" or, even more notorious, "sustainable" are also playing such a role. The combination of an everyday activity in connection with a value-laden adjective can form the basis of a program for civil society.

However, there might be greater or deeper programs that encompass most of these rather new forms of programs, just like values lie deeper than outrage or fear. The recent protests in Germany against the railway project Stuttgart 21 can be used as a lens for focusing on such greater programs (Römmele, 2010). Protesters in this specific case wanted to protect their park, their city, their home — in brief, their identity against modernity risks. Ironically, the proponents of Stuttgart 21 also wanted to protect their identity against modernity risks, just against other modernity risks than the protesters. However, the dispute was decided by protest, as always, in such a way that the protesters had the "good" values, whereas the proponents had none at all. The proponents' arguments added to that as they adhered to established procedures, legitimate decisions already taken, expert knowledge on their side and so on. Clearly, they totally missed the value communication, which in turn fuelled the protest even more. Identity, protection, conservation are of great value to value communication. In fact, conservation and protection is likely one of the deepest civil society programs. Protection also accounts for the Anti-Nuclear or the traditional Environmentalist movement. For the local sports association, conservation

and protection of community through joint organization and performance of sports and sports events, also appears to be a valid program. The protests against Stuttgart 21 show one more interesting feature as basis for civil society programs. It was predominantly a grassroots movement, routed in local activity, creating a counter public ("Gegenöffentlichkeit") and a form of counter expert knowledge with even a detailed concept of a railway alternative. Something similar can be seen in globalisation-oriented civil society movements, like the formation of Attac and also the latest Occupy protests. This is even more the case with grassroots democracy activists in developing countries, where there is only weak institutional power of governments, and most of it regarded as corrupt. The program at hand is a form of empowerment of people via building counter power (media attention, expert knowledge, organisations) against disempowering corporate and political interest. Subsidiary empowerment, to give that program a name, can just as much act for civil society in order to produce more value and more value communication as conservation and protection.

Interestingly, both programs can be combined: Empowering local communities in order to make them more autonomous against outside intervention and rule, thus sustaining their identity and culture. Needless to say that even in the local sports club, this greater and deeper program underlies value communication and directs that communication to the preferred side of the value code. Taken together, protection and empowerment is the classical program of emancipation, but with a conservative touch: to free us in order to become our true selves and maintain these selves.

The Organisations of Civil Society

Organisations have evolved as a special form of social systems in modern society. They are answering the question where in society decisions are formed and taken. In pre-modern societies decision power had a clear locus given through the structure of society itself e.g. in the form of the monarch or clan leader. As has been noted many times, in modern society its structure of functional differentiation evaporates decision power, thus needing a new locus for decisions. Organisations are that locus, in fact they can be observed as decision systems, with decisions as their specific form of communication (Luhmann, 1999; Seidl and Becker, 2006). The question what to produce is not decided on markets but in business organisations. The question what legislation to enact is not decided on the agora, but in parliaments and pre-formed in governments. The decisions are following the code of the system of reference, taking form against the generalised communication medium of

the system of reference. For a business organisation the system of reference is the economy. However, it can be opportunistic i.e. ensuring continuation of operations to switch the system of reference and act politics or even values. Of course this change in reference cannot be followed for too long unless the organisation decided to change itself i.e. from a business organisation to a political party or a charity. It is interesting to note that this change in reference is a constant feature of social businesses, marking them as organisational chameleons.

In civil society organisations have to address the question how to take decisions with values as medium and code of reference and how to stabilise the continuation of value communication. In the past, protest movements have only sustained their influence and momentum when they evolved organisations to support them and carry on. The environmentalist movement invented the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, Robin Wood, the WWF, and even green political parties, thus transgressing the boundary between civil society, politics and the economy. The evolution of the green party in Germany is a prime example how civil society first evolved an organizational hybrid, which then became a full part of the political system — and stopped being a part of civil society, although the arousal mechanisms of the Greens still resonate strongly with the original value-laden communication of its origin. However it did not stop them from forming government coalitions with the Conservatives in several German states.

There are several methods how to form, discuss and take decisions in an organization with values as reference system. Preaching and converting is one method, gathering the already converted and preaching to them is even better. One sign of civil society organisations is that they demand the acceptance of their values before you enter the organisation. It was already argued that values are set dogmatic i.e. you cannot challenge them if you want to be included in the organisation and its decision process. To frame it more positively: civil society organisations propose values, they make some form of motivational offer to join their cause and it is up to their members-to-be to decide for themselves if they are buying into it. Values are the sole source and legitimation of any communication within a civil society organisation and beyond its boundaries towards its environment. In order to couple to that environment, to politics or the economy, methods are developed to "economise" or "politicise" its values and, in a kind of reverse engineering, economic and political programs are infused with value. We take the example of being green to illustrate this. Civil society organisations communicate to the economy that being green is good *and* paying off, therefore marking it as even "gooder" — thus all things green *must* be good economically, otherwise they are just carried out the wrong way. Or for

politics, green is marked as good *and* winning you the elections. This is the game civil society organisations are playing and there 's never a way out in system theory, but in value communication this is even "truer".

However, this view also points towards the permanent pitfall of civil society organisations. They are apt to betray themselves about their real impact on politics or the economy. When coupling to politics, to the economy, to science and so on, they have to carry out this "masquerading operation" and mark their value discourse as other, non-value discourse — being green is paying off — and vice versa — to do economically well is to be green. But which discourse is which? Is it necessary for being green to pay off? Or do you have to be green in order to make sound profits? What causes what and what needs to be proven first? The critique from protest groups against big civil society organisations like the World Wildlife Fund stems from this problem, which is a direct result of the coupling of a value-driven organisation with a non-value driven environment. Civil society organisations can also change their reference system, not only temporarily, but also completely and "fall out" of civil society like green parties or green consultancies.

Civil Society in the Next Society

From what has been developed so far, it appears sound to speak of civil society as a specific function system of modern society. However, when we follow the ideas taken from the more speculative parts of Niklas Luhmann's theory by Dirk Baecker and use a system-theoretical perspective to reason about a possible future of society, modernity might well come to its end (Baecker, 2007). Luhmann's system theory is not only a theory about the functional differentiated society we can observe today, but also an evolutionary theory of societal distribution media. Communication being the basal operation of any social system is shaped by the way it is distributed. The reader should beware that the notion of distribution is more a reference to everyday language and has no, ontological implications for communication i.e. it does not imply that communication is a thing that can be distributed from one place to the other. Communication is created in the process of the threefold selection process described above. However, distribution media play a significant role in how communication is created. Three grand ages of societal evolution can be observed with the help of system theory: segmentation, stratification, and functional differentiation. The beginning of any of these ages is marked by a crisis in society, caused — not solely, but significantly — by the introduction of a new distribution media that enabled communication to increase its complexity. Complexity

here means that communication gained more options to connect to other communication and to develop more communicative themes than before, including the disturbance of older communicative themes and their underlying societal structures. When the shift from oral language to scripture occurred, what has been handed down temporally by reciting stories, verses, rites and lore could now be solidified in text. The institution of landownership emerged, turning land into a property right with both economic and political significance. At the same time, these rights were made countable: if you had more of them you became more powerful. This accountability of property rights — in all the variety of meanings — is a necessary condition of a stratified society, with a king on top and peasants at the bottom. The advent of the mechanical printing press changed this society dramatically. Suddenly text was not in the domain of a sacred profession anymore — the stratum of the priests — but proliferated without control throughout society. For any text there was a counter-text criticising it and so forth. Old securities came under pressure, contingency loomed large and in the end, the hierarchical order of the stratified society itself dissolved in political and economic revolutions in the centuries to come. In fact, the cultural technique of critique had to be developed in order to cope with this new complexity introduced by the printing press. Had it not been developed, modernity would not have evolved the way it did.

In the last forty years a new distribution medium emerged. The computer in connection with electronic communication networks brings new possibilities and new problems. Communication via computer and networks not only evaporates authorship of texts — a key feature of the book society — it also destroys traditional ways of creating, storing, and selling texts, in other words: it destroys our book-keeping. Moreover, communication is now not only multi-sourced in a text — that was also the case with a book with many references — but multi-sourced instantaneously. The text being at the basis of a specific communication can be created simultaneously through the introduction of hypertext and automated search engines. What can be observed is loss: Loss of authorship and the legitimacy of the text by the author or by e.g. professional journalism, loss of control over text as regards its present state that can be constantly changing while reading and thus loss of the ability to provide a static reference. Of course this new medium also has great advantages that emerge from its downsides. The described losses enable communication to form more freely and unbound than ever before. Communication can connect to way more other communication in an instant, with virtually no temporal distance. For the first time, communication has a distribution medium at hand that matches its event-based character. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan: the message has finally become the medium (McLuhan, 1962; McLuhan, 1964). But if communication is now almost omnipresent in our everyday lives, if we now can almost feel communication through touchscreen interfaces and gesture control, what implications does this have for society and its civil society? We will have to take an abductive inference from what has been said here or in other words: perform an informed speculation.

When communication becomes omnipresent and loses all the modern containers like authorship and references, the cultural technique of criticising text becomes obsolete. What can be criticised anymore? Selective attention, ironical curiosity and a certain kind of opportunistic playfulness all appear much more apt to cope with the newly proliferating complexity in society caused by computer communication. This of course disturbs codes and programs of function systems. How can you decide to pay or not to pay if you are either playing with many options at the same time or change your frame of reference permanently e.g. from economy to science and thus truth instead of payment? We have described civil society organisations as carrying out a masquerading operation, infusing values into other systemic references, thus in itself balancing on a multitude of references while trying to ensure their dogmatic stance on their chosen values. These organisations can become interesting empirical role models for economic and political organisations as to what extend a system reference can be kept and obfuscated at the same time. This of course calls for a certain form of accepted schizophrenia in organisations, the same schizophrenia civil society organisations exhibit when engaging with politics and business. Another possible role for civil society organisations can be that of an "airlock" for other organisations and the proliferating complexity of computer communication. Instead of becoming schizophrenic themselves, political organisations like governments or economic organisations like business enterprises can use civil society organisations as mechanisms to canalise this new complexity. This would then demand an even increasing schizophrenia from civil society organisations that can only be balanced by an even stricter adherence to values. Civil society as system, as the backdrop to which all civil society communication refer — be it protest, initiatives or formal organisations — can also merge into a new role. Up until today, civil society is either viewed as a nebulous third sector between or beyond anything else or as a troublemaker endangering the operations of the rest of society. The view on civil society as system makes it clear that it has its own function for the rest of society that no other part can take. In the "Next Society" that we can observe emerging after modernity today, civil society as system can perform a paradoxical operation for this society: it can blur the boundaries within society that functional differentiation created through schizo-

phrenia — through being the truly postmodern jester with a license to de-differentiate and thus sustaining functional differentiation. The dangers of such a reliance on civil society are of course also significant. Schizophrenia in combination with a dogmatic adherence to values is a risky operation for both communication and its social systems as well as for thoughts and their psychic systems: the human mind. Without a certain amount of irony, of playfulness and an almost Buddhist-like cheerful serenity this operation appears to be impossible.

Conclusions

Civil society has been conceptualised as a function system with its own problem to solve, its own medium in which it can take form, a specific code to direct communication, decisions programs, and its own type of organisations. In this view it is clear that civil society is neither a textbook chameleon nor an aberration within society blocking its progress; quite on the contrary it is a clear differentiable part of society and plays a vital role no other parts can play. Furthermore it has been abductively guessed that, although being a child of late modernity, civil society can play an important role in the transition towards a next society with more diffused and less clear-cut forms of communication as we can see emerging today. The implications for the operations of civil society and moreover for its organisations are also clear: adherence to values and masquerading operations when connecting to other social systems beyond civil society. This also gives a clear warning to anyone working and taking responsibility in civil society. What is needed is an awareness of civil society's complete dependence on values and their inherent dogmatism while on the same time being able to translate and obfuscate their values to other systems of reference. Strict civil society activists would say: their sell-out, and thus they play a vital role for civil society itself as reminders of what it is about.

However, whether civil society can really stabilise itself fully as a function system of society remains unclear. It obviously is operating as you can tell by looking in the real world. But the problem of its organisations, their need to go looking elsewhere for resources, for recognition, for impact, constantly endangers civil society's decision core. Without such a decision core, no stable form of civil society. But this might not be necessary. Civil society could remain an unstable function system, a system in constant making and unrest, giving rise to protest which gives rise to initiatives which gives rise to organizations that, in the end, fall out of the realm of civil society from which they originated. Thus these organizations infuse other function systems with value communication and raise sensitivity for it. Maybe this restlessness is a

necessary condition in itself or civil society in order to play the sketched role in the light of grand societal challenges like climate change and human well-being on a planet of nine billion people, the turn from modernity to the next society notwithstanding. Given the conflicting nature of value communication — there shall be no other values — it could well be the most dangerous role societal evolution can hold for any of its systems. "

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Bases of Power and Effective Participation of Civil Society Organisations in Development Partnerships – The Need for Governance?

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Introduction

Partnerships increasingly gained importance as a managerial imperative of international development cooperation (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2006; Robinson, Hewitt, & Harriss, 2000) in all parts of the world, where all kinds of organisations nowadays find themselves in the positions of managers and participants in such inter-organisational relations (Rochlin, Zadek, & Forstater, 2008). With their extremely diverse constituent bases, development partnerships in particular (Hastings, 1999), face grand challenges in governing inter-organisational power relations in order to enable effective partnering processes (Brown & Ashman, 1996; Fowler, 1998).

Yet, this course of events has gone rather unnoticed outside of the development domain (Brinkerhoff, 2002b). Despite the valuable insights that have been generated by inter-organisational relations and network research (Raab & Kenis, 2009) those almost solely derive from the study of partnerships operating in relatively uniform contexts, such as the service spheres of European and North-American countries (Hasnain-Wynia et al., 2003; Huang & Provan, 2007; O'Toole Jr & Meier, 2004; Provan, 1980; Zakus, 1998). Consequently, Raab and Kenis (2009) emphasise the need for their "external" validation in other domains of partnership operation.

Development scholars have pointed out the difficulties and needs for governing seemingly inherently unequal power relations and provided in-depth insights into their complex nature in international development cooperation (Lister, 2000; Morse & McNamara, 2006). Notwithstanding the valuable insights gained from this research, its majority to date has only been informed a little by theory (Brinkerhoff, 2002b) and is based on the study of only single or a small number of cases which hardly allow for any generalisation and cumulative knowledge building. Research on one of the rare existing comprehensive data sets[27] has found differences in the proportion to which certain groups, e.g. governments, businesses, and CSOs from the global South and North, (Andonova & Levy, 2003; Hale & Mauzerall, 2004), are represented in partnership initiatives. Yet, those groups are not powerful or powerless in all partnerships and politics of

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[27] See: http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/partnerships.htm.