New models of public policies representing aspirations of social movements and broader sectors of civil society have been adopted in Latin America in the last decade. Many of them are deeply associated to a modern kind of relationship between civil society organizations (CSOs) and the State, encompassing popular participation, better connections among governments and communities, more accountability and convergent efforts to combat social problems. These new expressions are seen as excellent mechanisms to increase the effectiveness of public policies and as a demonstration of democratic maturity of society in solving social problems.

One of these recent expressions is the well-known Bogotá Cómo Vamos (Bogota, How Are We Doing), Movement that monitors the evolution of life quality, focusing on the accomplishment of the District Administration Development Plan in the capital of Colombia. It was created in 1997 as the result of an inter-institutional alliance between Casa Editorial El Tiempo, the Corona Foundation and the Bogota Chamber of Commerce. This kind of civil society initiative intends to create dialogue spaces, increase democratic control of public management and promote the evaluation of public policies through the development of goals and indicators on urban policies and social diagnosis. They have been seen as a new form of social control accountability and participatory democracy mechanism in the Latin American case.

This comparative study analyzes the performance of “new types” of civic organizations and social movements that emerge in three different Brazilian cities: São Paulo (Movimento Nossa Sao Paulo), Belo Horizonte (Movimento Nossa BH) and Ilhabela (Movimento Nossa Ilha Mais Bela), all of them “Nossa” (Ours) inspired by the Colombian experience. These movements are articulated in networks of civil society organizations such as the “Brazilian Social Network of Fairer and Sustainable Cities” and to the “Latin American Network of Fairer and Sustainable Cities”. Along with the development of indicators, regular researches on citizens’ perception about local government and different strategies are also put through to influence the formulation and execution of public policies in these cities. These movements in Brazil are relatively recent (the first was born in May, 2007 in São Paulo) and there are not many studies about its performances. Thus, it is fundamental to analyze the relationships of these movements with their member organizations, with government, corporations, other civil society organizations and international organizations in depth (Coston, 1998).

This article aims to analyze the interactions between State and civil society actors in the construction of social control of public policies, especially on the diffusion of these organizational models in Brazil. This article also aims to debate the challenges and the dilemmas involved in this form of civic action and in the modernization of urban policies, understanding the conditions and realities that favor the innovation and diffusion of organizational models among civil society organizations.

It is an exploratory comparative research based on case studies, literature review and in depth interviews. Recently, it has been possible to observe that comparative studies involving civil society organizations increased significantly, with several approaches on what are these organizations and the field (Anheier & Salamon, 2006). The shift of civil society organizations towards the center of the polity and, consequently, the increase of the scope and scale of the civil society sector, call up researchers’ attention that still face certain limitations to understand the role of these organizations (Cohen & Arato, 1994). Comparative studies are fundamental to understand these organizations’ and the sector’s characteristics that are linked to its path dependence (history, culture and political tradition). With the intention of analyzing the development of this kind of movement, a comparative
multidisciplinary approach is used, combining elements of political science, sociology and organizational theory (Scott & Meyer, 1991).

The analysis of these experiences in promoting the dialogue of CSOs with government, seeking the improvement of its accountability regarding public policies at the local level, is an important element to problematize in order to understand the challenges in building a more democratic public sphere in societies marked by late development and social inequality, as is the case of Brazilian society.

References


