'NGOization': From Activism to Advocacy

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Since the 1990s, the perception and work of NGOs has begun to shift. Driven both by external and internal pressures, these organizations have increasingly been plunged into a process of 'NGOization'. NGOization is a trend in the structural construction of NGOs that produces a shift from horizontal and broad organizations to more vertical and professionalized roles (Lang 2012, p. 73). NGOs have moved from "engaging with" to "talking about" social and political concerns (Lang 2012, p. 91). This trend is found both in democratic societies as well as in areas undergoing processes of democratic development, although with different intensity depending on the historical context of each society (Mojab 2009, p. 105-110), and is often motivated by large funding from international organizations (Lang 2012, p. 73). The aim of this article is to look at the concept of NGOization, how it has been constructed, what the trend implies for NGOs, as well as its main consequences and criticisms. Lastly, it will explore the process of NGOization in the particular case of women's organizations in Turkey.

It is necessary to clarify that NGOs and civil society are not interchangeable concepts, even though they are sometimes difficult to separate. As Feldman points out, in many cases civil society might have interests or demands that are not to be found in NGOs. Additionally, there may be relations of contradictory directions, with civil society working through more bottom-up relations and NGOs often engaging in top-down ones. Lastly, the relationship between NGOs and the State is increasingly intense and solid. Promoted by the current neoliberal system, NGOs are beginning to become part of this power structure. Such rapprochement and links lead to a closer alignment of NGOs' demands and work with institutional power. In short, NGOs become political actors embedded in the established system (Feldman 1997, p.62-64).

Different authors have proposed different frameworks for analyzing the main variables influencing the trend of NGOization, although they all share some common variables. For Choudhry and Kapoor (2013, p. 5), the most influential factors are professionalization, institutionalization, depoliticization and demobilization, while for Lang (2012, p. 75), the key change variables are professionalization, institutionalization and bureaucratization. Based on the ideas extracted from the authors, and after reviewing selected literature on the subject, this article will examine some of these variables and shared trends, with a focus on institutionalization and professionalization, as these are the ones that the literature has considered to be the most relevant. This article will also examine some relevant trends, namely the shift from activism to advocacy, the still perceived altruism and the emerging elitism (Lang 2012, Ungsuchaval 2016, Morris & Goldsworthy 2008, Skrentny 2003).

As underlined by the above-mentioned authors, there is a substantial focus on the processes of professionalization and institutionalization of NGOs. The first of these processes is highly related to the adaptation of the members and of the NGO itself to the language of public policy; a trend that is occurring with increasing intensity and speed. In order to see its evolution, it is useful to observe the tax declarations and employee structures in these organisations. With regards to the process of institutionalization, it can occur in three directions: through its organizational structure, through the policy opportunities offered, such as consultancy, and through increased porosity among members who migrate from working in NGOs to working in formal political institutions (Lang 2012, p. 73). Overall, the trend of NGOization produces a closer proximity between NGOs and the State, with NGOs ceasing to be external subjects and becoming actors in the official decision-making process (Ungsuchaval 2016, p. 29).

In addition to these main variables, NGOization leads to observable structural change processes in the organization.

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Some of these important novelties are: increased individualization of power and authority, creation of structured legislative frameworks, increased control over cooperation, growth in instrumentalization of relationships, adoption of a more competitive perspective in staff recruitment, creation of salaries, hierarchical structure and division of labour (Lang 2012, p. 67). The NGO begins to focus on specific results and funds, rather than on ethics or shared values, becoming more technocratic in its ethos. In order to survive and achieve positive political influence and access to funds, NGOs become "colonised by governmental ways of doing business" (Harwood & Creighton 2009, p. 19).

Moving to the main trends, one of the main consequences of the NGOization process is the shift from activism to advocacy. The main differences between these two trends are based on a more result-oriented and less multidisciplinary activity, as well as a shift in the shape of mobilization, with greater collaboration with authorities (Paternotte 2016, p. 3). Another effect of NGOization is the "perceived altruism" that continues to be associated with NGOs. Historically, NGOs have been perceived as highly moral and altruistic, but, with the process of NGOization, there is a turning point from "commitment to a particular issue" to instead merely "talking about that particular issue" (Morris & Goldsworthy 2008, p. 125-126). Finally, the elitism that comes with the process of NGOization has been widely criticized, as it leads to greater professionalization and institutionalization for the survival of the NGO. In democratically developing countries, "civic oligarchies" are created (Henderson 2003, p. 9), leading to a detachment from the beneficiaries and the social base of the movement (Ungsuchaval, 2016, p. 4). The resulting elitism creates greater difficulties for the beneficiaries and the social base to actively participate and raise their demands, as the networks or oligarchies established tend to be more and more private and exclusive.

Therefore, the process of NGOization has a number of major implications for the work of NGOs. The existence of institutional actors that support social change from within is fundamental for it to take place (Skrentny 2003, p. 269). However, and as we have seen, the consequences of entering the institutional sphere affect the structure of the organisation, its internal formation and perspectives of external action, more focused on particular results and funds. This ends up negatively affecting the social base and the qualitative impact of the work (Ungsuchaval 2016, p. 10), while increasing the complexity and elitism of participation and demands.

In order to look at the process of NGOization and ground the analysis, the particular case of women's organisations in Turkey and the main criticisms they are facing will be examined. In Turkey, the decade of the 1990s saw a rapid growth in the number of women's organisations and a high institutionalization of the feminist movement. This process of NGOization of Turkish feminism through project-based feminism has led to the emergence of a number of internal criticisms (Keysan 2019, p. 54-58). Turkish NGOs are receiving extensive support from the EU, among others, by granting them large financial support and encouraging the execution of a number of projects. Similarly, these organisations enjoyed great support from the government during the AKP's first decade in power (2002-2012), a period during which the government became increasingly active and supportive of a large number of organizations and civil society participation (Keysan 2019, p. 85).

Project-based feminism has led to an increase in the number of women participants and broadened the target groups. However, there has been a shift from active militancy to advocacy, causing the political elements and character of feminism to be diluted among the projects. Similarly, many organisations are primarily driven by issues of economic profit, missing the fundamental point of the fight for women's rights (Diner & Toktaş 2010, p. 54-55). Finally, the high educational and cultural level required to write these projects causes a division between an elite that presents and manages projects, and a grassroots that participates in them (Coşar & Onbaşi 2008, p. 340). In the Turkish context, this is particularly the case in projects for Kurdish women, where the feminist militancy of this group has a wide background (Diner & Toktaş 2010, p. 56).

In conclusion, the NGOization trend, now occurring on a global scale, even if with different degrees depending on the country and the type of organisation, has reshaped the paradigm of social action and its translation into political changes. Professionalization, institutionalization, bureaucratization, depoliticization and demobilization have led to structural changes in the way social demands are perceived and elaborated, leading to a shift from activism to advocacy in the way in which mobilizations are developed and responses are given to society's concerns. All in all, it is crucial to observe and analyze this process, because NGOs have a fundamental role to play in making society's demands be heard. Therefore, we need to reassess their work in order to prevent their increasing links with the

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existing political establishment, so that they can continue to be a vehicle for social demands and real change.

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