

# NGO'S AND HUMAN RIGHTS HOW LEADERSHIP BECOME A DRIVING FORCE FOR CHANGE IN NGO'S FOR PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN MEXICO

JOSÉ ANDRÉS CAMINO DE VILLA\*

## Resumen

En el ámbito de la realidad social actual en México, presentaré de manera esquemática un esbozo de la historia reciente acerca de las organizaciones no-gubernamentales (ONG), tanto en el ámbito global como en nuestro país, tomando en cuenta su evolución histórica desde hace tres décadas hasta nuestros días. Asimismo, se establecerá un vínculo entre el rol llevado a cabo por las ONG's y la variable de "liderazgo", ya que se partirá de la conjetura de que el "liderazgo" ha sido una causa importante para generar una consciencia social en materia de promoción de Derechos Humanos en México.

Con el propósito de desarrollar el planteamiento citado, considero importante resaltar el rol que los líderes de las ONG mexicanas han desempeñado para la creación de capital social, así como su participación en la construcción de una "cultura cívica" de tipo participativa, especialmente en las áreas urbanas del país. Por último, el autor de esta ponencia, presentará un esbozo de proyecto relacionado con el tema, ya que el objetivo último del Seminario Lasallista (Beauvais, Francia) consiste en fomentar el perfil de liderazgo de sus participantes, para de esta manera, emprender una serie de actividades coordinadas en beneficio de la comunidad.

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\* Licenciado en Relaciones Internacionales por la Universidad Iberoamericana, Maestro en Estudios Europeos por el *College of Europe* (Brujas, Bélgica) y Catedrático de la Facultad de Derecho de la Universidad La Salle (México).

## Summary

In the framework of the current social reality in Mexico, I will present a brief history of NGO's at global level as well as their background in Mexico, including its historical evolution since three decades ago to the current times. Then, I will set up a link between the role of NGO's and the variable of leadership with the purpose to establish their importance as a driving force for change in the promotion of Human Rights in Mexico.

In order to explain this phenomenon, it is of our interest to state the role that NGO's leaders have played in the creation of "social capital" as well as their participation in the construction of a participative "civic culture", especially in urban areas. For the purpose of the future project, I consider important to emphasize to shed light about the role of NGO's as well as their leaders with the purpose to let know community concerning their achievements in the referred subject.

### I. Definition

For the purpose of this presentation, it is of our interest to give a broad definition of NGO's; thus, we are going to consider what it is commonly the so-called "Third Sector", taking into account these organizations of social character, civil society, religious and the "Institutions for Private Assistance" (IAP).

However, and with the purpose to provide a more precise definition, we are going to understand that non-governmental organizations are usually meant "voluntary and open (non-secret) associations of individuals outside of the formal state apparatus (central and local governments, police and armed forces, legislative and judicial bodies, etc.) that are neither for profit nor engage in political activities as their primary objective".<sup>1</sup>

### II. A general overview of NGO's

NGO's constitutes a postulation of Americanized Global Culture because according to Tocqueville, one of the principal characteristics of American Democracy was the existence of "private associations", most of them are "voluntary associations" which constitutes a key to the functioning of the American Nation, and according to him, they were at the heart of democratic civilization. Another important idea was that an organization for a

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<sup>1</sup> Akira Iriye. "A Century of NGOs", in: *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Summer 1999), Blackwell Publishers, Malden, MA, p. 422.

common object is taken up.<sup>2</sup> They played an important role for the development of public opinion, at first in the United States; then in the International Order.

Following the above-referred argument, it is possible to state that after 1<sup>st</sup> World War, the rise of IGO's (Intergovernmental Organizations) and NGO's (Non-governmental Organizations)<sup>3</sup> had constituted a reaction against the traditional system of interstate relations. The objective was to build new institutions that can evolve to a more just international world order. In this point, I consider of my interest to enshrine this phenomenon in the theoretical background of "democratic idealism" as well as the "interdependence networks" configuration.

The second wave for NGO's was given during 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Some of them had at aim to participate in the rescue of victims of war as well as other kind of projects, like economic improvement of poor countries, technical and scientific assistance and humanitarian activities. Nevertheless, some organizations have gotten more academic purposes and attended development cooperation issues. Therefore, we can stress the origin of Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation during 1930's.

Another perspective about the same reality is that NGO's can be seen as part of the so-called "American Cultural Diplomacy",<sup>4</sup> where global community is a long-term (and desirable) objective, especially during "Cold War" period. The main idea of the referred way of thinking consisted in developing an "international community of interdependence, freedom, communication and reciprocity, therefore, it implies the sense of inherent limits, acceptance of mutual rules and restraints and common responsibility of standards of conduct".<sup>5</sup> This paradigm will be in parallel according to what Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye will denominate "International Regimes".

Considering the following period (1950-1970), the objectives of NGO's were re-orientated: it took origin the anti-nuclear movement, the apparition of international women's organizations and others which pursued the deco-

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 422-423.

<sup>3</sup> When we speak about IGO's (Intergovernmental Organizations) we are referring about those that nowadays constitute the so-called International System (The League of Nations, then UN; the OAS, EU, African Union, etc.). The IGO's are conformed by nation-states and they respond to their interests. However, NGO's are non-conformed by states; they are conformed and represent civilian interests. For the purpose of this presentation we are going to focus on NGO's.

<sup>4</sup> Cultural Diplomacy can be defined as "the initiation or facilitation of the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether they promote national interests, build relationships or enhance socio-cultural understanding". Definition provided by the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (online): [http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en\\_culturaldiplomacy](http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy) (29.06.12).

<sup>5</sup> Akira Iriye, *op. cit.*, p. 427.

lization and independence of African and Asian states. The afore-mentioned NGO's were focused on demographic and developmental projects.

During the 1970's and 1980's, some NGO's were working in cultural exchange and communication projects. It has been justified in the framework of industrial democracies to which they became a necessity for both the Dialogue East-West and that of Developed-Developing Nations. They can be enclosed in the Liberal developmentalism and they are manifested through educational, intellectual and professional exchanges.

Furthermore, some scholars assume that organized civil society is not opposed (but complementary) to the role and sources of power of the State, it means, that whereas State power is "effective" ("Hard Power"), NGO's provide a kind of moral and cultural power ("Soft Power"). Due to the principle of associationism has took –in origin- place in the U.S., it may be assumed, that it constitutes another kind of manifestation of American (Cultural) Hegemony during 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

TABLE 1: DIFFERENTIATION RELATING GLOBAL VISION STATE / NGO'S

State	NGO's
Traditional power	Cultural / moral power
"Hard power"	"Soft Power"
National power	Interdependence among nations

Source: Personal Compilation.

Nowadays, NGO's Agenda had become more sophisticated, because they started to work with more sensitive subjects, like preservation of wildlife, protection of environment, promotion of interracial justice and protection of human rights.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the developing nations, it can also be included the topic of democratization. Taking into account this constructive role of organizations as well as their positive consequences relating the promotion of values and attitudes, it is of our interest to introduce the role they have played in the concrete case of Mexico.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 434.

### III. The NGO's in Mexico

Although NGO's in Mexico has been existed along 20<sup>th</sup> Century, they have extended since the decade of 80's, especially after the earthquake that took place in 1985 in Mexico City. Due to the non-expected weakness of local authority and political institutions, it appears some citizen's movements encouraged to help the victims. In addition to the referred organizations, they were basically concerned for economic and social issues; however, the uprising of the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas (1994) derived in the rise of new movements and coalitions. They were looking for have stronger influence in electoral issues because they pretended that the first step for "participative democracy" should be preceded by "electoral democracy".<sup>7</sup>

In this framework, between the purposes of NGO in Mexico, they look to contribute where government cannot deploy its repertoire of functions: social programs, development of indigenous communities, financing rural sector as well as single and middle enterprises, etc. Furthermore, human rights protection and promotion of democracy are also important activities that Mexican NGO's have been carried out since the 1970's, when political system had not been liberalized yet.

Concerning the socio-economic origin of their members, we found the fusion of mainly three sources:

- **Religious:** From 1960's to 1980's, there was in splendor the movement of Theology for the Liberation, promoted by the progressive sector of Catholic Church. They have made the Ecclesiastic Communities for the Basis in poor areas of the country and became the first precedent of NGO's in the country.
- **Academics/Jurists:** During 1980's, there were organized some institutions by the referred people in order to promote legal assistance for the Defense of Human Rights, mainly in benefit for political prosecuted people, imprisoned and against repression and political violence carried out by authorities. In some cases, they have collaborated with political opposition with the purpose to fight for the institutional transformation (liberalization) of the country.
- **Activists:** Some politicians and members of leftist movements have preferred to organize NGO's with social purposes, especially if their organizations or political parties were illegal. This phenomenon was usual from 1960 to 1990 and after the referred period their members

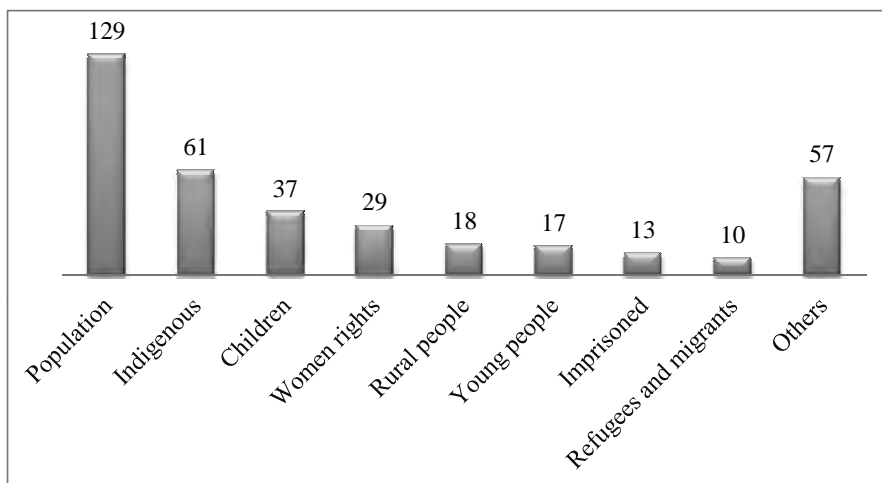
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<sup>7</sup> Sergio Aguayo and Luz Paula Parra, *Las Organizaciones No Gubernamentales de Derechos Humanos en México: entre la democracia participativa y la electoral*, Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos, México, D.F., 1997, p. 17.

usually opt to leave their organizations at the moment of political reforms and they preferred to participate in framework of the institutions of the political system.

Another important feature for NGO's consist in the fact that most of their participant people have come from Middle Class. Nowadays, they are able to participate in the process of decision-making outside the traditional sources of power (government, political parties, legislative branches, etc.), in addition that some of their leaders decide to participate in public agencies, responsible for the control of governmental performance as well as in their public policies. Some examples of this consist in the leaders who decided to participate in the *National Commission for Human Rights* (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, CNDH), the *Federal Institute for the Transparency and the Access for the Information* (Instituto Federal de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información Pública, IFAI) and the *Electoral Federal Institute* (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE).

TABLE 2: TARGETED PEOPLE BY NGO'S IN MEXICO  
(IN NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS)



SOURCE: Personal compilation based on interviews realized to 250 NGO leaders in Human Rights. The total amount of NGO does arrive to 371, because some of them have two or more targeted populations. In: Sergio Aguayo and Luz Paula Parra (1997, 21).

In the framework of information expressed in Table 1, it is possible to appreciate that it is difficult to find a priority sector for them. Whereas, the majority is concentrated in the needings of general population, it is possible to appreciate that some of them, prefer to attend indigenous, children and

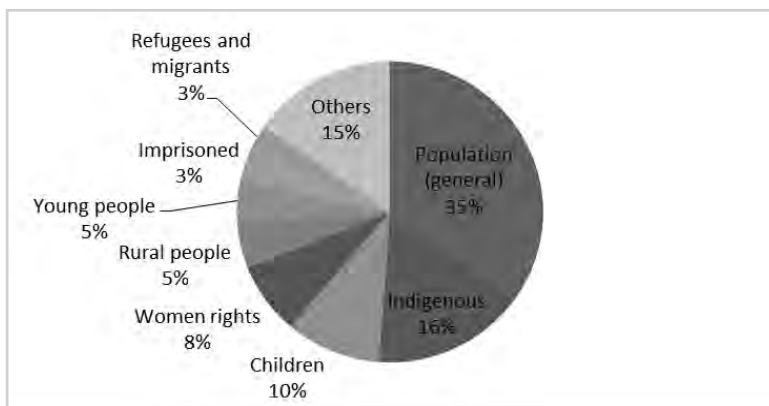
women rights. Taking into account this information it is of our interest to mention the most representative NGO's in the country.

**Principal NGO's and coalitions since the beginning of the democratization process in México**

1. "Eureka" (Committee for the Defense of Imprisoned, Prosecuted, Disappeared and Political Exiled).
2. Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía (Mexican Center for Philanthropy).
3. Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos (Mexican Academy for Human Rights).
4. Center for Human Rights "Fray Francisco de Vitoria".
5. Center for Human Rights "Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez".
6. Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de las Casas".
7. Center for Human Rights of San Luis Potosí.
8. Alianza Cívica (coalition of NGO's with electoral purposes).

Following the population sectors that are attended by the most representative organizations in Mexico, it is possible to infer that the referred orientation has a positive correlation with the priorities of their leaders. This point should be studied in the next section.

TABLE 3: TARGETED PEOPLE FOR NGO'S IN MEXICO (IN %).



SOURCE: Personal compilation with information provided by Mexican Academy for Human Rights (Aguayo, 1997, 21).

## IV. How to define a leader in relation with an NGO

The concept of leadership could be studied since different perspectives. Starting with an individualistic point of view, it is possible to distinguish between a “natural leadership” and “institutional leadership”. Taking into account the point of view of Guadalupe Olivar (2003),<sup>8</sup> “natural leadership” means *leadership without power*; therefore, it is implied that leaders should convince others and transmit trust and confidence. Likewise, “institutional leadership” is part of the organizational theory that should not be excluded since leader cannot be successful without the logic of the organizations, it means, the NGO.

In the referred framework, we cannot forget another kind of features that may possible the symbiosis between “leader” and “organization” that can become effective the “leadership” and success the tasks thereby proposed. Thus, we can state the following characteristics:

1. Strategic planning and management.
2. Proper physical and ecological environmental.
3. Self-fulfilling and self-awareness for life.
4. Self-sustainability for long term.<sup>9</sup>

Summarizing the points stated above, these elements can be translated in “symbolic power” (Bourdieu, 1998), which natural consequence is that leader is part not only of corporate image of NGO but their personal ones, both for its members and outside the organization. That image is conformed both by his self-esteem and creativity, as well as in conjunction with his personal skills and theoretical background. He must have the skill to solve conflicts as well as to work with efficacy and efficiency, relating organization.

Moving to our study, and according to Loaeza (2008), it is necessary to build networks among NGO’s in Mexico where their leaders can develop links of confidence and identification. Another important feature concerning the first leaders of Mexican NGO’s should be settled in the framework that they were “outside” (and sometimes “against”) the political power (authorities).

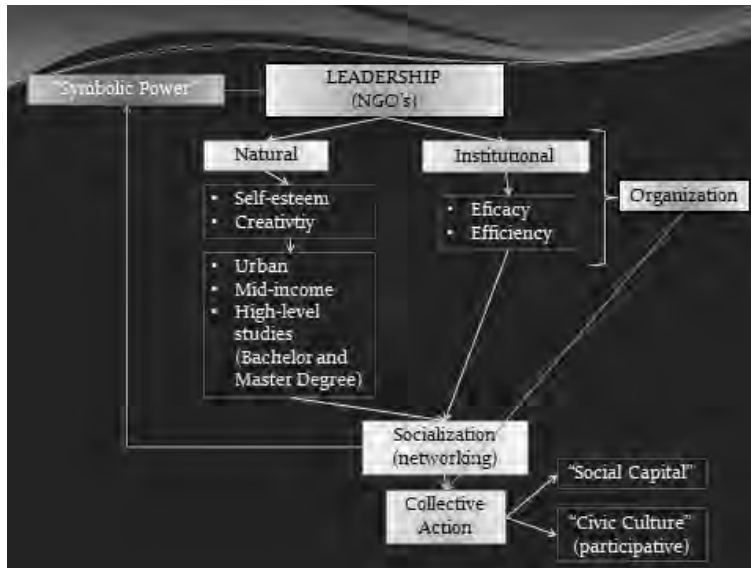
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<sup>8</sup> Guadalupe Olivar H., *Capacitación de líderes en las organizaciones no gubernamentales con fines filantrópicos en una cultura para la paz y los derechos humanos*, PhD. Tesis, ULSA, México D.F., 2003, p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.



TABLE 4: LEADERSHIP IN NGO'S



SOURCE: Personal Compilation.

In addition, it is important to state the personal path-dependencies of the former leaders: they were mostly urban, mid-income people, with high level studies (Bachelor Degree and/or Master Degree) and they were committed with a whole variety of social causes (including immigrants, indigenous, women rights, etc.). Normally, they tend to work in a context outside the neighborhood (in a difference relating the US society), and finally, they adopt different positions at the moment of democratic transition (Mexican Presidential Election-2000).

During the current period (since 1990's to nowadays), some of the leaders have preferred to maintain their traditional causes (mainly activists), outside the government; others (basically academics and loyalists) accepted to participate among the official sectors linking government and civil society (attorney, ombudsman, etc.), whereas a minority profited the opportunities to enter into the power making decision process (official posts, deputies, members of political parties, etc.).

However, in order to exert an effective leadership inside NGO's, we should take into account the patterns for collective action, as well as the citizenship organization. Thus, citizenship organization has become in an invaluable tool for influencing and pressing governments. The mechanism works to the variable of socialization and the conquest of symbolic space

(Bourdieu, 1998). The argument states that “collective memory” about cooperation derives in the elimination of loneliness feeling assuming that individual needs to interact each other. Furthermore, we have found that cooperative networks permit to work for public goods and common interests, as well as the referred logic allows individuals to trust “the other”.<sup>10</sup>

**Attitudes for leadership:**

1. Self-esteem.
2. Open minded.
3. Prospective vision.
4. Self-respect and respect for the others.
5. Compromise with justice.
6. Ecological worriedness.<sup>11</sup>

## **V. Influence of Leadership: towards the building of Social Capital and Participative Civic Culture**

According to Robert Putnam (2011), “social capital” can be defined as “the features/characteristics of social life (rules, norms and confidence relationships) which allow individuals to act together with more effectiveness for getting common objectives”.<sup>12</sup> In this framework, the theory of social capital mentions that the phenomenon of associationism tends to establish networks with strong horizontal interactions. Therefore, when we have a high density of the referred networks it is foreseen that citizens will push for more mutual benefits.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, we can complement the previous definition with another one, where we can state that “social capital” is considered “the variable that measures social collaboration among different groups of a human collective, and about the individual use of opportunities thereby arisen, taking into account three sources: mutual confidence, effective norms and social networks”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ma. Fernanda Somuano, *Sociedad Civil Organizada y Democracia en México*, El Colegio de México, México D.F., 2011, p. 64.

<sup>11</sup> Guadalupe Olivar H, *Capacitación de líderes en las organizaciones no gubernamentales con fines filantrópicos en una cultura para la paz y los derechos humanos*, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>12</sup> Ma. Fernanda Somuano, *Sociedad Civil Organizada y Democracia en México*, op. cit., p. 133.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> “Capital social”, en Wikipedia, la enciclopedia libre (en línea): [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital\\_social\\_\(sociolog%C3%ADa\)](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital_social_(sociolog%C3%ADa)) (26/6/12).

The above mentioned paragraph goes in parallel to the concept of *Civic Culture*. Therefore, we consider that a proper leadership in NGO's help in building mutual confidence, firstable among their members, and then, with the targeted people (indigenous, poor people, single mothers, etc.). Mutual confidence can be measured by the following dimensions: particular confidence (among family and neighbors), generalized confidence (through the "unknown people") and confidence for institutions.

When people trust institutions, it works in a self-reinforcing process where effective norms are reflected through the institutional confidence, as well as institutional confidence is helpful for reinforcing norms.

Finally, the establishing of social networks is natural consequence of NGO's activity; then networking is consequence of socialization, and socialization foreseen to broadening not only objectives, but also resources and collective action patterns for organized civil society.

A democratic society needs a strong civil society, which is the consequence of proliferation of NGO's generating a positive correlation. When the referred correlation is sat up, it means a transformation of perceptions and values of citizenship, increasing tolerance, dialogue and pluralism inside a society. The referred features consist in a participative *Civic Culture*.

For the effect to explain the evolution of *Civic Culture* in Mexico, we will talk about the basic features of this classification. According to Almond and Verba (1963), there are three categories of *Civic Culture*: parochial, subordinated and participative civic culture. After looking for democratic transition in Mexico that took place in 2000, we can observe that NGO's leaders had contributed to the consolidation of social capital (especially in what it refers the volunteer job), as well as to appreciate a partial evolution from a subordinated civic culture to a participative civic culture in urban areas. It can be demonstrated into a proliferation of communitarian organizations, participation levels in the framework of electoral process, as well as criticism from the citizens to the authorities in office. In this framework, from 371 NGO's that were working in 1997 (Aguayo, 1997), there were increased to a 6267 organizations in 2008 (Mexican Center for Philanthropy, 2008).

## **VI. Current matters**

Following the arguments mentioned above, leadership in NGO's have to face a series of challenges in order to consolidate their contribution during the last three decades in the country. However, must of the matters concern the institutional issues for establish non-governmental organizations in the country in addition to the personal skills and influence that they exert,

both inside and outside the organizations. Some of the principal current constrains are the following:

1. **Law:** Nowadays Mexican law foresees the existence of Private Assistance Institutions because this is the legal framework for NGO's. In this framework, their activities are free of charge relating taxes. However, Mexican Ministry of Finance is still reluctant to register NGO's in their database. For consequence, non-registered NGO's cannot be benefited of taxes exemptions.
2. **Financing:** Most of the NGO's are supported either by government or by external support. In addition to material sources, NGO's need human resources well qualified for accomplishing tasks. It implies no only technical/professional skill but also psychological maturity for the challenges occurred during critical moments.<sup>15</sup>
3. **Organization:** It implies to design a proper planning, execution and evaluation of the programs carried out by the NGO.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, they cannot subsist with mostly "volunteer" workers.
4. **Coordination with other NGO's and public institutions:** It is important in the framework of conforming NGO's networks. Sometimes, NGO's do not cooperate each other for the competitive environment relating funding; tax regimes, ideological matters, as well as targeting population, due to sometimes the environmental conditions are limited for a determined kind of organizations, excluding the others.
5. **Decision-making process:** The fact to get a proper leadership in the framework of NGO's imply not only skillful human resources, it should consider the fact how to delegate and de-centralize decision making process,<sup>17</sup> as well as to find collaboration with public institutions (governments) and if possible, with private sector. In the same line, to clarify tasks and responsibility areas among leaders, collaborators and volunteers should determine de viability of long terms projects carried out by the organizations.

## VII. Conclusions

As it was stated in the first section, one precondition for the rise of NGO's is an environment where democratic attitudes have been allowed at the society level. They mean self-confidence and the fact to trust one each other, both at private and public level.

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<sup>15</sup> Borja Vivanco, *Cultura y técnicas de gestión en las ONG*, Ed. CCS, Alcalá, Madrid, 2009 p. 101.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

According to some political scientists –like Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba- and sociologists –like Pierre Bourdieu-, the above referred attitudes should be reflected through the concepts of “Participative Civic Culture” and “Social Capital”, which they can measure the level of progress of different civil societies around the world outside the traditional political structures, it means, the government, political parties, public agencies and so on.

Therefore, the American political tradition has allowed a mature civil society which tends to facilitate its organization in communitarian groups, churches and another kind of NGO's. After their success both inside the U.S. and overseas, the referred experience has been extended to the other continents with different degree of achievement.

In Mexico and Latin America, NGO's have been evolved in a softer way relating this of the U.S. because of their subordinated civic culture and their weak social capital because of their historical experience as well as their authoritarian regime. However, Catholic Church as well as some activists and jurists had been promoted since the beginnings of the 80's, the first group of national NGO's against political governmental repression as well as for the promotion of transition to democracy.

As a last approach what it can be said is the fact that there were necessary both external influence (at socio-cultural level) in conjunction to a weak (but existing) civil society in the framework of an authoritarian regime for the effect that a series of social movements (some of them with the aim to promote both human rights and democratization causes) can evolve into a network of NGO's in Mexico. The other countries of Latin America have been evolved almost in the same way.

However, NGO's are not still consolidated as a social reality. They now depend too much both on their leaders as well as on their limited resources (some of them provided by the State) because of a tax regime which does not help them as well as a lack of awareness for many people in the countryside. As parenthesis in this explanation, we should do a remark stating that most of NGO's are located in the capital and the other big Mexican cities, with the exception of the State of Chiapas with a lot of indigenous populations.

Therefore, the future of NGO's in Mexico (and other countries) should depend in the extent that their leaders should maintain its compromise with human rights causes (both in its political, social and economic definitions) as well as in their possibility to follow a proper strategy for being self-sufficient, it means a proper capacity for performing their own projects with their own economic and human resources.

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