Civil Society in Argentina. An Approach from Social Policies

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Introduction

A lot has been written lately about the civil society —its organizations, its ways of demonstrations and democratic participation; and the links between civil society, the State, and the market. This debate began and consolidated in Argentina in the so-called "democratic transition". The democratic opening in 1983 was the driving force of new hopes and frustrations for intellectuals, politicians, artists, militants, and citizenship. It was believed that democracy, alone, could solve many of the social, political, and economic problems that affected the country. These expectations were lowered in the end; and, in some cases, they even changed into apathy or widespread disappointment. Nevertheless, many people think that we have not reached the limits of this debate yet; or that these limits may change and enable alternatives that have not been subject of discussion yet.

Within the framework of the updated studies on the civil society and its organizations, in this work we will start with a brief history outline of civil society in Argentina. We have treated to systematize its main stages, in order to indicate the characteristics of the civil society in the last decades. With this brief history outline as context, we will give an account of the efforts made in an attempt to conceptualize the main associative forms of

the civil society, so that we can highlight their more outstanding characteristics and attributes. As it is further mentioned, it is very important to analyze the civil society in interaction with other institutional spheres, particularly the State, to understand how the civil society works and affects the different political processes --particularly those related to the implementation of public policies and its direct entailment with wider social processes. In this sense, the new social policies constitute a link to approach this subject. In no other case has there been as much emphasis on the importance of participation, the expression and even the management of civil society organizations as in the one of the social policies fomented and implemented recently in Argentina. This insight will enable us to discover some of the most relevant axes of the present forms of entailment between the State and civil society. In the case of Argentina, the implementation of these policies has developed in parallel with a process of pauperization regarding the conditions of social reproduction of vast social sectors. This conjunction between the new social matter, and decentralized and focused social policies was not far from the emergency and consolidation of new actors from the civil society, which struggled to obtain resources that allowed them to guarantee their subsistence. One of the most important emerging actors in the Argentine public scene of the last years is the called "piquetero movement". This movement, in its different spheres, knew how to become a beneficiary, contributor to and manager of the new social policies implemented by the Argentine government. Nevertheless, its incidence goes beyond this role, becoming —for many— the vehicle of a new debate about the limits of the Argentine democracy: its inrush into the public sphere would give an account of a new excluding society in process of consolidation. It is at this point that we question ourselves, towards the end of this article, about the alternative possibilities to think of the limits of the participation and incidence of civil society organizations in the decision-making political processes. We will mention some of the main contemporary proposals, leaving open the question about a new scenario that enables the construction of a new democratic institutionality.

Brief historical outline

For some authors, the existence of **civil society organizations (CSOs)** is a phenomenon that has long existed in Argentina. Since colonial times and independence period, there has been institutions of public good that acted in different areas (social, cultural, and political), but mainly in the welfare area. It can be said that this phenomenon emerged by the end of the eighteenth century, even before the State consolidation (Campetella and González Bombal, 2000).

Several stages can be distinguished in the timeline of the civil society in Argentina: I) The colonial period (1810/1860): emergence of organizations devoted to social welfare, created by prominent members of the colonial society mainly for the benefit of patients and orphans; II) The migratory period (1860/1910): appearance of unions, organizations of membership, mutual aid and associations of anarchist and socialist influence. All these groups were meant to protect labor rights and the improvement of life conditions, especially for those of foreign origin; III) The period of consolidation of the agro-export model and the Import Substitution Industrialization (1910/1970): strengthening of the national business establishment and appearance of organizations in favor of sectorial, professional and employers' interests; IV) The falling of Welfare State (1970/1990): appearance of the membership-based organizations oriented to satisfy basic necessities and survival and to organize social promotion. It is also worth mentioning the appearance of human rights organizations in the mid 70's; V) Globalization (from 1990 up to present): the strong emergence of organizations in favor of all kind of rights took place while business foundations are framed within the so-called employers' social responsibility (PNUD/BID, 1998).

From another point of view, Acuña sets the development of the movement of organizations not so early in history. On the contrary, he argues that, in comparison to other Latin American cases, its development was rather delayed. This explanation is based on the conditions established by the existence of State intervention in traditional policies, the existence of a

"Welfare State model" of a populist kind with strong social and redistributive policies since middle 40's, and by the presence of syndicalism, that performed important public functions in social matters (Acuña, 2003).

The coup d'état of 1943, and later, the assumption of Perón in 1946 after the elections, marked not only the beginning of the construction of a new interventionist State, economically speaking, but also the search of a social consensus and a consolidation of the government's performance legitimacy. Social assistance acquired a central role through diverse State institutions and *Fundación Eva Perón* (FEP). This one has an ambiguous connection with the State, since its character -supposedly private- granted independence as well as some discretion concerning both its performance and its handling of public and private funds.

The strategy of the government's social policy was based on the necessity of consensus and on the legitimization of both the State and its role as the guarantor of the labor force replacement and reproduction. There was a straight relationship with the population, without technical intermediaries, in an attempt to make the women of the party —who personally presented the cases and demanding of aid to Eva Perón, President's wife— gain control of the Peronist doctrine.

The FEP implemented two forms of action regarding social assistance: straight social aid and the giving of benefits through establishments for social aid, based on the understanding of rights in the social justice field, since workers were the top-priority population target of these social policies.

Acuña (2003) sets the performance of civil society organizations in a context of great political and social instability, dominated by long authoritarian periods during the 1960's. The SCOs performance was signed by its opposition to the State action, perceived as an authoritarian power that would create a feeling of distrust (Acuña, 2003).

It was during the dictatorship initiated in 1976 that many of the present associations of human rights defense, whose members were directly

affected (The Mothers, Grandmothers and relatives of missing people) or those who collaborated in tasks of complaint and research arouse. Also, "many mutual aid associations of territorial base, dining rooms for poor children, special centers for retired seniors, or first-aid rooms had their origin in or were boosted by the fight against the dictatorship policies" (Brown, 2002:300). These associations created new spaces for the accomplishment of *the politics-related issues.*

During the 90's, those SCOs committed to issues related to poverty increase and social exclusion acquired fundamental importance. These organizations constitute a heterogeneous set that mostly includes private foundations, development and promotion organizations formed by grass roots and communitarian organizations, as well as groups of professionals. The last ones are the most numerous, and represent the determination of those socially excluded to overcome the poverty situation in which they are immersed with the aid of their organization (Forni, 2001). Since the crisis of the year 1989 and the consequent social emergency, numerous social organizations emerge and consolidate its main role as performers of the local social policies. This situation is mainly related to the great economic transformations.

Despite these discussions about the development of the civil society organizations, there is a consensus on the fact that it was in the last decade of the 20th Century that this set of organizations obtained social visibility as a sector. When the State replaced itself, syndicalism was progressively weakened and the typical mechanisms of a market society were accented, the margins of visibility of the third sector were clarified. The State changed significantly its relation with the unions and initiated a strategy of approach to the organizations of the civil society (Thompson, 1995; Acuña, 2003).

Some conceptual definitions and "confusions"

The heterogeneity of institutions that are included under the denomination of "civil-society organizations" makes it difficult to group them all under a unique concept of organizations that fulfill extremely different roles in society and, on top of that, they do not consider themselves participants, among others, of a common space. So, "…it should not considered as an

only actor with only one voice; on the contrary, the very nature of associations expresses the diversity and the multiplicity of existing interests in the society" (Roitter, 2000: 9).

But, how such a wide and diverse universe could be classified?

The notion of *third sector*[1] is related to a relational definition where the State and the market are the two first sectors. This third sector would originate from the faults developed by these two sectors when allocating goods and services (Laville, 2004).

The third sector, briefly understood as the set of civil-society organizations aimed at the common good (Filmus, Arroyo, and Estébanez, 1997), emerges, it makes its way between the State and the market, coming together in new relations among them (its residual category of "third sector" rises from being organizations which are neither governmental nor commercial). As González Bombal easily explains, "that thing we so call `third sector', to differentiate it from the State sector and from the private sector, has something from one and from the other, but it is exactly that peculiar combination which defines its specific nature: being an activity supported by the initiative of its individuals, it reaches public dimension, for it is carried on as a voluntary service to the others" (González Bombal 1995: 65).

In Argentina, the third sector receives different definitions: public nonprofit organizations, charitable organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGO), social organizations, intermediate organizations of the civil society, community-based organizations, third-sector organizations, etc. Something similar happens on a worldwide level: in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, there are expressions such as voluntary sector, non-profit sector, or independent sector; in Europe, the term is coined from social economy; and in several countries of Latin America, we find designations such as sector of the social economy and sector of the non-governmental organizations (Roitter, 2000). According to Filmus, Arroyo, and Estébanez, "this wide and heterogeneous

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[1] *Third sector* term, though not absolutely equivalent, is used in this section as synonym of *civil society organizations.* .

situation shows the peculiarities of the new model of social organization as much as its weaknesses," (Filmus and Estébanez, 1997:24).

Although they may appear like a sector related to multiple aspects of social life, it is important to display those attributes shared by these institutions, to clarify the endless number of terminologies regarding the "third sector". As Salamon explains, in spite of the differences, "… it is about organizations that operate outside the State apparatus, that do not distribute the benefits, and to which the citizens should be free to associate, or not, in the pursuit of common objectives" (2000: 7).

We take into account a number of characteristics to define the organizations that constitute this sector, following some criteria established by Salamon and Anheiner (1992, in Campetella, G. Bombal and Roitter, 2000:16):

- *Structured:* It assumes the presence of certain degree of formality and permanence in time, though it is not essential that the organizations count on legal function and status.
- *Private:* They are officially separated from the State, though it envisages receiving public funds and/or having civil servants as part of theirs directories.
- *Self-ruled:* They have the capacity to handle their own activities and to choose their authorities.
- *Volunteers:* Based on free affiliation.

Other criterion could be added to these characteristics, i.e.:

- *Non-religious:* They are not like churches and congregations dedicated to the practice and diffusion of a creed, though the organizations could be linked or promoted by churches.
- Non i*n favor:* They are not meant to impose a political idea or their candidates, or to reach the power of the State, though the organizations could be promoted by political parties (PNUD/BID, 1998 24).
- *Social values:* They try as much the satisfaction of basic social needs as the promotion of values and attitudes aimed at changing articles of incorporation and cradling criteria of fairness, solidarity and democracy (Filmus, Arroyo and Estébanez, 1997: 27).

Throughout this work, we will use the term civil-society organizations (SCOs). This term "is used to group the whole number of associations and organizations (including the foundations) present in the country […]. It replaces, in a sense, an old term coined by the conservatism: the living forces. It can also be found in countries of Western Europe in the 80's" (De Piero, 2004).

To analyze the history of the civil-society organizations, it is essential to include other actors that interact with them in the public sphere, such as the State, the multilateral organisms of credit, and the private sector.

It is worth pointing out the fact that civil-society organizations in Argentina are largely characterized by counting on unstable resources; human resources with low level of professionalization, high rotation, and a precarious institutionality. The analysis of civil societies in interaction with the other spheres, especially with the State, is considered to be of vital importance as to understand how it operates and how important it is in different political processes related to the implementation of public policies and their direct overlapping with macro social processes such as, for example, the changes operated in the labor market.

The new social policies

The transition towards the neoliberalism and the changes operated by the adjustment measures in Argentina brought about the transformation to a complex and heterogeneous society, with multiplicity of inequality axes, new spaces of social exclusion, and of social, economic, and cultural differentiation (Isuani, 1998).

During the decade of 90's, the State acquired a series of characteristics and attributes that marked a metamorphosis in its appearance, functional dominion, and role before the society. Far from being a supposedly-minimum actor (aspiration of an ideological political current which considers desirable reducing the role and size of the institutional apparatus to its minimum expression), it has definitely proved its absence in different areas

of public management, which is shown in the smaller scope of its action, in the resolution of critical social matters (Oszlak, 2003).

The metamorphosis of the national State has been clearly noticed in the fall of the number of direct employment in its offices and in the transference of duties to the market, sub-national governments and the civil-society organizations related to the welfare of poor society sectors (Oszlak, 2003).

In fact, the main social indicators of this situation showed an increasing level of poverty, an inequality in income distribution regarding the rest of the region, a high and increasing level of unemployment, and a significant increase in labor informality that put barriers to the universal nature of hedging against social risks (Acuña, Kessler and Repetto, 2002).

Taking into account this general framework, we would point out reforms in the assistance and promotion sector that were supported by the agencies and foundations of international cooperation, financing projects, plans, and programs. This *aid* demanded the strategy of social-cost focalization for the unemployed population or for those whose incomes were below the line of poverty, and the outsourcing of services through the participation of the civil-society organizations (Grassi and Neufeld, 2003).

In case of Argentina, the previously mentioned reforms were carried out through the granting of credits from the World Bank to execute specific projects. In this sense, this was meant to implement structural reforms in all the administrative levels of government, as well as to develop social reforms —including the education and health sectors, and assistance aspects— to fund consultancy/technical assistance projects, and projects related to infrastructure (Corbalán, 2002).

Once these objectives were clearly stated, each payment was subordinated to meeting the goals set to the government. This is the reason why the World Bank carried out supervision tasks, evaluating the government performance through criteria that included technical, institutional, economic, and financial aspects.

The international financial agencies, the cooperation-to-development policies, and governments began to think of SCSs as new actors of importance, to which it was necessary, at least, to listen, or even to directly include in the formulation or execution of policies (Thompson, 1995). The multilateral organisms stimulate the importance of the SCOs participating when implementing social policies. Their position before the multilateral banks of development and the State was dual: on the one hand, some were ready to cooperate; on the other hand, some watched them with distrust (Acuña, 2003).

From workers to poor people

The new concept of the view on the social matter will be given by the passage from a perspective on the social-matter framing in terms of *work* to another perspective on such social-matter framing as *poverty*. This taxonomy will include the categorization of the individuals, giving them a particular social identity —from workers to poor people—, as well as a specific practical relation between those who classify and the ones being classified —decentralization, focalization and participation.

This new questions posed on the social matter will be part of the way in which individuals "live" their situation, which is closely linked to the forms of collective mobilization. Therefore, it is a cognitive and practical operation that will include certain segments of the population in a social category and will determine the form of intervention on that population according to the established concept. Consequently, the new institution of the social matter will imply mainly a new relation between the State and the mass sectors. Decentralization, focalization and participation will be the three key components of this new organization. Neighbor associations will successfully reach higher levels of intervention in public policies and, their relations with politician will be modified by means of promoting the participation of the beneficiaries in the social policies (Merklen, 2005).

For those workers and social sectors which are more unprotected, the general tendency towards the pauperization of the living conditions has increased dramatically. The workers were specially affected by the economy

deindustrialization, the impoverished labor relations and the increase level of unemployment. As a consequence of the structural direction of the Argentine economy, there has been a *gradual separation between the urban popular world and the world of the formal work*, symbolized by the *territoriality* of the subordinate classes. Due to the employment crisis as social integration factor, workers and their families were forced to increase their strategies to find new resources that allowed them to guarantee their subsistence. In this way, they resorted to several different economic activities in order to the get the income that was no longer provided by employment. In this view, the region of the immediate habitat was more and more a key chance of popular survival strategies (Merklen, 2005; Svampa, 2005)

This trend, derived from the socioeconomic changes introduced to the neoliberal reforms, was reinforced by the decentralization and the focalization of the State social policies. The management of the social programs was transferred to local levels, whereas the program implementation promoted the affected communities' participation. In this was, while focusing on the public social assistance, the State "territorialized" it, not only in its management but also in its implementation, at local and communitarian levels. Thus, resources around the daily habitat of popular sectors were relatively more available. This situation reinforced the tendency to the territorialization of the rent generation strategies of popular sectors and increased the leading role of the neighborhood associations (Merklen, 2005; Svampa, 2005)

In larger cities, whenever the institutional forms of social and political integration fail, there is a local emergence as the natural space for the development of diverse forms of solidarity. The neighborhood is shown as a precarious space of social integration through the city, since there are no enough solidarity bonds at local level to replace the social protection given by the institutions and employment. Local solidarity does not produce any resource; however, it is in charge of redistributing those resources that territorial organizations recover outside the district. "Outside" the district, there is a main source to get resources: the political system. As social vulnerability in the popular districts is massive and for long periods of time,

their inhabitants are forced to exert a permanent pressure on the political actors and institutions in order to provide themselves with what is most essential. This is the base of the collective mobilization in the popular districts. This situation, originated in the socioeconomic changes that occurred in the last decades, was reinforced and deepened by the redirection of the public policies (Merklen, 2005).

Unemployed people movement

At local level, social-policy agenda in town-councils promoted *the associated management* as a working methodology, together with a series of interests between the government, neighborhood organizations and professionalized non-governmental organizations: access to resources and programs derived from the need to show capacity of being associated and making technical, human and financial efforts; diversification and increase in services, facing the growing demand of work and to the landslide of the provincial and national State as regards this issue; and social legitimacy or management control, like the condition promoted by external cooperation (Clemente, 2004).

The Argentine crisis that had its critical moment in 2001, had previously appeared in the urban municipalities. It has been modified since the outbreak, not its scale, but the form of the demand through conflict and mobilization. Being in an emergency, the actions that town-councils managed to generate centered in health, primary and secondary school, and food, by promoting —at least for circumstantial reasons— the opening and democratization of the relations within the community (Clemente, 2006).

Civil society gave multiple answers such as networks of bartering, popular dining rooms, neighborhood meetings, groups for unemployed people, and recovered factories and companies, each one of them with its dynamic characteristics (Cerrutti and Grimson, 2004).

There were groups that presented a formal structure and, indeed, managed to press for their interests and to determine some local decisions about

social policy. These groups' resources of power allowed them to solve the arguments over the economic surplus in their own benefit. Many social movements at this stage become Organizations of Promotion and Development, mediating between the poor cities dwellers, the State and multilateral agencies (Cardarelli and Rosenfeld, 1998).

Among the many ways of protesting, we are going to analyzed some of the characteristics of the organization and demonstrations of unemployed people in Argentina, which displays numerous similarities with other Latin American movements.

Firstly, it is worth mentioning the *territorial aspect* of the "piquetero" movement (Zibecchi, 2004; Svampa and Pereyra, 2003). It is a group of organizations constituted by similar material conditions of existence shared by people who live in a same district or neighborhood. Some scholars even state that certain space segregation is needed as a condition for these organizations setting (Cerruti and Grimson, 2004).

As we have already mentioned, since the 90's a new *scenario* of dispute, demand and negotiation, decentralized from the factories, has been constituted, which begins to aim towards the State. The *territoriality* of these spaces implied courses of action and protest based on the occupation and blocking strategic vehicular access and streets of the city, as well as others places with deep symbolic importance in political terms, like Plaza de Mayo (Grimberg, 2004).

These spaces have been the key-process *scenarios* of organizational experiences that used the public and private space in different ways. Initiative and solidarity between independent actors and organizations included mobilization as well as daily processes of construction: from the occupation of streets and public buildings, to cultural events and interviews with massive and alternative mass media.

Secondly, the social movements look for, at least in their speeches, *material and symbolic autonomy* to deal with the State and the political parties, by

means of *direct action* and guarantee of the group member's subsistence (Zibecchi, 2004).

The unemployed people movements have developed an organization divided into areas of work, like development programs, health, education, politics, press and security. Each area aims at turning the social plans negotiated with the government into productive projects.

The self-management initiatives related to production, education or health, among others, are financed by some percentage of the money transferences of the social plans of each member of the movement.

The *productive* dimension of these practices is based on getting and claiming resources, and on the readjusting of meanings —in opposition to the political governmental strategies— when trying to develop the management capacity in certain basic areas of daily life.

The achievement of a symbolic and material autonomy to deal with State varies between different organizations. This is related in part to the mechanisms for making decision. These mechanisms have developed according to the organizational model and traditions. There are political fragmentations, alignments and breaking-off within the "*piquetero*" movement, since this movement also includes divergent groups and political lines rivaled by a same social basis for unemployed workers. The three great alignments are as follows: the groups related to centrals and political-union trends and State unions; the movements created by left political parties of different orientations; and the groups that are known as independent and that were generated around leaderships of district type (Grimberg, 2004; Svampa and Pereyra, 2003).

Even so, it is possible to point that the diverse attempts of autonomy and generation of other forms to make policy have not eliminated the old *fellowships* and clientelistic practices that continue operating inside the governmental and political structures. As well as this, we have to include many other leaders or "*punteros*" related to the movements who exert the

role of mediators between the resources of the government and *clients* who were granted with goods, favors or services.

Thirdly, the "*piqueteros*" movements focused on the affirmation of *identity* and in the revaluation of *culture.* Their scope rose during the emergency of the crisis, and was established on the basis of specific forms of sociability, solidarity and social reciprocity, like spaces of valuation for their protagonists and individual and collective learning.

The "*piquete*" is a symbol of the possibility of counting on a scope of an *intersubjective* encounter among the unemployed people. The protest is a moment when the individual situation defined negatively by the lack of work is reverted in order to enable the construction of a project of common political action with those who defined their situation in a similar way.

Fourthly, the piquetero movement states *work-organization plans* that try to give arguments as regards the meaning of work, visualizing land, factories and establishments like production spaces.

The organizations develop a series of daily practices in employment programs, like tasks and work committees where they construct meaning around work, planned actions or politics (Grimberg, 2004). In this complex frame, the "piquete" requires a series of organizational steps and previous decision making like the definition of its characteristics, its immediate reaches and senses; and a division of tasks in areas - cooking, cleaning, health, press or security- that need to settle certain instances of coordination. The road-blocking activates daily processes of generation of effective resources, of reflection and construction of categories of interpretation and action (Grimberg, 2004).

Fifthly, "piqueteros" movements are able to shape its own *spokesmen*. Many members of struggling middle class with schooling have gotten up to the movements, having contributed to its capacities of organization and formation. The methodology of *popular education* has become a tool for shaping the movement members (Zibecchi, 2004).

Finally, it is important to highlight the *role of women* in the "*piqueteros*" movements. They are in charge of the administration, labor organization and security during the "*piquetes*". These tasks were traditionally masculine. However, the fact that few members occupy relevant powerful positions in the national leadership of the movements shows the reproduction of the patriarchal parameters in the popular sectors (Svampa and Pereyra, 2003).

The most important characteristics of the piquetero movement in Argentina —already identified above— allow us to understand some aspects of this public space constitution, where local practices of demand and opposition to the State and self-management initiatives are tightened. These imply certain ways of organization and action with intersections between democratization forms and mechanisms of fragmentation and clientelism. Nevertheless, the emergency of a space for sociability, solidarity and social reciprocity must be highlighted by its function in the redefinition of citizenship and groups and individuals identity.

Toward a new democratic institutionality

The emergence of a social movement of unemployed people in Argentina represents an extension in the democratic agenda for many people. This new social actor would provide the possibility to renovate the public debate about the borders of the Argentine democracy, the future distribution of the social power between different sectors or classes, and the alternatives to surpass the main causes for the social, economic and political crisis in the country. It is from this point of view that we will briefly approach some of the more relevant innovating proposals in terms of participation and incidence of the CSOs on the processes of decision making. Without trying to cover all possible sets of these alternatives, we will mention which are the critical ones, what inspires them, and what positive effects are expected from them, leaving open the question about a next scenario that allows the construction of a new democratic institutionality.

In the last decades, proposals have risen trying to establish new relations between the different spheres of the public power and the civil society.

Initiatives such as the participative budget, participative planning, or revocation referenda are trying to create a *new democratic institutionality* that modifies the traditional forms of entailment between the democratic state, governments, and citizens. It is particularly at a local level where different governments from Latin American cities —such as Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte, Montevideo, Rosario, or Buenos Aires— have developed experiences of this type.

In general, the starting point for these proposals is the critic of the processes of administrative decentralization and promotion of citizen participation. These processes are promoted by organisms of international financial assistance (the IMF, World Bank, , etc.) and applied by the neoliberal governments of the region. The effective practices of decentralization and participation from governmental levels have been done without the relevant distribution to the economic resources. As a consequence, local and regional low budgets had to be allocated by the minute. This practice supposed a de facto tax-adjustment and other significant obstacles such as the little political predisposing of governments to encourage mass participation, manipulation of the public cost for elections, the communitarian intervention tools and the preexisting levels of distrust, illegitimacy and political clientelism (Coraggio, 1997 and 2007).

The alternative proposals to democratize governmental powers lay on the horizon of the construction of a *new space for decision-taking* shared by the executive and the legislature, so that it gives impulse to an objective process that improves the exercise of civil rights and promotes the creation of a *new public sphere*.

These aspirations are triggered by the belief in the lack of traditional formal democracy mechanisms, in order to achieve a lasting and effective source of legitimacy. This situation is reinforced by the complexity, fluidity and dynamics that the social relations in the contemporary societies have acquired, which demands a permanent validation of the public powers. Furthermore, these initiatives are based on severe criticism of the increasing colonization of the Latin American States by private interests that promoted the layout and implementation of regressive socio-economic

policy. In this sense, these proposals try to combine —under a different approach— the traditional mechanisms of representation that were originated in the universal suffrage, together with other forms of direct participation from different instances of citizen mobilization. So they facilitate the institutional focus on the demands of the civil society, restricting the influence of the corporative interests (Coraggio, 1997 and 2007; Genro and Souza, 1998).

The socialization of the information and the democratization of the decisions on public matters are some of the positive effects of these new commonly mentioned institutional adjustments. The extension of institutional information flows and the creation of areas for the formation of a public opinion independent of the governmental and private powers would help develop active, instructed and critical citizen awareness. This new citizen awareness would facilitate the incorporation of other social actors previously marginalized and left aside from the political decision-taking processes. The possibility of expressing and defending its necessities would counterbalance the influence of the concentrated economic interests on the governmental powers, generating one positive synergy between the processes of political socialization and income redistribution. By doing so, the control and the elective government officials and authorities' accountability to the citizenship would be increased. In addition, there would be an improvement on the conditions to elaborate public policies with greater degrees of acceptance and social consensus. This process would eventually result in *a democratization of the State and politics in general*, and would be the corollary of an *integral reform* that would put state powers at the disposal of the interests of the majorities (Coraggio, 1997 and 2007; Genro and Souza, 1998).

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