

Cooperative Links between State and Civil Associations in Mexico

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the conditions that either promote or constrain the overall performance of civil associations in Mexico. This is done by drawing the cooperative relations between government and civil organizations. It is shown that the improved participation of civil associations in social projects has historically depended on the creation of collaboration spheres that, while preserving the autonomy and the particular functions of each sector, allow for the formation of convergence areas in projects and public policies. The examination of the cooperative links is supported by different sources and by the analysis and tracking of the exchanges between the federal government and the associations that have been promoting social welfare for the last twenty years.

Cooperation is often conceptualized as the commitment to collective actions, and it can be described as the construction of emergent and temporal areas of collaboration between different sectors that work towards a common goal. If we assume that cooperative behaviour is rooted in incentives, relational satisfaction and common norms and values (Lopes, Santos and Teles, 2009; Alexander, 2006: 31), it can be said that these components constitute areas of convergence or divergence that, given the occasion, can form cycles of promotion or restriction that regulate the intervention of civil associations in social projects. This position leads to the assumption that cooperation is a direct consequence of positive interchanges that improve the overall outcome of social projects.

Processes of collective interaction entail decisions made by each sector depending not only on internal resolutions, but also on the determinations taken in other sectors. It is also assumed that these choices are beneficial for each sector and that there is a previous, common and shared understanding of the nature of those benefits. Relational goods are focused on the exchanges that create social capital, it is assumed that shared norms and collaborative behaviour are forms of social capital that can be used to build and promote institutional arrangements on which coordinated inter-sectorial actions are based.

This paper also discusses the convergence points between the government and civil associations. Furthermore, it proposes future areas of research such as: how people come to understand or recognize cooperation and the entry points to social policies, governance, private-and-public government and self-governed ways of community work. The analysis is supported by the examination and discussion of the forces and elements that act either as incentives or obstacles to convergence efforts.

Keywords: Mexican civil associations, cooperation, collective action, positive exchanges.

I. Introduction

This paper presents an exploration of recent cooperative relations between the government and the Civil Associations Sector in Mexico (CAS). We understand cooperation as a set of collective actions commitment. We also note that cooperative behaviour is considered to be rooted in the existence of incentives, common goals, shared norms and values, and relational satisfaction, following the views of Lopes, Santos and Teles in 2009; and those of Alexander in 2006.¹ These elements are the components of arrangements that enhance or restrict the intervention of associations in social projects.

Our position is that cooperation is the result of positive interchanges that optimize the outcomes of social projects. Collective interaction processes entail decisions within each sector depending not only on inner relations, but on the decisions and processes taking place in other sectors. We also assume that these decisions create benefits for each sector and that there is a common shared knowledge of what those benefits are. It is important to stress that categorizing these interchanges as positive refers exclusively to the convergence of the interests of the sectors involved. The profile of cooperative relations is an indicator of the problems and challenges affecting a country in terms of incentives and obstacles for convergence.

Thus, our research questions are focused on the convergence points, which make the cooperation possible. The intention is directed to identify incentives and obstacles in the convergence efforts to magnify cooperation. We stress that cooperation goes beyond the simple coordination of efforts, as

¹ According to the study performed by Lopes, Santos and Teles (2009) cooperative behaviour in collective associations is linked to rules and motivations that explain it and support it and which help overcome the problems deriving from the lack of interest in assuming the costs of the effort of cooperating, in spite of the increase in welfare that is expected from doing so. This also entails overcoming collective-action related dilemmas which are marked by the tendency of some members of a group to not act in order to benefit common objectives unless there is some coercive measure that forces them to do it, or some sort of individual incentive, other than common interest satisfaction, that encourages them to support the costs implied by the achievement of common objectives (Olson, 1992:12).

it is rooted in an interest and commitment to reach common objectives. The common goal is perceived as a collective objective, a shared benefit or a purpose that has been agreed upon. This notion entails the achievement of individual interest by the members of the group(s) or sector(s) taking part of the action. In Olson's words: "achieving any common goal or satisfying any common interest means that a public or collective benefit has been provided to a group" (Olson, 1992: 25). The convergence of goals is sustained by the identification of incentives and the emergence of new common benefits reflecting changes in the understating and use of private, public, or government-owned resources (Hess, 2008:5). Such changes have had repercussions over the creation of public interest spheres and over the relations between those taking parts in them.²

Relational satisfaction is focused on the interchanges that generate positive results, social capital or relational goods, and that fulfil the function of becoming incentives for cooperation. The role that social capital plays in the problems of collective action studied by Ostrom and Ahn (2003) and Robert Putnam *et al.* (1993) amongst others, has made it clear that shared norms and behaviour patterns are different forms of social capital that can be used to create agreements which will in turn solve problems related to democratic governance and will aid coordinated actions.

Norms and values constitute a normative shared ground in which sectorial interests can come together. They promote cooperation by indicating actions that are beneficial for other sectors, groups or individuals. The values promoted by the Civil Associations Sector (CAS) are also regarded as social returns, since they contribute to strengthen the links between different spheres of social life.³ Regarding this, it is relevant to examine Rothstein's proposal (1998), who argues that the normative institutional context is important as the basis for certain types of social policies. This position agrees with that one of Elinor Ostrom, as they both claim that the situation in which decisions are taken plays a decisive role in changing the notion in which individual interest prevails over common actions, and also in the central role trust has facing social dilemmas (Ostrom, 1992).

For Rothstein, collective action means actions dependent on social norms and not only someone's own interest. He argues that political rationality does not have to confront economic rationality and proposes a constructive political rationality that makes it possible for individuals with different

² Elinor Ostrom performed the leading studies focusing on these movements. Her research about common goods point out that understanding the market as the optimal institution for private goods interchange, and the government as the entity that exercises coercion of individual interests towards public interests, does not help to explain the diversity of institutional arrangements these days. There are new kinds of common goods that share the subtractability characteristic of private goods with the difficulty of exclusion of public goods, for example, daily care centres, nurseries, or theatres (Ostrom, 2009).

³ Social returns can be direct or indirect, depending on whether they are estimated as a direct, immediate result of the CAS objectives or they are deemed as qualitative returns of greater scope and with long-term effects.

interests to reach common solutions to collective problems in spite of the differences between them. According to this, he claims that citizens will respond to public interest if three conditions are fulfilled: a) programs are deemed as fair by citizens, *substantive justice*; b) citizens believe others will participate on the base of solidarity and load-distribution, *distributive justice*; c) procedures are considered to be adequate, *procedural justice*. Values, therefore, are not static and indisputables; are products of a social and political context. Because of this, in this paper they are not treated as abstract entities, but as expressions of a consensus among the social agents on premises and interpretations that support cooperative behaviour in public interest issues. Cooperation is possible when there is an agreement on the values or substantive premises, and therefore, cooperative relations can be seen as mechanisms to create and improve governance capabilities.

As a mechanism to improve governance, cooperation is posed as part of welfare governance, a trend of change in the role of government that has spread throughout several countries and which is characterized by the emergence of different forms of public-private associations that are inserted like social-services providers or participants in government social programs, adding civil associations to welfare provision. This new role of the governance has also been linked to privatization, decentralization and devolution processes that have implemented governments in the international context to obtain legitimacy, improve the public management quality, transfer services and reduce social programs costs (Bar-Nir and Gal, 2011).

For those studying these processes it is evident that, given the impossibility of capturing in one generic category the multiple agents that can be involved in cooperative relations; civil associations and the state cannot be understood as unified, homogeneous entities. However, if an attempt can be made to understand how this net is interwoven, it is necessary to develop some sort of abstraction in which the state, here perceived as the government's regime, and the associations, particularly their civil sector, can be acknowledged and studied. In other words, we favour the sectorial perspective without forgetting that each sector is composed by multiple, diverse entities.⁴ Our analysis is focused on the identification of and the discussion on the agents, the powers and the components that act as incentives or obstacles for convergence efforts based on the changes in perception about what is deemed to be shared goods and common goals.⁵ The study of cooperative links is supported

⁴ Accepted the impossibility to identify and conceive a civil society as a unitary subject, we claim that there is a set of common characteristics and a net of agents and projects that support its acknowledgement as a social component.

⁵ We adopt the idea that when it comes to shared goods, it is possible to leave aside the suppositions of the non-cooperative game theory and the tragedy of commons. We favour the perception of cooperation as possible, as it considers possible to act according to public reason and common interests.

by documentary sources based on the follow-up of interchanges between national governments and associations dedicated to welfare-provision to the Mexican population during the last two decades.

With these elements, revising cooperative relations serves to support an argument which links convergence of interests and cooperation premises. Rather than pretend to estimate the dimensions of cooperation, it seeks to capture the complexity of the processes involved in the CAS's participation dynamics. The convergence arrangements profile is useful to set some indicators of the problems and challenges affecting the country in terms of incentives and obstacles for the participation of civil associations in welfare-provision.

II. Interdependent relations between civil society, market and state

Social life is articulated in the spheres of state, market and civil society. As a sector constitutive of the social system, civil society is constituted by a number of organizations that exist in order to exercise interests that bring together the efforts to produce, maintain and modify social life. From this perspective, civil societies have the capacities to articulate collective action. These social groups and associations realize the ways in which this sphere acts. As expressed by Alberto Olvera, one of the substantial features of the group is its autonomy; its independence and its differentiation from state and market (Olvera, 2004). Another useful reference to understand the role of civil associations is Jeffrey Alexander's, who claims the collective actions of civil agents can be perceived as a set of social movements that brings together the social values and demands of every historical moment (Alexander, 2006).⁶ Relations among the basic constitutive sectors of a society are different across countries, as they depend on their history, culture, political systems and development conditions. They are also dynamic, as they are influenced by international, national, and regional economic and political conditions.

Civil sector is framed within the set of associative forms (Olvera, 2004: 30). Alexander (2006) circumscribes the wide associative universe to a solidary civil sphere that favours collective interest to some point, also taking notice of the existence of other phases and interests in associative heterogeneity. Thus, not all associative forms can be subscribed under the civil association category; this group is characterized not only by its voluntary spirit, but by its civic commitment and its orientation towards public interest (Canto, 2004; Olvera, 2004). Civil associations sector is

⁶ In this concept, Alexander underlines the existence of a solidary community, the idea allows us to approach the notion of "common goals" used in this analysis, since common goals would be the expression of the social movements sustained by values and principles pertaining to each cooperative cycle (Alexander, 2006: 31).

perceived as a set of voluntary, autonomous associations formed by citizens who are on the margin of the market and the government's coercive powers. Because of that, they are capable of creating social subjects and contribute to social development (Canto, 2004; Olvera, 2004).⁷ By “civil associations that take part in welfare provision” we refer to those which intervene in the public realm to solve problems and address social needs. In the words of Jeffrey Alexander, they are organizations that, in order to reach a particular interest, have found it necessary to address civil community issues (Alexander, 2006: 93).⁸

III. Cooperation

The understanding of cooperation as an alternative to create welfare and boost development is based on studies that make it clear that the relations between state, market and society are interdependent. The constitution of a field acknowledged as civil and its participation as political agent is not a geographically or functionally isolated phenomenon, but one that is usually associated to inner and external cyclic phenomena. Also, the cycles of expansion or restriction of civil associations in the public sphere are related to other economic, political and social powers and agents, which promote and hamper their participation (Guadarrama, 2007). On these bases, the welfare, globalization or financial crisis are determining factors of civil society potential. In turn, institutional structure, as the one that defines rights, services demand, fiscal incentives and ways of community organization, has a bearing on the dimensions and the expansion of the civil associations sector. Interdependence between factors is a good part of what propels them and it often determines the need to cooperate to reach common goals.

From this perspective we can consider cooperation as the result of interdependency, rather than as a product of solidarity, voluntary contribution, altruism or philanthropic interest. Cooperation is established and strengthened with positive interchanges. Intersectorial cooperation is conceived as the constitution of solidary fields of participation between two or more sectors, where it is possible to develop shared projects, reach common goals and solve problems.

Cooperation and solidarity are perceived as associated with the goals shared by a community. The idea is that cooperation results are positive to achieve objectives, even when it is evident that

⁷ For Alexander, the term “civil association” should be restricted to those that are deeply rooted in civil solidarity and have influence on it (Alexander, 2006). Even though we consider these distinctions to be pertinent, in this study we maintained the general concept of civil associations as organized groups of volunteers who gather around common purposes, as it is impossible to differentiate between both groups in the time period we aim to analyse.

⁸ This is also based on the distinctions Carroll makes between organizations the activities of which benefit third parties or generate a public benefit (Grassroots Support Organizations, GSO) and those which only benefit their members (Membership Support Organizations, MSO). It is important to notice that GSOs are organized and operated mainly for public benefits (Carroll, 1992, quoted by Somuano, 2011: 26).

objectives are not always reached or are not clearly focused on public interest. Because of this, purposes and means are often questioned. We then consider that the state and the CAS have relations for public interest and, in that sense, cooperation is understood as positive, even when success dimensions and negative or unintentional effects of the actions were not taken into account.

The scope of these relations is complex and variable depending on the type of organization, the nature of its activities, the resources and benefits involved, as well as the type and level of interventions of the agents. Because of this, we do not pretend to address this whole universe, but to focus on a sectorial view of cooperative relations. From this assumption it follows that cooperation exists when, given well-articulated shared goals, sectors actively participate in the public sphere to achieve them.

In welfare provision, the civil associations' participation in Mexico has become an important component of economic processes and public policies. From a wider perspective, civil associations' intervention is important when it comes to ensuring greater welfare and with this in mind it is possible that cooperation is perceived as collective action and becomes the preferred option of individuals in organized groups.

As the basis for the constitution of these interactive spaces, the possible cooperation between sectors is realised by the establishment of agreements, which are beneficial for all cooperating parties, and as a part of possible national or regional projects to face social risks. From this point of view, cooperation can be seen as a point of convergence for interests, relations and circumstances favouring resource flows to support collective projects that promote greater welfare.

IV. The context of cooperation

Even though it is possible to identify cooperative relations between the governments and the citizens throughout history, relations between the formally constituted fields of state and civil associations begun to be considered in Mexico when a distinction was made between the civil and the religious spheres, during the consolidation of the Mexican liberal state.⁹ Particularly relations between the state and the civil area are enshrined in the acceptance of the principles of citizens' equality and the preservation of individual liberties, which encouraged the creation of a sphere that was independent from the state.

⁹ Some studies include freely constituted associations as part of the wider social configuration of autonomous individuals associated to liberalism and the emergence of modern states. For example, it is considered invalid to talk about associations when referring to groups of subjects with no rights over their ascription.

Within testimonies collected from constitutive acts and associative regulations, two fundamental principles can be stressed when it comes to cooperative relations between state and civil associations: (1) the gradual acceptance of legal and political equality of citizens, which was spread around the country during the second half of the 19th century, and (2) the unrestricted respect of individual liberties that was hoisted by the liberals during that period of time. In turn, the conviction about individual liberties helped establish limits to separate private rights from public responsibilities. In the relations with their entourage, associations stressed the social importance of assuming more equalitarian values; they created a combination of ideas and models that stressed the importance of agency and collective organization (Guadarrama, 2007).

Civil participation in the public sphere was formally constituted with the establishment of the civil association figure in 1928, which formalised the citizens' right to organize outside state vigilance. At the commercial sphere, the legitimate constitution of non-profit associations was also acknowledged. As pointed out by Fernando Pliego (2003), the introduction of this figure, in the civil juridical framework was, at that time, a trascendental innovation, achievable with the ideological and political impulse of the revolutionary movement (Pliego, 2003: 213).

The study we have referred, points out the transcendence of this concept to situate associative forms in the realisation sphere of common benefits that are mainly economical.¹⁰ It is clear then that this new conception opened a different space for relations articulated around the free participation of the individuals in common welfare action without a limitation other than those established by the law, which cancelled any possibility for state intervention. This way of seeing associations is important because it succeeds to articulate the principle of social rights pre-eminence provided by the ideas of the Mexican revolution with individual freedom of association (by means of a contract), where participant's willingness is the major factor for the decision (Pliego, 2003: 225-226). It is possible that this fortunate synthesis was determining of the permanence and validity of this concept, as it is not only the one used the most nowadays by citizens that wish to organize themselves around common purposes, but it has practically been unmodified since 1928.

For cooperative relations, the legal constitution of civil associations meant the acknowledgement of organized groups that, without being subject to state control, could cooperate with the government.

¹⁰ The civil code of 1870 mainly acknowledged social relations between individuals on the basis of kinship; other than that, this code only mentions Particular Interest Associations (Asociaciones de Interés Particular) which include associations founded in a contract with preponderant economic ends (Pliego, 2003: 219).

However, it can be said that, during the first half of the 20th century, civil organizations were included in a state-centred development model that did not bring about their independent and autonomous organization. The actual strengthening of the sector started at the end of the 20th century, when it began to be identified as a relevant component of the country's social and political transformation. In this paper we argue that cooperative relations were based on common goals and positive interchanges that generated social capital. One way of capturing these interactions is to conceive them as institutional arrangements that enabled a major or minor influence of the CAS in the social realm.

V. Cooperative relations between the government and civil associations

As was the case with other Latin American countries, in Mexico during the last decades of the 20th century, there were changes that restricted the role of the state as a major agent in welfare provision. The government's interest in encouraging the concurrence of other individual and collective agents in responsibilities so far assumed by the public sector became evident then, and this tendency was accompanied by restrictions in social expenses and the privatization of various services. All of this had an impact on the commercialization of public goods and caused repercussions in social and political activism by groups interested in democratizing the country; these effects gradually spread to the public sphere. Meanwhile, the government set into motion decentralization strategies for state and municipal social programs that involved the participation of new social agents. In addition to favouring market freedom, these tendencies contributed to positioning civil associations as a sector with incidence in the integration of social demands. Nowadays, CAS participation in social welfare is an assumption generally included in government programs; however, its specific modalities and the means to establish coordinated action are not clear, and hence its intervention in social programs is limited.

Rafael Reygadas has pointed out that modern Mexican civil organizations were born in the 1960s, and they were linked to social and popular movements that propelled the creation of citizen networks which, even though not strong, did give them public visibility (Reygadas, 2004: 189). Sara Gordon relates their emergence to political changes linked to a great differentiation of the political system and she stresses the importance of corporate relations weakening and the government's inability to attend social demands in their emergence (Gordon, 1997). These movements forced a rearrangement of their relations with the state, which were reflected in an increased number of associations, the rise of new ways of association and the creation of public entities and dependencies that had the purpose to incorporate citizen participation in public

programs.¹¹ Amongst the processes that favoured such rearrangements was the state retreating from some functions, electoral plurality, and the acceptance of other agents taking charge of functions so far confined at the state.

1. Common goals and the position of the state in welfare provision.

As we mentioned before, civil associations and their collaboration with the government in social welfare activities were already present during the decades of 1960 and 1970, but wasn't until the 80's when a significant increase was registered in the number of associations and they started to be perceived as a sector. Some of them even started to create networks to address issues related to health, human rights and local development among others. Fernanda Somuano (2011) points out that the first national associations networks emerged by the end of the 80's and beginnings of the 90's, greatly enhanced by the government's decision to modify the fiscal regime that benefited them. Legal dispositions treated non-profit organizations as companies, which was perceived as threat for philanthropic and development projects.¹² It can be said that, up till then, collaboration between the government and the associations had been inserted in a fiscal benefit plan as a way of solidarity towards the poorest which, as compensation, had to be acknowledged by the government. This balance in the relations was maintained until 1989, when the government applied various reforms to the tax system by which all civil associations turned into income tax contributors. These reforms –abolished in 1993, served as a basis for associations to start developing new normative frames in their relations with the government, thus opening the door to more horizontal and respectful relations. As a consequence, the debate about civil associations' participation in welfare matters increased during those years, mainly regarding two topics: the government's incapability to address social demands, and the associations' autonomy.

In spite of the disagreements between government-civil associations relations at the end of the 80's, there were some convergence points, which did in fact propel the multiplication of associations. These points can be understood as common goals like the redirection of social policy, the search for government legitimacy, the need to alleviate vulnerability and poverty, the demands for

¹¹ Data provided by the System of Information on Civil Society Organizations (Sistema de Información sobre Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil, SIOS), Indesol and Metropolitan Autonomous University (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana) indicate that 51% of civil associations in existence since 2000 were constituted during the last decade of the 20th century (Indesol, 2002).

¹² We refer to the changes made by the House of Representatives (*Cámara de Diputados*) to the Annual or Periodic Amendments to the Tax Law (*Miscelánea Fiscal*) in December 1989, which considered civil associations to be income tax causative. Up to that moment, regarding tax matters civil associations were restricted by Fraction VI in Article 70 of the Law on Income Tax, which excused them from paying taxes on that matter and also on assets, thus turning them into non-taxpaying legal entities (Reygadas, 1998:158). Rafael Reygadas and Fernanda Somuano agree that this measure was the trigger of the articulation processes of civil associations' networks (Reygadas, 1998; Somuano, 2011).

democratization and greater participation in public life, and also the changes in the resources distribution channels for welfare provision. Thus, we can see that common goals do not reflect the interests of a particular sector, either state or associations, but rather they constitute agreements that enable the creation of commitments between the agents, which can be coordinated for specific purposes, even if they differ in their methods or if their purposes are not exactly aligned.

Other phases of interests' convergence in this period can be explained by exogenous factors: the grown importance of civil associations around the world and the recommendations from international organisms to include them in the public policies and development strategies. The movement is justified by the transformation of some countries in power relations between governments and citizens, which allowed for the introduction of other agents.

At the beginning of the 1960's a significant change had been registered in the relations and civil associations were not seeking just to target vulnerable groups or groups in poverty, neither just being only intermediaries with the state; they were trying to work with the government in the development of social projects. This change became evident in 1995 during the National Citizen Associations Congress, (*Encuentro Nacional de organizaciones Ciudadanas*) when over 600 associations got together to create a proposal for a Citizen Rights Act that included a demand to give associations with an objective focused on social development, a regulatory frame that allowed for their recognition as public interest entities. Another demand was the capability to participate in the design, execution and evaluation of public policies and respect towards their ways of organization and representation.¹³ One of the transformations in the relations was that associations turned more self-managed and they gained a very important role in promoting public policies. They went from being a restricted, dependant and influenced by the state sector, to be seen as more independent, plural, autonomous and capable of promoting its own projects.

Other testimonies (Reygadas, 2004) believe that the relations between government and civil associations were ambiguous. On one hand, the ruling of Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) promoted the creation of civil associations that could receive official support as part of the National Solidarity Program (*Programa Nacional de Solidaridad*, PRONASOL), but on the other, such measures were considered to discourage autonomous associations' collaboration. In the same sense, during Ernesto Zedillo's administration there were restrictions for the intervention of civil associations with critics opposed to government policies, and these were accompanied by questions about their

¹³ Citizen Rights Act (*Carta de los Derechos Ciudadanos*, 1995) proposed to Mexican society by citizen associations participating in the National Congress.

representativeness; nonetheless, they were summoned to participate more in social programs). In spite of the ambiguities, the beginning of the 1990's was a period of encouragement for the associations' participation that, even when it was not clearly marked by cooperation, did bring a shift in the positions held by the sectors until then.

Regarding the government's position, there were efforts to open spaces for the association's participation, and in them it was possible to create dependencies (directions, consulting councils, boards), which were designed to promote links with the CAS and its intervention in social projects. One of the relevant actions was the ability to channel public resources to associations that developed or advised projects on community welfare, which strengthened cohesion and social capital. One those steps was the Social Co-investment Fund (*Fondo de Coinversión Social*), created in 1993, which was created with the expressed objective of promoting the development of the associative sector for third party beneficiaries. Also, in 1995, the National Development Plan acknowledged the importance of civil associations' participation in public policies, pointing out they could be qualified consulters in their creation as well as in their instrumentation and evaluation (Canto, 2004: 5).

Other of the relevant actions was the establishment in 1995 of the National Institute for Social Development (*Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Social, INDESOL*). This entity was commissioned to promote social development activities with the participation of civil society associations. During the same year, INDESOL took management of the Social Co-investment Fund and, in 2006 it was transformed into a social program, which was used to channel public resources to associations that developed or advised community welfare projects, which strengthened cohesion and social capital.¹⁴ There have been an increasing number of resources directed by this program to projects developed by social organizations, and the government discourse repeated the importance of counting on the cooperation of civil associations to achieve national development.¹⁵ Cooperative relations are enhanced due to the government delivering financing to the associations for social projects, but the associations must invest economic and other types of resources as well. Both parties are also expected to invite other agents to participate. This program is currently the public policy strategy that distributes funds to most of the associations.

¹⁴ According to the operation rules, the specific objectives of the Social Co-investment Program are to strengthen social agents, to promote and widen the creation of social capital and to promote and defend the rights of the target population, as well as strengthen social and human development public policies by generating knowledge.

¹⁵ The amount of resources this program has destined to projects developed by social organizations has increased substantially. From 2000 to 2006 alone, the budget went from 127.70 to 337.30 million pesos, while the number of projects receiving financial support went from 877 to 1167. Sources: Indesol, PCS results report corresponding to 2001 and UAM Indesol: Result evaluation of social co-investment Program 2008 (Indesol, 2010).

It should be noted that, even when a number of cooperative links could be established as a direct and urgent response, generated by social problems, some others would correspond to the shift in the state's responsibilities towards welfare, as it is inserted in decentralization public policies, a movement associated to the government's expectations to reduce social expense.

If we take into account that change is possible when innovating agents conciliate new rules and patterns with other institutional agents (who defend existing rules and institutions) and those new rules and patterns are accepted, we can then say that change is dependant on the coalitions agents are able to establish. The agents' relative power is of great importance, as they are capable to assemble a coalition needed to change or defend current institutional arrangements. Also, it is necessary to make it clear that coalitions must be formed between those who benefit from prevalent rules and those who do not (Mahoney y Thelen, 2007: 29). Due to these reasons, new cooperative relations were created as the number of civil associations increased, and once these could be identified as a sector that could be a negotiator with the government in order to achieve certain social goals.¹⁶

This discussion is useful to help us distinguish between CAS participation in social projects from the previous stages and cooperative relations among sectors, since, in spite of the existence of diverse concepts and classifications of citizen participation; they all start from the balance in power agents can exercise in decision-making, as well as in resource planning and control. Because of this, intersectorial cooperation was possible when it was also possible to talk about autonomy and more horizontal, equalitarian relations. One indicator of the changes in the positions about cooperation is that most resources for CAS financing come from individual donations and, in second place, from public funds; this also shows the importance of cooperative relations.¹⁷

A significant advance for collaboration with associations was the formulation, in February 2004, of the "Federal Law for the Promotion of Activities performed by Civil Society Organizations", which established the conditions for cooperation between the public sector and the CAS, as well as the

¹⁶ The designations note the great conflict implied in associations hoisting values or principles that other groups of citizens oppose, and the way in which civil associations operate within a context of cultural conflict in which values and institutions of the establishment are opposed to new values (Olvera, 2004: 40).

¹⁷ Data from the Analytical report of the CIVICUS Index of Mexican Civil Associations ("Informe analítico del Índice CIVICUS de la Sociedad Civil de México -2020") indicate that 23.38% of CAS financing comes from individual donors; 22%, from government; 21.77% from national companies and sources; 8.22% from sale of services; 5.58 % from foreign donors; 4% from affiliation quotes and an 8% corresponds to non-specified resources. Also, The CIVICUS Index performs a relatively high general assessment (65.9%) of the sub-dimension of financial and technological resources for Mexican CAS, which can mean greater CAS autonomy (CEMEFI, 2011: 35).

acknowledgement of the associations as public interest entities with the right to receive donations, tax prerogatives and access to public funds and resources. This law also introduces mechanisms for the registry of associations, which have allowed us to have a better knowledge about their numbers, their location, and their activities with the use of a registry code identified by the abbreviation CLUNI, (Civil Society Organizations Federal Registry Unique Code).¹⁸

The dynamics of the cooperative links shows how important the role of the state is to secure participation rights for the citizens in the public sphere and to generate welfare, which means cooperative cycles somehow constrain or widen according to the structure of rights and the welfare provision modalities of the state.

¹⁸ The action areas included in that law for civil associations are: civic areas, social assistance, support for popular nutrition, legal assistance, gender equality enhancement, support for the disabled, cooperation for community development, human rights defence and promotion, sports promotion, sanitary and health-care services, environmental issues, and support for education, culture, the arts, science and technology, popular economy and citizen protection (art. 5°)

TABLE 1

COOPERATIVE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE STATE AND MEXICAN CIVIL ASSOCIATIONS 20th CENTURY	
COMMON GOALS	POSITIVE INTERCHANGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state’s role as dominant agent in welfare provision is restricted • Government and civil associations share an interest in giving incentives for the involvement of other agents in public responsibilities. • Restricted social expense and service privatization. • Groups interested in the country’s democratization doing social and political activism. • Civil associations get stronger agency • Social development activities are promoted through citizen participation. • Civil associations gained access to public funds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A normative frame for social participation of the organized groups is established. • Public resources for welfare are provided through civil associations. • There is collaboration between private entrepreneurs and the state. • Rise of socially responsible enterprises. • Non-profit organizations grow and diversify.

In addition, and maybe more important, collaboration was brought about between entrepreneurs and government. On one hand, strategies were focused on changes for which the state could allow the entrepreneurial sector a wider intervention in public responsibilities; on the other, from a previously inexistent perspective which did not consider the state as a restrictive power for business enterprises, it was perceived as way of strengthening the sector through improved regulatory frames and collaboration incentives. As pointed out by Matilde Luna (2012), during the first decade of the 21st century, the Mexican business sector found a new area of action in the social realm through different associative entities such as foundations, civil associations, analysis and information organisms, citizen observatories, agreements, etc. Such entities have created multiple

organizations with business participation, some of them with significant international links. In their respective fields of action, many organizations of this kind have had an important role in the design, implementation and follow-up of public policies, as well as in producing norms, providing information, promoting attitudes and values among the citizens and creating public action networks both local and international.

The interest on the characteristics and development of non-government and organizations and the non-profit sector also spread to the realm of academic research, as proved by the creation of programs and institutions focusing on these areas, and the rise of surveys that allowed for the record and characterization of Mexican civil associations. There were also contributions on the development of different social movements and civil associations' networks that have had influence on the country's democratization.

2. Positive interchanges articulating cooperation

Cooperative relations are then framed by coordinate operation agreements and normative precepts that enable public resources management. But there is also progress in the association's commitments, and these can be seen in the acceptance of coordination mechanisms, which before, were estimate as invasive for their autonomy. In this sense, it is possible to understand the notion of positive interchanges which sustain cooperative relations such as social approval and prestige. In this interaction, the sectors involved are under pressure to correspond to what is given and obtained from the relation.

Cooperative relations are not bilateral, but multilateral. The state action influence cooperative relations in two principal ways: first, it provides security and incentives for the interaction between different agents, thus creating the conditions that make cooperation possible; second, government agents establish relational links with the organizations they provide with incentives and benefits from which they get profits and contributions either in money or in service provision. Inasmuch as such agents operate within the rules guaranteeing transparency, integrity and respect, the possibilities for cooperation increase (Cook, Hardin y Levi, 2005). In the civil sphere, the willingness of social organizations' agents to participate in a normative field is fundamental.

In contemporary reconfiguration of cooperative relations, the sector of civil association developed an interest in specializing for addressing specific problems, making of projects, getting training to manage public resources, participate in accountability activities and getting recognition for their work. This new position marked the passage from contrary and even government-opposed organizations, to autonomous organizations seeking to fill in a space in the public sphere.

These transformations can also be observed in the organizations' growth. On this matter, some sources register their multiplication by four in over a decade; they went from two thousand in 1995 to just above ten thousand in 2008 and 11,226 in 2012¹⁹. Other sources (Castro, 2003; García *et al.*, 2009) even indicate there were 35,000 non-profit organizations in 2008, 7,080 of which were authorized donees, which means they were allowed to receive tax-deductible donations.²⁰ In turn, the "CIVICUS, Civil Society Index Report for Mexico" (2010) estimates the existence of between 20,000 and 35,000 organizations.

There are also data testifying that in 2008, 23% of the organizations (8,063) were able to receive public resources, having obtained their official registry code, CLUNI, from INDESOL.²¹ Also the economic census for 2009 indicates the existence of 40,089 non-profit establishments in Mexico, including civil associations and organizations, private assistance institutions, foundations, unions, clubs, colleges and universities, among others (INEGI, 2011:59). The differences across these data can be explained not only by the lack of a unique civil associations' registry, but also by the diversity of criteria used to classify the very heterogeneous entities that form the sector. It is clear then that the data recorded about the non-profit sector are not enough to locate the growth of civil associations dedicated to welfare-provision which could be potential agents in cooperative relations, but they allow us to notice the growth of civil society participation in the public field.

Even though positive changes are not only marked by the designation of public resources, the dimensions of this contribution are indeed very important when considering the CAS effectiveness and its impact on the dimensions and the non-profit institutions' weight in the National Accounts System. Data indicate that, regarding national economy, non-profit private sector has a 0.74% share in the generation of national GDP. Also, if we include the estimated value of unpaid voluntary work, their contribution to the GDP would be of 0.89%; that is, one of every one hundred pesos

¹⁹ Data from: Non-profit Organizations Directory of the Mexican Centre for Philanthropy. (*Directorio de Organizaciones No lucrativas del Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía*), (CEMEFI, 2010).

²⁰ According to Mexican Fiscal Law, institutions registered as "authorized donees" receive tax-deductible donations. As a confirmation of civil associations growth in Mexico, from the 1990s on, Consuelo Castro (2003) indicates that the number of authorised donees in the country multiplied in those years, as it went from 1,426 in 1995 to 5,932 in 2002. Also, 67% of the associations operating under that category in 2002 were welfare organizations. When examining this tendency to increase, Sergio García *et al.* (2009: 34) identifies 1,991 authorised donees in 1991 and then 7,080 in 2008.

²¹ Source: Statistical Record of the Mexican Centre for Philanthropy (Registro Estadístico del Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía, CEMEFI) (García *et al.*, 2009: 30).

produced in a year would correspond to civil associations (INEGI, 2011:55).²² It is implied that, as part of that universe, CAS obtained economic benefits that gave them sustainability; these generated goods, services and job opportunities and they had a positive impact on society. They also used public resources in their management and were co-participants in the execution of strategies destined to provide welfare.

Another indicator which is more adequate to mark the positive relations interchange between the state and civil society is the “Social Co-investment Program” which, as mentioned before, is the strategy channelling most public resources to associations.²³ As pointed out by their objectives, the program’s aim is to contribute to opportunity equality by strengthening those associations executing projects to address the needs of social groups suffering from poverty, exclusion, marginalization, gender inequality or social vulnerability. The program currently finances around 1,605 projects every year across the 32 federal entities with resources that have shown a gradual increase since 1993, when the program was established.²⁴ Other benefits of cooperative interchange are seen as social capital, both for the organizations and for those benefited by its actions; recent evaluations of the program show it as a strategy that provides institutional strength to the associations and generates benefits for their targeted population, while generating social capital between its member and beneficiaries by creating networks with other social agents where information and support is interchanged and social cohesion is enhanced (Soloaga, 2010).²⁵

For us, it is important to stress that the government gets as many benefits as do the CAS: government gets information, authority, and the capability to channel the civil agents’ efforts towards actions that generate governance. Associations acquire importance, resources and prestige while they generate goods and services for their targeted beneficiaries.

One notable change was the diversification of associative forms, since the traditional private assistance institutions and the union and corporate organizations were soon joined by other ways of

²² The National Accounts System defines “Non-profit organizations” as legal or social entities created with the purpose of producing services or goods, but with a status that not allow them to be a source of income, benefits or other financial profits for themselves (INEGI, 2011).

²³ This is a social fund; it is also an on-demand program that addresses the needs detected by the CAS (Leal, Tapia and Verduzco, 2010). The assignation procedure consists in giving resources to the associations so that they can fulfil the projects designed and executed by them.

²⁴ Between 2003 and 2010, the program went from a budget of 223.2 million pesos, to one of 409.4 million pesos. (INDESOL, 2010, Programa de Coinversión Social)

²⁵ In this evaluation “social capital” concept is used to refer to an organization’s social resources that increase welfare for their members and beneficiaries. By “social resources” we understand aspects such as trust, norms, reciprocity, solidarity and networks; these elements rest in the social structure where benefits are produced (Soloaga, 2010).

participation such as civil associations, social movements, cooperatives, socially responsible enterprises, round-up programs and community foundations.²⁶ In spite of this expansion, certain weakness can still be seen in the sector, mainly when it comes to its conformation in other countries. Regarding this, Michael Layton (2006, 170), points out that “if we compared the data provided by the National Survey on Philanthropy and Civil Associations (Encuesta Nacional de Filantropía y Sociedad Civil, ENAFI) performed in Chile in 2005, we will see that in that country there are 50 associations for every 10 thousand inhabitants, while in México there is only one organization for the same number of inhabitants. Also, with the exemption of the Federal District, no state in the republic has even one association for every 10,000 inhabitants”.

It is important to know that when it comes to federal entities, there have been interesting experiences regarding cooperation between state governments and civil associations. A particularly special case in that one of Chihuahua, where it was, even possible, to capture and channel tax resources towards the CAS.

Recounting the benefits of interchanging relations between the state and the CAS does not mean that cooperative relations between sectors are now optimal or at least good, since it was not our intention to evaluate the cooperation, but rather, to notice the points of convergence that make it possible.

²⁶ Cooperatives are forms of solidary association that, in terms of social economy, are non-profit, even though they do have economic activity, they provide services for their associates and to third parties by exemption; cooperatives do not have much presence in Mexico, where cooperatives were linked to corporate entities associated with political groups through cooperative associations. Socially responsible companies assume business models seeking to integrate economic growth to social development through public policies directed to responsible competitively, sustainable development and society’s life quality improvement (Stolar, 2009). In Mexico, organisms such as the Mexican Centre for Philanthropy (Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía, CEMEFI), the Employers Association of the Mexican Republic, (Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana, COPARMEX), the Business Coordination Council, (Consejo Coordinador Empresarial, CCE) and the Alliance for Business Social Responsibility, (Alianza para la Responsabilidad Social Empresarial, ALIARSE) are in charge of seeing that companies assume these principles, and they grant distinctions to companies with that kind of initiatives. In 2005, Mexico entered the World Pact of the UN to promote a new business culture that’s based on socially responsible ethical principles.

TABLE 2

POSSITIVE INTERCHANGES SUPPORTED BY COLLECTIVE ACTION COMMITMENTS CAS CONTRIBUTIONS TO COOPERATIVE RELATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participation of civil associations in the design and development of public policies. It allows the execution of public policy strategies focused on selected groups, the redistribution of resources and the incidence in the decision-making process.• Promotion of subjects, needs and social preferences turning them into priorities in the government's agenda.• Generating paid work opportunities and profits of unpaid voluntary work towards public interests.• Transparency, accountability and scrutiny in the public sector.• Strengthening social tissue and promoting citizen participation in service provision.• Governability and governance.• Registry of non-profit associations working in the country.• Philanthropic associations go from being donees to being investors.

Examining the expansive and restrictive cycles of the associations' participation in the country's social and political life, we can identify the difficulties implied by the legal and fiscal regime for the cooperative relations between the government and the CAS, due to the tributary prescriptions establishing a less than favourable context for the promotion of a solidary culture. The government does not always consider the associations as contributors to the governability of the country due to their strengthening social tissue, promoting citizen participation and granting services for unprotected sector of the population. Also, the function fulfilled by these associative forms is seen suspiciously. This means that one of the key factors for the establishment and consolidation of cooperative relations depends on a favourable environment that enables the flows of resources that, without being necessarily material, do support coordinated action.

TABLE 3

POSSITIVE INTERCHANGES SUPPORTED BY COLLECTIVE ACTION COMMITMENTS BENEFITS FOR THE CAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Governability and governance.• Registry of non-profit organization working in the country.• Diversification of associative entities.• Benefits in the shape of subsidies, donations and tax exemptions.• Co-participation in public policies execution.• Resources for projects relevant for the associations.• Employment and self-employment opportunities for their members.• Influence on their social context.• Resources and goods for their social objectives.• Social capital for the associations' agency• Support for the associations' maintenance and continuity.• Social acknowledgement and prestige.

In the final outcome of the interchanges it can be seen that there are direct and indirect social returns, these influence governance aspirations; cooperative relations directly benefit those agents involved and they have a repercussion in the public space and interests. The brief recount we have presented on the development of cooperative relations between the state and the civil associations in Mexico help us identify some indicators of the problems and challenges affecting our country in terms of incentives and obstacles for intersectorial cooperation. The starting point is the existence of an unequal society where welfare-provision resources are scarce.

V. Obstacles and incentives for the cooperation between the state and the civil associations

If we look closely at the obstacles faced by the cooperative efforts, the first one is the difference in perspectives between the sectors about the meaning of cooperation. The second one is the scarce acknowledgment that the state has made of the solidary sector as a social and political agent. These differences have consequences in the government's strategies that keep the social sector working in

minor areas that cannot be addressed by the public sector.²⁷ A explanation for this position can be found in the permanence of corporate and clientelistic relations between the state and the civil sector that have not encouraged the establishment of links with organizations which possess more capability for autonomy.²⁸

Another difficulty lies on the lack of shared agreements about what should be done to address social problems or stimulate development. The “development” concept has different connotations among the multiple agents involved in public policies; whereas for some it means economic growth, others stress the need to widen productive capabilities; some other the purpose of elevating human development indexes and the increase of liberties and capacities. On one hand, these different concepts can be translated into divergent efforts depending on which sector or group hoists them; on the other hand, there is a lack of a regulatory frame that enables the cohesion of the civil society sector.

In the same sense, the extended image of civil associations as an area of conflictive interests, where there cannot be agreements, common values and trust, is a barrier to establish cooperative links; that vision makes collective action difficult and affects the convening power around projects promoted by civil groups.²⁹ The negative perception is also extended to the dimensions of the impact on social problems and public policies. At this point, the findings of the Civicus Civil Society Index are relevant as they show how external and internal agents consider the civil society sector does not have a substantial influence in the Mexican social context (CEMEFI, 2011: 48). This perception is based on real problems that have affected the sector’s performance and which should be solved through clear accountability processes.

Following the intention to make a profile of these obstacles, we identify that the main problem in cooperative relations is the sectors’ autonomy. A repeated demand of the civil groups has been to keep distant from coercive pressures that impose guidelines for their acts or that have incidence on

²⁷ The state’s negative perception of cooperation is reflected in some documents that constitute the normative frame for the functioning of the associations and their control mechanisms. The negative perception of the civil associations is registered in manifestos and declarations hostile towards government control. It must be noted that these different perceptions are supported on the kind of corporate and clientelistic relations there have been between the state and the corporate groups.

²⁸ Amongst these capabilities there is the availability of self-government for the civil associations that provide them with financing resources and open the possibility to make decisions beyond the interests of agents unrelated with them. Exercising autonomy also implies the capability to capture resources that allow them to face the pressures of commercialization of the services they were providing. These elements restricted the client-based and political use of their activities by political agents.

²⁹ One of the aspects that affect distrust is the cultural diversity of the country, as well as the different interpretations emerging from the values promoted by the CAS. Other relevant factors are the insufficient accountability and the perception, among the own CAS, of frequent cases of corruption amongst them (CEMEFI, 2011:41).

the control of their interventions. In face at this conflict, the debate on the possibilities of cooperation will be greatly focused on questioning whether the action fields of the sectors most keep separated, since one intervention on the other is seen like an invasion or a dominance act, not as collaboration. In this context it is possible that potential cooperation could only be realised if the competence and regulation spheres are kept apart, if the cooperative projects are temporary and they respond to concrete goals. Finally, our analysis stresses that the great obstacle for cooperation has been, and will continue to be, lack of trust, which feeds from the absence of institutional frames that generate certainty.

Regarding incentives, one of the major challenges is to create public policy strategies that promote intersectorial connections, and amongst those of great relevance, the creation of a so far inexistent regulatory frame that can make cooperation possible. Results provided by some studies show that the existence of clear norms is fundamental to achieve major cooperation and also to solve many of the problems posed by collective actions (Ostrom and Ahn, 2003). Norms that enable trust are also fundamental for cooperation relations involving altruist, non-profit actions.

Amongst the important incentives to establish cooperative links we find economic and social benefits that can be obtained through cooperation, particularly those involving profits by providing services and social benefits. We also consider that there are potential costs and risks in cooperating. Because of this, the incentive consists in the costs share being inferior to the projects' benefits. When estimating such benefits, it is essential that government and society acknowledge, support, and make explicit the contribution of the social sector, and also that they evaluate and give account of the relational and social benefits their intervention causes. This also means that the benefits must be perceived as governance and legitimization incentives for government involvement. Other incentives would be the knowledge production and the experience acquisition for the design and execution of development projects, which the participants can get as assets to consolidate a social capital of profitable investment for their professional performance, just as for acquiring legitimacy, leadership, prestige and social recognition. Belonging to cooperative networks and organizations with a greater social influence and the links with organisms that support cooperation is another way of widening capacitation and successful experiences transference.

From all of the above we can conclude that the forces moving the expansion or constriction of the civil associations sector and, in consequence, the greater cooperation, do not come only from that sector, but also from the state's strategies to reach their own legitimacy, fulfil its functions and solve the problems. As a consequence, even when it is true that a better performance of the

organizations depends on the strengthening of their structures, some of its key support elements are the incentives provided by the society and the government.

The discussion about the barriers and the incentives for cooperation is an important issue for the analysis of the problems affecting the development of Latin America, where the civil society struggled permanently to preserve its autonomy, seeking to maintain organizational forms that allow the possibility to decide on its own affairs, but also where it is restricted by its limited financial capacities, and also presents great heterogeneity in its capability for organization and mobilization.

Final Thoughts

As a result of the profile outlined for the cooperative relations between the state and the sector of civil associations in Mexico, it is observed that in the last few decades there have been changes in the way civil groups fit into society and, as consequence, on the way in which they participate in political processes. This has conditioned the extension and form of their cooperative relations with the state. Also, cooperative relations can be considered as a component and a result of the governance plans. However, after going through the labyrinth of cooperation, we should not have the impression that the serious problems countries face as a result of financial crises can be approached with simple and fraternal solutions inviting to cooperation.

The discussion about cooperative relations regarding the Mexican context in this paper, do not allow us to appreciate what happens in local spaces, where interactions can be positively or negatively built with different intensity on very different assumptions that require examination from other angles. Also, generalizing the development of cooperative forms does not allow us to appreciate the influence that lines established by the government may have over local contexts to enhance or restrict cooperation between the governments and the CAS.

Among the questions derived from the analysis, there is one open to think, whether in the case of Mexico cooperative relations, it is present a distortion leading the CAS to fulfil a role of political functionality closer to cooperative and clientelistic patterns than to the autonomy of associations and its co-responsible intervention in public interest matters. Other area for reflection is the one regarding non-cooperation, a field that could be wider that the one we have analysed here. We highlight the need to develop research studies focused on disagreements marked by situations in which both the state and the CAS have chosen not to cooperate.

Given the critical situation of our country nowadays, it is necessary for each of the sectors to reorganize in order to solve the upcoming problems. And along with this sector reorganization, the country needs to create public policy projects that take into consideration the strengthening and repositioning of the solidary sector in accordance with the new governance and social coordination tendencies. From this perspective, we can conclude that governments cannot generate all the social capital that is required to achieve development, and that civil associations sector have the potential to promote a more active citizenship; we infer that intersectorial cooperation can be a desirable strategy.

On that path we can see that without access to autonomous associative forms able to express our opinions and values, we will have a very limited capacity to cooperate or to have any influence in political processes. In the process to strengthen such capacities it is advisable to take into account that an essential condition to increase cooperation is understand the associative sector heterogeneity. Civil associations require separate connection, promotion and regulatory plans; that is, cooperation proposals that establish different responsibilities and obligations frames, according to what's more convenient for them and for the public interest. With these references, the expectation of cooperation presents a difficult panorama, and for this reason it is essential to take into account that, in addition to the associations' willingness to participate, there must be strong incentives that make cooperation attractive, as well as the elimination of the existent barriers that oppose cooperative efforts.

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