

Complementarity of Cuban Civil Society's Projects

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In order for it to be possible for our nation to move towards democracy and respect for human rights, we must all necessarily and individually embrace and see the values, concepts and attitudes implicit in these ideas in each and every member of civil society that exists, but is currently and officially unacknowledged.

That totalitarianism we must overcome must impose a singular perspective of things in order to survive. This view goes hand and hand with ensuring that individuals do not participate in public policy, expect everything to come down from up above, and “pay attention and participate” only in the resulting official project. Officialdom must consider anything that challenges it or impedes its actions as malignant.

We must undergo a liberating self-transformation, so we can stop being a mass. In other words, we must stop being individuals who do not consciously, actively, responsibly participate in society, who uncritically follows the orders of the group of people in power, and become free and responsible social actors in an independent civil society.

Despite complaints by some of its recipients, the pervasive indoctrination in our

educational system, and other, officialist, educational influences, are inadequate for preparing us to become actors in said civil society.

Those who would take on the role of fully functioning citizens are faced with problematic issues such as having intolerance towards others, lacking an ability to engage in constructive dialogue, doggedly following our training instead of using individual creativity, a loss of values that have been internationally validated by socialism's pseudoethics—one in which there is a double standard, which really means there is no morality whatsoever.

The abovementioned self-transformations would guarantee that groups and institutions within an independent, civil society would be more efficient and have greater social impact, which they would not be able to do if they kept looking for characteristics of socialism's “New Man”—like fanaticism, dual morality or apathy—in its members. These characteristics only make it possible to be free of problems and not lose privileges in our society.

A most general conceptualization of democracy as a possible way for citizens to freely participate in decision-making that affects

everyone, as well as internationally accepted notions concerning human rights, are what make up the ideological foundation most supported by actors in a contestatory civil society. It is also what makes it possible for diverse actors to interact constructively against totalitarianism, a force that nullifies diversity in order to survive, and also suffers because of it, because it constitutes its greatest weakness.

To give preference to respecting human rights over ideological considerations, party politics and all other differentiators would make it possible for diverse projects to complement one another, and potentially strengthen Cuban civil society by increasing its social impact and own internal cohesion.

I am going to analyze three projects in Cuban civil society that are not officially recognized by the government, but whose methodological complementarity in their efforts against the inexcusable, monopolizing or totalitarian competence that results as a symptom of it anomia—the one and only, officially acknowledged project that it has been mandatory to follow for more than half a century.

Even if disloyal competence is habitual among monopolies and totalitarian regimes, in their efforts to increase their spheres of influence, earnings and other individual benefits, or those of the interest groups at the top, analogous actions in civil society's struggle to transform the nation are sources of weakness.

The diversity found among those civil actors, in their interests, tastes and preferences, should be taken into account when weaving the fabric of that very same civil society, in order to make it possible for its actors to choose to participate in any of these projects without fearing being criticized or doubted by their colleagues, and as evidence of their truly democratic character.

In chronological order, the very first campaign for a civil society was “Por una Cuba Martiana” [For a Martí Cuba], which was started in mid-2008 with a presentation to official institutions of a 10-point petition. Its objective is to “arrange a nation-building project through participation, a project that would represent consensus, determine what changes would inspire diverse citizens to responsibly and actively collaborate.” The campaign's founding document contained three minimum but essential requirements for the design of this nation-building project and its application:

1) That the changes pursue “a solution to the population's problems, which jeopardize the nation's future, and not limit itself to being satisfied with an ideological, party or any other kind of ideological model foreign to our own roots.”

2) “To base itself upon, take as a given, and pursue total human rights for all Cubans, whether they live abroad or are in Cuba.”

3) To cause the emergence of democratic institutions to take the place of our current ones, which are too centralized, vertically structured, and hierarchically subordinated to the group in power, and only serve to communicate the decisions of the same, ensure that its orders are complied with, and those expressed by popular will.”

The ten points referred to are:

1. Agriculture
2. Housing
3. Public transit
4. Self-employment and small businesses. An informal market and economic crime.
5. Education
6. Workers' rights
7. No too excessive centralization
8. A Constitution and powers

9. Justice and lawfulness/legality
10. “No more political prisoners or exiles...”

The distribution and verbal consent that is found among the actors in our civil society—more than 2,000 citizens—shows a clear tendency to arrive at consensus about this proposed points. A survey conducted between March 10th and April 10th, 2011, with about 220 citizens from the Provinces of Havana and Artemisa also revealed a pronounced tendency towards consensus. The slow progress of this campaign and other collateral actions has been determined by a lack of resources to be able to take it all over the country, and a need for more actors as survey administrators.

The greatest intention is for the survey administrators to motivate the general population to continuously present these petitions at all levels of their official institutions, with an emphasis on meetings where Delegates from the People’s Assembly have to account for their actions and their results. The hope is that this will stimulate debate and cause more and more citizens to express their demands to the authorities.

The “Nuevo País” project is another interesting initiative. It was started in 2011, as an exercise in teaching and employing deliberative democracy. It did so while posing to everyday citizens the question of what should be done to get the country out of its now, 20-year crisis, which is worsening. Multiple actors in our civil society hold consultative sessions either at home or social action locations, and invite citizens of varying opinions and origins to participate. They write their proposals on how to improve national life on a piece of paper, and are free to either identify or not identify themselves.

The project uses historically significant dates to determine when it will have meetings, and changes meeting locations as a way to decrease the chances of being repressed. The government fears large gatherings, particularly of people who are disaffected with it, or resistant to its impositions. The results are processed by a coordinating group, which makes public the results when the time is right.

Another citizens’ project—“Por otra Cuba” [For A Different Cuba]—began in mid-2012. Its first phase involved disseminating the content and purpose of the United Nations’ international human rights pacts. After divulging them to citizens, they invited them to sign a petition whose intended recipient was the Cuban government, and asked that the Cuban chancellery actually endorse and sign pacts, as it announced it would in December 2007. The documents were signed in February 2008, but the process has yet to be completed. The measure’s initial proponents have come to realize that certain legal requirements were not met when the signatures were being collected, but also deeply value the incredibly moral substance contained within a demand supported by thousands of citizens.

The above-described, three projects have in common that they believe in giving precedence to consulting the government’s leaders regarding what paths should be followed to get the country beyond its crisis and propel it towards modernity, thus eliminating the fear and poverty in which it has submerged its inhabitants. The projects may have this in common, but their methodologies are different. Even so, they are valid in all instances, and not redundant, but rather complementary, instead. This complementarity suggests a need to support all these projects in the same way

combatants help each other using different weapons.

Citizens should be made aware of the advantages of complementarity, when they are invited to support or participate in one of them, to counteract the fatigue that comes with gathering all those signatures and making all those invitations to people to participate in earlier projects that have not yielded results measurable by common people. Yet, this does not mean that they have not yielded positive results, too.

Complementarity's advantages can be obtained only by abandoning the unthinking habit of supporting proposals not for their content, but because of the people who propose them. It is time to support ideas, programs, strategies and objectives according to their viability and social impact, for their potential to complement other civil projects and actions already underway.

What follows is an example from the experience of a civil activist who leads a group in Cuba. We take the precaution of not identifying him because of the very problem we are trying to combat. This person leads the citizen project "Por otra Cuba," but did not allow the organization he represents to design a protocol for endorsing or supporting the Petition (to the U.N.) from the yet to be recognized Groups and Institutions of Civil Society. Among the demands in this Petition is one for the Cuban government to complete what its needs to do to endorse and sign the Human Rights international pacts.

How to explain this obvious contradiction, if not by accepting that the project is supported because of who is advocating for it, and not because of its contents or objectives? This brother forgot that the Apostle [José Martí] taught us that when one sets forth an argument, its lack of merit is not revealed by who the person who promotes it is, but rather because he is found to be wrong.

Beyond the idea associated with vertical structures of order and leadership—the notion that there needs to be a specific leader or group to unite independent, civil society—we should consider the principle of complementarity in diversity. It makes union possible through action that unites diversity into horizontal, coordinating structures more in keeping with the essence of a legitimate civil society.

This could be decisive for the structuring of a civil society that includes a unique and unifying, total diversity, to show all its actors and the part of the population that interacts with them the benefits derived from accepting the principle of complementarity, and the evil that comes about when it is ignored or violated.

The Cuba that is dreamt and shared by different projects indistinctly called "Cuba Martiana," "Nuevo País" or "Por Otra Cuba" is in fact national unity's alma mater. It can be achieved through dialogue, shared strategies, coordinated actions, and the creation and development of projects that complement each other, and don't oppose or exclude one another.