

Global Civil Society. The Rise of a New Global Actor?

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Resumo

O objectivo deste artigo é fornecer algumas perspectivas reflexivas sobre as origens políticas do processo epistemológico, conduzindo à noção ontológica de Sociedade Civil Global (SCG). Partindo desta perspectiva, a SCG é descrita como uma construção social inerente à dinâmica da globalização. Transformou-se numa referência social derivada das percepções cognitivas adquiridas e baseadas, na recolha de informação dos Media e de outras fontes de dados.

Enquanto conceito teórico, a SCG adaptou-se estrategicamente ao objectivo político de controlo da crescente diversificação de expressões, do conhecimento acerca de um ambiente social transnacional. O papel de comunidades epistemológicas e de outras comunidades de inovação tais como os “think tanks” e “coligações” de discurso, é analisado e avaliado. De uma perspectiva da teoria das relações internacionais, são fornecidos argumentos porque é que a SCG não pode ser considerada como um actor global, e também, como e porque é que a SCG tende a ser equacionada política e socialmente com os movimentos de resistência e/ou de anti-globalização, sublinhando alguns dos efeitos multidimensionais que originam estas ligações conceptuais e o seu nexu causal.

A definição vaga e fraca de SCG, e os contornos sociais da noção em constante desenvolvimento, conduzem ao caos do seu significado conceptual, operacional e analítico, assim como a uma diversidade de lealdades múltiplas, flexíveis, simultaneamente transitórias e diversificadas, incluindo tacticamente o tempo e o espaço, fornecendo assim uma função estratégica instrumental atribuída a este conceito orientado para a resolução de problemas.

Abstract

The aim of this article is to provide some reflective views on the political origins of the epistemological process leading to the ontological notion of Global Civil Society (GCS). From this perspective, the GCS is depicted as a social construction inherent to the dynamics of globalization. It has become a social referent derived from biased cognitive perceptions acquired through, and based upon, information gathering from the media and other processed data sources.

As a theoretical concept, GCS has been strategically adapted to the political objective of managing the growingly diversified expressions of knowledge awareness about transnationalized societal environment. The role of epistemic and other innovation communities, such as think tanks and discourse coalitions, is addressed and evaluated. From an international relations theoretical perspective, arguments are provided on why the GCS cannot be considered as a global actor. The article also addresses how and why the GCS tends to be politically and socially equated with resistance and/or anti-globalization movements, stressing some of the multidimensional effects stemming from this conceptual linkage and derived causality nexus.

The vague and loose definition of GCS, and the constantly evolving societal contours of the notion, allow for the fuzziness of its conceptual meaning, operational milieu and analytical margins, as well as for the multiple, flexible, simultaneously transitory and diversified allegiances, including tactically space-time oriented in-and-out movements, thus providing for the strategically instrumental function ascribed to this “problem-solving” concept.

Introduction

The concept of *Global Civil Society* (GCS) implies the interaction between the complex notion of *civil society*, which tacitly entails other previous notions, as well as the existence of other types of societal formations, and the qualifying notion of *global*, which provides the key element leading to concept of *globalization*.

The notion of *civil society* has evolved over time. The identification of the distinctive features that separate it from the “*political*” society, as suggested by Antonio Gramsci, stem from multiple and complex differentiated perceptions, originating a vast number of wide ranging definitions that stress one or another specific characteristic considered to be, in each case, the most relevant one. The consensual core features of these definitions seem to be: 1 - the essentially non-governmental and very diversified form and nature of its elementary components; 2 - the variable degree of institutional and organizational complexity; 3 - the differentiated consistency of their structural frameworks as well as networking connections; and 4 - a wide range of frequently conflicting objectives, actions and strategies.

In short, *pluralism*, highly irregular behavioral patterns, sharp differences both in attitude and purpose, and very uneven structural elements, seem to frame the maximum common denominator of *civil society*. *Pluralism*, ultimately reflects the capacity to provide consensual answers to the universe of interests and legitimized expectations of individuals and groups, under the rule of law, within a state.

Both *pluralism* and *civil society* belong in the context of a political culture of liberal democracy, where citizenship rights and duties prevail as consensual principles for sustainable individual and social practices. This means, both the tolerant coexistence of different sets of values, belief systems, attitudes, projects and objectives, based on a set of accepted norms, and the ability to manage those differences in a constructive way, that is, aimed at the improvement of the whole of the concerned society.

The notion of *global* refers to the qualitative aspects of outcomes stemming from a spatially related and defining process leading to, and resulting from, deep structural, systemic change whose potential developments are perceived to affect actors’ attitudes and behaviours on a planetary scale. Quantitative approach methods are helpful in identifying contextual elements such as the number, diversity and density of actors, intensity and direction of interaction fluxes. However, these are not the core features of globalization processes.

In fact, the notion of *global* as a qualitatively defining feature, is not just related to evolutionary homeostatic system adaptation processes, it focus essentially on

homeoretical, transformational, system change. The term *global* has therefore specific implications when referred to as the defining feature of the concept of *civil society*. It portrays the GCS as an inherent consequence of the globalization process.

The notion of *globalization* is frequently dealt with from the limited perspective of its economic and financial dimensions. However, the notion of *global*, as applied to the concept of GCS, implies that all the other aspects of globalization, such as ethical, political, social, cultural, environmental, and epistemological must be analytically considered for a comprehensive holistic approach, in order to evaluate the meaning and outcome of the process, in all its multiple, diversified and dialectic social dynamics, interactions and synergies, convergences and contradictions.

From this standpoint, a few questions may be formulated, the first of which being: has *civil society* really gone *global*? The answer here may be only very cautiously affirmative because in many countries the rise of civil society has mostly been identified as a reaction, in the form of organized resistance, against the projection of western ideas, values, economic policies, political power and military intervention.¹ On the other hand, the adjective *global* used in this context, refers, primarily, if not exclusively, to a process of spatial extension, with no necessary structural change implications.

The second question is: has the globalization process been the cause for the transnationalisation of civil society? The answer is obviously negative. In fact, while globalization processes account for higher degrees of diversity, density and increasing intensity in transnational interactions, these can be historically traced back as sustained relational patterns, at least since medieval times. In fact, transnational interactions are determinant factors in globalization processes.

Finally, the third question refers to the subject matter of our reflection: can the GCS be considered as an agent of transformational change in the context of globalization processes. In other words, can GCS qualify as an actor of I.R.? The answer to this third question is also negative, though not obviously so.

We will try to stress the argument that the concept of GCS is a politically motivated "misnomer" that refers to the social construction of reality through strategic discourse, by providing a specifically confrontational environment image of the international relational setting, determined by the underlying structure of power, according to pre-fixed objectives along pre-determined development patterns.

1 Cfr. Thomas Carothers, "Civil Society. Think Again", in *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1999-2000, pp. 18-29, p. 27.

State, Sovereignty, and Globalization

The phenomenon of sovereignty erosion can be historically traced back from Westphalia to Viena, and to the end of the XIX century when the great powers and other states gathered at The Hague, agreed to implement political and legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms and systems, norms and rules, to provide for the peaceful settlement of their disputes, and from then on, through Versailles and San Francisco, and more recently, and tragically, since September 11th, 2001.

During the second half of the XX century, terms and notions like defensive alliances, interdependence, transnationalism, regionalism, integration, international regimes, and global governance became increasingly common, as referents of different stages and processes of the sovereignty erosion phenomenon. They also refer to strategies, instruments and forms devised by states to deal with their own evident lack of ability to face the new problems arising from a rapidly changing relational environment.

This evolution is originated through the synergic convergence of a number of interactive processes. On the one hand, the social evolution of societies, in terms of demands related to the improvement of living standards and legitimized expectations. On the other hand, the access to information and communication technologies stimulating the circulation of knowledge, ideas and data, products, services and individuals, allowing for the mutual identification of social, cultural and religious perspectives, life styles and attitudes, leading to new patterns of behavior.

Knowledge and information alter perspectives about issue relevance and priorities leading to the recognition of new problems and to epistemological evolutions, including new forms of issue area framing and commonly perceived optimal solutions, inducing individuals and groups to interact transnationally through organized social movements, advocacy networks and innovation communities, and to coordinate actions among them. All this factors may prove to be important determinants of political choices, legitimized actions and international policy coordination.²

Through the combined agency of all these transnational actors, states lose regulatory control over their constituencies, to the new alternatives available for individual and collective allegiances. They lose control over territories in the form of illicit cross-

² Cfr. Peter Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination", in idem, ed., "Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination", *International Organization*, vol. 46, n. ° 1. 1992, p. 3.

-border trafficking, illegal immigration and outer space overflying. Finally, states limit their legal power through extraterritoriality, yield control power over their political decision-making capacities and processes through the voluntary transfer, sharing and/or limitation of sovereign competences in regional processes of integration and participation in international alliances, treaties and institutions.

New global problems like climate change, the spread of infectious diseases, environmental/ecological degradation, transnational organized crime, terrorism and other forms of violence, access to vital resources, overpopulation, refugees, minorities and other human related problems, like food scarcity, lack of sanitation, education, poverty, etc., also affect severely the capacity of sovereign states to deal on their own with the required global solutions, deepening interdependences, promoting the relevance of transnational actors, namely NGOs³, international organization and institutions, leading ultimately to the demand of global governance regimes.

Perceptions about sovereignty erosion are thus, two folded. If, for some analysts, sovereignty erosion is seen as the weakening of a major obstacle to global governance, for other observers, states have adapted and conceived policies, strategies and mechanisms to somehow, respond both to this eroding process and to the increasing relevance of transnational actors.

At the same time, the state is perceived as being the essential agent in the formation process of a globally shared regulatory function, even when expressed through the action of international organizations, that will make global governance possible under the rule of law. So far, failing to reach this stage has been, not so much the result of eroding sovereignties, but their lack of political will to support the implementation of a global political agenda through intergovernmental organizations.

The notion of sovereignty, as conceived by Jean Bodin in the XV century, has thus evolved considerably since Westphalia, and is currently under a complex reevaluation process. The causes and consequences of sovereignty erosion have different meanings as applied to different states and, in most cases, it stands as one among several new modes of agency within relational frameworks, shaping new interactive attitudes and behaviors.

3 See, Stephen Hobe, "Global Challenges to Statehood: The Increasingly Important Role of Nongovernmental Organizations", June 1998, Indiana University, in www.globalpolicy.org; James A. Paul, "NGOs and Global Policy-Making", June 2000, in *idem*; Michael Edwards, David Hulme, Tina Wallace, "NGOs in a Global Future: Marrying Local Delivery to Worldwide Leverage", Conference Background Paper, Birmingham, 1999, in *idem*.

Sovereignty erosion is under way. While maintaining its value as a political referent, in empirical and instrumental terms its conceptual value shows the devaluation phenomenon, inducing theoretical reformulations as well as an epistemological reappraisal process, that reveals the trend for the relativization of its operational content. Sovereignty is eroding, as the state is sharing power with other significant actors of the relational environment, loosing autonomy and becoming part of an increasingly interdependent international community.

The inevitable and intrinsic linkage between sovereignty and the state may induce the perception that by sharing power, the state is weakening in the process of sovereignty erosion. From a pure realist perspective, the tacitly and inherently resulting hierarchy of state actors based on relational power, tends to take structural power as an independent variable, stressing the primacy of the rational actor ability to deal with comparative capabilities in order to calculate relative gains through a cost/benefit analytical equation, leading to rational choice decision processes as applied to specific contexts.

However, from a mixed actors system perspective, by sharing power, the state is actually devising new modes of managing change through innovative, if often slow moving and not always effective forms of agency, and sovereignty is becoming one among other structural principles shaping both the system and the state, namely in its inherent ability to adapt and strive through environmental change processes, and determine the significance and the scope of global relational frameworks.

Most of all, the state is evolving in the sense that it is adapting its mechanisms to the new roles required by the process of change, revising priorities, tackling new issues from different perspectives, performing new functions, and providing solutions within the relational system, in order to maintain its leverage in the process of shaping the relational system and managing global change, by enhancing knowledge and recognizing non-fungible power factors. Old and new political and technical instruments combine to allow for the implementation of knowledge based policies and strategies, where power factors as well as power itself, must be reconsidered, both as an agency determining variable and an indicator among the criteria for state hierarchy setting.

The state is thus identifying new issues, creating prospective scenarios, devising available and possible solutions, and defining new objective priorities in order to respond through shared governance regimes, integration processes, international organizations and other collective relational frameworks, to the demands of the unfolding process of global, transformational system change. This is characterized, among many other aspects, by the sudden and accelerated evolution of the *civil society*, decisively influenced

by intensified transnational interactions, improved communication technologies and increased information access, allowing for, and leading to, complex learning processes.

The Concept of GCS

Only in very recent years has the expression “civil society” reemerged from the early European political science of the late XVIII century.⁴ During the 1990’s, politicians suddenly reinstated the expression through its frequent use. Since then, political and social scientists elected it as a conceptual reference in the context of transnational processes linked with the informational-communicational dimension of globalization.

From a 1990 perspective, “[t]he words ‘civil society’ name the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks – formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology – that fill this space”.⁵

A working, descriptive definition of GCS was proposed a few days before 9/11, 2001. It stated that GCS is the “sphere of ideas, values, organizations, individuals located primarily outside the institutional complexes of family, market and state, and beyond the confines of national societies, politics and economies”.⁶

While providing elements of continuity between the notion of civil society and the definition of its global dimension, namely the inclusion of a “sphere of ideas, values, organizations [and] individuals”, this description sets two social boundaries. First, a societal limitation, by excluding the “institutional complexes of family, market and state” and second, a spatial/societal extension in what it transcends “the confines of national societies, politics and economies”. In fact, the conceptual definition of *civil society* changes in space and time, and these changes arise from the different perspectives, intended objectives, ways and fields of inquiry.

Michael W. Foley and Bob Edwards reflection upon the “Paradox of Civil Society” stress some of the fundamental questions related with the definitional description perceptions and perspectives about *civil society*. “Does it, for instance, include business

4 Cfr. José Adelino Maltez, *Princípios de Ciência Política*. Lisboa Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, 1996, p.298.

5 Cfr. Michael Walzer, “The Concept of Civil Society”, in idem, ed., *Toward a Global Civil Society*, New York, Berghahn Books, 1995, pp. 7-27, p. 7.

6 Cfr. Mary Kaldor, Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, eds., *Global Civil Society 2003*. Oxford, O.U.P., 2003, p. 4. T. do a..

(‘the market’) as well as voluntary organizations, or does the market constitute a separate, ‘private’ sphere? If we exclude the market, should we nevertheless include economic associations-trade groups, professional organizations, labor unions, and the like? What about political organizations? Does it make sense, following Antonio Gramsci, to distinguish ‘civil’ from ‘political’ society? If so, how are we to distinguish between political associations per se and the political activities of groups in civil society, from interest groups to religious bodies, which are intermittently mobilized in pursuit of political goals? Just when does the ‘civil’ become the ‘political’?”⁷

Thus, social and time/space criteria restrict the universe of potential elements of the GCS, both in terms of nature and agency. From a broader comprehensive perspective, “[t]he simplest, most common, meaning given to ‘civil society’ is all public activity, by any individuals, organizations or movements, other than government employees acting in a governmental capacity. In the broadest sense, it encompasses all social, economic, cultural and political relations, but the emphasis is usually on the political aspects of these relations”.⁸

This wider ranging definition is thus needed and adopted here to provide for a comprehensive perspective of the GCS as well as for the understanding of its essential diversity. John Keane suggests that the use of the expression GCS as a “descriptive interpretation” fills its purpose if we refer to the concept as an “ideal-type - as an intentionally produced mental construct or ‘cognitive type’”, that allows “for naming and clarifying the myriad of elements of a complex social reality, even though it cannot be found in such ‘pure’ form anywhere in the social world itself”.⁹

The proposed definition depicts GCS as “a dynamic non-governmental system of interconnected socio-economic institutions that straddle the whole earth, and that have complex effects that are felt in its four corners. Global civil society is neither a static object nor a *fait accompli*. It is an unfinished project that consists of sometimes thick, sometimes thinly stretched networks, pyramids and hub-and-spoke clusters of socio-economic

7 Michael W. Foley, Bob Edwards, “The Paradox of Civil Society”, in *Journal of Democracy*, 7, 3 (1996), National Endowment for Peace and The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 38-52, p. 38-39 and notes, in www.globalpolicy.org.

8 Cfr. Peter Willetts, (2004), “What Is a Non-Governmental Organization?”, in “Institutional and Infrastructure Resource Issues”, ed. by Honorary Theme Editors Jarrod Wiener, Robert Schrier, in *Encyclopaedia of Life Support Systems*, developed under the auspices of UNESCO, EoLSS publishers, Oxford, UK, <http://www.eolss.net>, p. 17. T. do a..

9 Cfr. John Keane, *Global Civil Society?*, Cambridge, C.U.P. 2003. p. 8.

institutions and actors who organize themselves across borders, with the deliberate aim of drawing the world together in new ways".¹⁰

Stressing the essential characteristic of its non-state state agents, private, individual or collective participation, and some form of structural organization, the proposed definition of GCS reveals a new characteristic. The *global* extension of the concept implies that civil society becomes *transnational* in scope and domain, while maintaining its *pluralistic* nature.

From a global perspective, the notion of *civil society*, reveals the fact that nation-states have come to recognize in it, the inclusive feature that allows for the interactive coexistence of a vast number of diversified transnational actors, namely NGOs, concerned with virtually every issue and sector of human and social activity, from environment and feminism, to human rights, sustainable development and biodiversity, economic regulation, justice, social development and distributive equity.

On the one hand, these actors share some responsibility in the process of sovereignty erosion. On the other hand, they must be dealt with in terms of reaching workable solutions, for new issues arising not only from the GCS itself, but also from external, systemic and environmental common global problems, namely giving way to global governance regimes.

NGOs, pressure groups, social movements and advocacy networks are among the most frequently mentioned transnational actors. But, at the same time, the growing relevance of economic and financial transactions, make multinational corporations another important set of actors. "The processes of economic globalization are (...) transferring unprecedented power to a variety of transnational actors, including transnational business and financial interests".¹¹ These are mainly western based, and the state as to deal and compete with them.

Still another group of erratic actors can be identified as integrating the large concept of GCS. This group includes the so called "perverse NGOs", ideological hate groups, transnational terrorist networks, transnational criminal cross-border trafficking organizations and transnational social movements, groups and networks identified with advocacy, financing and logistical support of the former.

¹⁰ Cfr. *idem*, *ibidem*, p. 8.

¹¹ Cfr. Mary Kaldor, Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, eds., *Global Civil Society 2004-2005*, London, Sage, 2005, p. 27.

Is GCS a Global Actor?

From a systemic perspective, an *actor* of international relations can be described as a contextually identifiable entity generally recognized as mastering the ability to develop internal legitimized consensus over decisional processes, project them into external action and policies through coherent, consistent and sustained ways of influencing structural processes of change in the perceptions, perspectives, attitudes and behaviors of other actors affecting the relational environment, and engaging in this processes with the ultimate goal of assuring its own sustainability.

In international relations, the global dimension of an actor refers not only to the reach, domain and scope of its policies, actions and objectives, but mainly to the systemic structural/transformational change that its actions produce over the relational environment. Many of these characteristics seem extremely hard to identify in the case of the GCS.

From the sovereign state perspective, the GCS has simultaneously become part of the problem and part of the solution in the state's attempt to manage the process of change and in any case, it stands as a defining feature of the international context where consistently growing numbers of diversified transnational actors are increasingly hard to ignore. But from a non-state actor's perspective, the GCS is a "progressive" and "democratic" movement and thus, only certain NGOs and social movements are considered to be a part of it.

In both cases, the political neutrality of the term is hardly achieved, and *civil society* or at least some of its constitutive elements often become *political*.¹² In both cases too, the GCS is viewed as, at least an aspiring actor of I.R., and the result of the sum of its transnational sub-actor parts. In any case, the inevitability of recognizing GCS actors as agents of change leads to the question of knowing whether GCS *per se* should qualify as an actor of I.R..

A number of epistemological, ontological and empirical aspects seem to forestall this possibility. In the first place, evidence shows that the concept of GCS is of western origin, and therefore biased towards a westernized perspective of the relational environment. Its theoretical reinstatement is an outcome of globalization itself, stemming from the relation between knowledge and change, rather than from the linkage between knowledge and power, also from intellectual scientific and technological innovation, as well as, from an evolutionary epistemological process.

12 See, Michael W. Foley, Bob Edwards, "The Paradox of Civil Society", in *ob. cit.*

Secondly, the concept of GCS entails two tacit, but rather questionable assumptions. One is that the GCS is the *transnational projection* resulting from the sum of the various “national” civil societies. This assumption means that the political science concept of *civil society*, as well as the perspective of the domestic/foreign divide, are not only applied to the transnational relational environment, but also, and most significantly, that the analytical approach to the concept of GCS reifies the normative political science approach to international relations, viewed as political interstate relations and carried out beyond state borders.

The other questionable assumption is the implicit similarity between the democratic environment, where each “national” civil society follows the rule of law within a given political order and legal framework, and the international *quasi* anarchical society. In fact, in the international context, the transnational civil society develops its processes and actions without any formal code of conduct, by strategically profiting from state power gaps and exploring its flaws, insufficiencies and limitations, giving a new meaning to the concept of anarchy, which, after all, is not just “what states make of it”.

Thirdly, both assumptions equate the concept of *transnationality* with the concept of *globality*, by establishing a tacit analogy between GCS and a selected, more or less extensive group of NGOs. However, as we pointed out, these are very different conceptual notions, both in nature and scope.

Fourthly the growing number of INGOs classified as QUANGOs, and GONGOs, GRINGOs, DONGOs, PANGOs and BINGOs make it increasingly harder to clearly distinguish and separate NGOs that would integrate the GCS, from states, governments, international organizations and transnational corporations.¹³

Finally, according to the proposed working definition of actor of I.R., the diversity of issues, interests, objectives and actions pursued by the social actors potentially included in the GCS, denotes the evident absence of the actor’s basic conceptual characteristics.

In fact, the diversity of entities potentially elected to be included in the concept of GCS, their contradictory interests and lack of coherence, consistency, are self-evident. At the same time, there are no distinguishable politically and strategically defined or planned objectives with the ultimate aim of influencing the behavior of the other actors in order to alter the relational environment and ensure GCS own sustainability as an actor.

13 See Natalie Steinberg, (December 2001), “Background Paper on GONGOs and QUANGOs and Wild NGOs”, in www.globalpolicy.org

This facts make it extremely difficult and theoretically questionable, if not empirically impossible, to view the GCS as a global actor. The question is then, why are both states and GCS advocates, committed to view the GCS as an actor?

The Objective and the Strategy

Like the concept of international community, which in fact refers to the western hemisphere plus a few other chosen countries, the idea of a GCS makes it easier for the common individual, to conceive a global community of citizens with a of considerable number of rights, and just a few obligations, if any¹⁴, and above all with a capacity of intervention by actively participating in the decision making processes that will potentially affect their existence.

The promoters of “globalism”, or the supporters of the so called “*Washington Consensus*” viewed as “an overreaching ideology of governance that combines neo-liberalism with an insistence and faith that global integration is inevitable and good”¹⁵, are interested in explaining the flaws of globalization explaining its hindrances by equating them with organized social resistance to the process, through the identification of a reactionary causality nexus. However, the individual perception is always related to each one’s own perspective of reality, conditioned by his or her geo-cultural setting, and biased by the strategic filters of the ruling media through the politically correct agenda-setting criteria, approved images and analytical frameworks.

The resulting messages are adapted to each specifically targeted social group according to the technical capabilities of the communicational environment, according to its socio-cultural context, determined set of values, principles, belief systems, arguments and domains of truth, which will ultimately translate into different perceptions about available alternatives among social groups and societies.

This perceptions will determine individual and collective priority choices, attitudes and behaviours, allegiances and loyalties, identifying each individual, group or

14 See, Amitai Etzioni, “Too Many Rights, To Few Responsibilities”, in Michael Walzer, ed., *Toward a Global Civil Society*, ob. cit., pp. 99-106.

15 Cfr. Sandra Halperin, Gordon Laxer, “Effective Resistance to Corporate Globalization”, in idem, eds., *Global Civil Society and its Limits*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, U.K., Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 1-21, p. 3.

society, either with the message conveyed by the underlying structure of power, or in opposition to the dominant cultural discourse of the politically correct.

The authors and promoters of that discourse also provide a wide-ranging set of customized images of this opposition. This is where we find all the elements of the melting pot of ideologies, social, political, religious and cultural trends and life styles that have been present since the Seattle demonstrations of December 1999, at every meeting of the WTO, the IMF, the G 8, or any other global intergovernmental decision making entity inducing transnational movements like the World Social Forum of Porto Alegre.

These individuals and groups are commonly labelled as anti-globalization movements and misleadingly defined as GCS, by the promoters of globalization processes. This identification of anti-globalization movements with GCS helps to build an image of "the other", that very rapidly converts into the opponent, the adversary, and, soon, the enemy. The underlying logic process is based on the controversial assumption that globalization is not perceived as a transformational process but rather as an ideology that anyone can be in favour of, or against, or a set of political or doctrinal principles and thus subject to personal choice, in terms of adherence or rejection.

Beyond the promotion of the globalization process in itself, this strategy is aimed at yet a more important core objective, defined by the underlying structure of power, which is to provide sustainability to the relational environment, through the maintenance of a confrontational mind-setting attitude among decision makers, that will induce similar attitudes and behaviours on individuals, groups and the society in general.

This strategy and objectives derive from the fact that the instruments available for shaping and managing the relational environment, were conceived to deal with the conflictive setting of the cold war era. The strategy is therefore, aimed at replacing the classical enemy of the bipolar world that came to an end in the process of implosion of the USSR and de communist block, in 1989-1991, by a new kind of threatening agent of change, a menacing, hard to identify entity that uses diffuse power, vague strategies, versatile unexpected and unprecedented means to reach unclear diversified undefined objectives that are however, made to converge in a logic of coherent action against globalization. This logic is based on the politically correct and approved strategic discourse aimed at the social construction of the image of a GCS as an anti-globalization social actor.

The anti-globalization movement in its many forms, shapes and shades including terrorism, is now seen as the enemy, embedded in, and equated with, the GCS at large.

Therefore, the GCS must be a global actor, for only a globally reaching actor can actively and strategically oppose a globally reaching process, such as globalization, and be equated with organized coherent and consistent resistance against it.

The inherently resulting perception shapes the logic of individual expectations about the socially constructed perspective of global reality. This will ultimately legitimate political decisions, justify priorities, ways and means to reach allegedly inevitable and crucial ends, even when this means the curtailing of civil rights and liberties; determine issue linkages, rational choices, securitarian strategies and policy options, advocate the use of force as a means for conflict resolution, and promote the spread of social, ethnic, political or religious violence, in the process.

Security issues become the polarizing dimension in the life of entire societies and political communities, shaping the relational environment and the logics of individual and collective attitudes and behavioural interactions, overriding any other wide ranging social and economic objective, like human rights promotion, environmental sustainability and other momentous global issues.

The interesting fact is that either influenced, financed or infiltrated by the structural underlying proponents of globalization, some of the diversified movements that integrate the customized image of GCS, united under the common banner of anti-globalization, are implicitly fulfilling the aims of the globalization promoters. In fact, by identifying themselves against the globalizing processes, these GCS movements are helping to build and justify the logics of inevitability of relationships inherent to a confrontational environment, and legitimising the strategically conceived image of a socially constructed reality.

Both pro and anti-globalization positions can be simultaneously identified in the attitudes and actions of the agents of change that fit under the acronym GCS. Their nature, objectives and strategies, as well as their expectations, actions and effective outcomes, as viewed through the rational choice lenses of the cost/benefit decision dynamics, are so diversified, frequently opposed and mutually neutralizing at times, that it is virtually impossible to consider the GCS as an actor, let alone a global one.

In fact, there is no evident or implicit common core objective or coherent behavioural pattern, even in relation to the most evident, simple and seemingly consensual issues, that would allow for the identification of the GCS as an actor of I.R. It is rather the logic of the individual actor's sustainability within the system that seems to prevail as the top priority, determining the attitude and nature of relational behaviour of each actor or

group of actors, movement, organization or network that fit under the encompassing notion of GCS.

The Role of Innovation Communities

Information and knowledge are not conceptual equivalents. While communication provides access to information and allows for the acquisition, storing and data processing from multiple, simultaneous sources in real time, the concept of knowledge implies both the capacity to process information, that is to recognize, select, compare, evaluate and validate relevant data, and the ability to integrate the resulting processed information in cognitive evolutionary processes of complex learning whose outcomes translate into social action through empirical application.

From the actor's strategic perspective, we must recognize the importance of the knowledge-based discourse as the key factor in the process of social construction of perceived reality. *Innovation communities* become important, if not crucial agents of change, in an image formation process leading to the perception and identification of the GCS as an agent of the globalized social reality and the relational environment.

Epistemic communities, generate and process ideas and specialized information that circulate through GCS actors, between state and non-state actors, as well as between knowledge communities at national and transnational levels of interaction. "Their claim rests on a theoretically informed vision of reality and a notion of scientific validity (...) The members of such a community share a common understanding or particular problems in their field of research *as well as* an awareness of, and a preference for, a set of technical solutions to these problems".¹⁶

The influence of epistemic communities members on decision making processes goes far beyond that of opinion leaders or opinion makers, generally aimed at reaching "attentive" and knowledgeable sectors of the general public; and special consultants, experts and advisers, generally concerned with specific issue areas and acting within limited institutional and decisional contexts. Epistemic communities develop a growing collective perception about the identification of perspectives, ideas, concepts, and notions about common issues, problems and preferred solutions that translate into a phenomenon of *consensual knowledge*.

16 Andreas Hasenclever, Peter Mayer, Volker Rittenberger, *Theory of International Regimes*, Cambridge, CUP, 1997, p. 149.

In the information age, epistemic communities and think tanks, communities of practice and discourse coalitions, advocacy groups, networks and movements, stand as the new social actors of the knowledge based society. As such, they represent the epistemic and empirical agents of social change, inducing knowledge specific based perceptions of the global relational environment, and shaping a socially constructed image of a reality we call GCS.

Finally, *communities of practice* coordinate their active participation through different forms of influence or pressure, over national and international decision making processes, or indirectly, by stimulating transnationally coordinated social movements and actions.¹⁷

Through discourse coalitions, epistemic communities, think tanks and communities of practice, based on consensual knowledge, provide justifiable policy arguments, logics and perspectives about issues, problems and optional solutions, or take actions that legitimize policy choices. Information, and above all, knowledge, becomes the essential factors of structural power.

Conclusions

In the beginning of our reflections we suggested definitional contents to the notions of *civil society*, *global*, *globalization*, *pluralism* and *transnationalism* as the working operational concepts necessary to develop our argument. Bearing in mind the very limited operational and instrumental function of these analytical and theoretical tools, our conclusions are necessarily very general in scope.

In the first place, civil society hasn't really gone global, though transnational interactions are crucial for the development of civil society. However, this does not necessarily mean the inevitability of a linkage between civil society and democratic, liberal values, nor does it mean the promotion of economic growth, distributive justice, the improvement of living standards, human rights or environmental sustainability. In fact, transnationalism is also responsible for the spread of hate ideologies, transnational organized crime, illegal economy networks, infectious diseases, terrorism, violence

¹⁷ Ver Peter M. Haas, "Epistemic Communities and the Dynamics of International Environmental Co-Operation", in Volker Rittberger, ed., *Regime Theory and International Relations*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995, pp. 168-201, p. 178 e segs..

and various other sources of global instability. They all belong in the realm of a GCS.

Secondly, the evident need for the sovereign state as the regulatory instance *par excellence*, and the constant demand for state-led interventions in every problematic situation in any sector of social activity or interest area at either local, regional or planetary frame of action, show that the transnational rise of civil society means it is neither necessarily going global, nor that state power is declining as a consequence.

But power factors have evolved and changed both in meaning, instrumental effectiveness and elemental fungibility, as well as in terms of assessment of comparative relational capabilities. At the same time, new power factors have emerged and grown in their relative relevance. The emerging “network” or “information” society is knowledge based and this means that knowledge has become the key power factor in every actor’s strategy to both relate with one another, and deal with the inevitability of managing change, in order to prevail and actively intervene in the process, through the inherent evolution in perspectives and priorities, attitudes and behaviors.

However, given the referred epistemological, ontological and empirical objections to qualifying the GCS as an actor, either transnational or global we consider the concept of GCS in itself, as a social construct of globalization, standing as a referent, and as such, referring to a complex agent of change, acting through the social construction of a biased image of reality, that was strategically pre-determined.

The final objective of that strategy is the promotion of the dominant, politically correct and framed discourse, in order to generate a process of cognitive perception and imposing through it an image of the GCS acting as a unit, in a coherent and consistent manner in the relational environment. From this perspective all the effects stem from an agenda-setting based on real facts, strategically selected, interpreted, edited and diffused through global information and communication systems and *media* networks. The notion of GCS thus becomes politically functional and strategically instrumental as a legitimizing tool for decision-making processes and through the inherent normative diffusion.

The concept of GCS represents more of a social construct, conceived for, and adapted to the political purpose of managing the global knowledge based society, through decisive procedural influence and considerable degrees of control. In other words, the concept of GCS is the result of the strategic mobilization of biased cognitive perceptions, adapted to the political objective of dealing with the globalizing trend of an ever expanding information gathering, attentive public, and knowledge aware, transnationalized societal environment.

In this sense, and from a gramscian dichotomous perspective, the ultimate question may be: when or in what circumstances, does *civil* society, and GCS or its elemental components, for that matter, become *political*, both in nature and in terms of agency.¹⁸

From an international relations perspective, the notion of GCS stands as a broad umbrella referent. It represents a strategically encompassing, wide concept, able to promote convergence and consensus over common perceptions and feelings, attitudes and behaviors, perspectives and images of reality, and to originate structured groups, movements, networks and organizations whose actions become legitimized by the alleged inevitability of dealing with that perceived reality, as well as with other actors and the relational environment.

Both the vague definition of GCS and the theoretically evolving societal contours of the notion, allow for the inclusion of multiple, simultaneous and transient individual and group allegiances, as well as tactical, space-time oriented, in-and-out movements, providing for the strategically instrumental function ascribed to the concept. In fact, the notion of GCS is loose, porous, flexible and stretchable enough for any individual to be able to feel part of, be identified with, or participate in processes of change developing in that perceived social reality, either directly and individually, or through collective movements of multiple, simultaneous or alternative allegiances.

The social reality of GCS includes important agents, relevant factors, distinctive system dynamics and processes, inducing significant structural changes in the relational environment. To consider the GCS as a global actor, however, is yet another epistemological misnomer, an intellectually misleading gadget serving as a problem-solving theoretical by-product of both neorealism and neoliberalism.

At the same time, its politically biased potential, turns the concept into an instrumental rationalist tool derived from the “neo-neo” consensus, rather than from the inherent theoretical debate, and strategically conceived to sustain and promote the traditionally dominant stance of positivist approaches in I.R. theory.

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18 See, Michael W. Foley, Bob Edwards, “The Paradox of Civil Society”, in ob. cit.

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