Activism, Artivism and Beyond

Inspiring initiatives of civic power
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One of the key activities of The Spindle, the innovation programme of Partos, is to monitor and highlight trends and new developments on key themes such as inclusion, civic power, new ways of cooperation and data.

Activism, Artivism and Beyond is the first publication in The Spindle Monitor series about civic power.
All cultures around the world have their own stories about the epic struggles of individuals and civil society groups seeking freedom and change. These struggles are a reaction to the multiple forms of oppression and repression that have existed since the earliest documented human history. Throughout the ages people have joined forces to protect public good, make the world more fair, free, and equal, and oppose those who want to keep resources and power in the hands of the few. And, although much time has passed, this has not changed. What has changed are both the forms of restriction, in terms of the mechanisms and tactics used, and the ways in which people circumvent these restrictions. This particularly applies to the civic space – the arena in which people choose their own way of life, express their opinions and participate in society. CIVICUS, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, in its annual State of Civil Society Report for 2017, warns that in more than 100 countries around the world the space for civil society is shrinking. It extensively documents the threats to civil society, including restrictive legislation, financial constraints, smear campaigns, and even assassinations. At the same time, many countervailing actions are being taken. Much can be learnt from these often creative and surprising initiatives. And that is what this report is about.

Partos, the Dutch membership body for development organisations, is dedicated to supporting civil society to better harness civic space and to exert its creative power for the public good. Together with our members and the Partos Civic Space Platform, we seek to warn of threats to civic space and reinforce solidarity and supportive action. Through Partos’ innovation programme, The Spindle, we focus on identifying and analysing new trends and approaches in activism by civil society and, where possible, we develop new ideas and tools. This report, Activists, Artivists and Beyond: Inspiring initiatives of civic power, we hope to help fuel this change.

To conclude this preface, we would like to thank all those who contributed to this project. We dedicate this report to those people with fire in their belly, who decide to stand up for something. It is their passion and persistence that forms the basis of society’s resilience and ignites change for a better world. With Activists, Artivists and Beyond: Inspiring initiatives of civic power, we hope to help fuel this change.

Bart Romijn
Director, Partos

8 The Standing March
10 Introducing civic space
12 Artivism: when art meets action
16 Case: Apollonia against Pinochet
18 Mobilizing global knowledge
22 Case: Climate Crowd
24 Relax, it says McDonalds
28 Case: Barsik the cat
30 Unmask the Corrupt
34 Case: Transparency International
36 Virtual uprising
40 Case: #GirlsAtDhabas
42 Teaching what matters
46 Case: Love Matters
48 Performing civic power
52 Case: Flo6x8
54 Building safety
58 Case: IM-Defensoras
60 Activism, artivism and the need to go beyond
62 Barriers to civic action
68 Definitions
70 References
**The Standing March**

The French protest ban

On 13 November 2015, Paris fell victim to a series of gruesome terrorist attacks. Suicide bombers and mass shootings by a number of gunmen left 130 dead and another 368 wounded. That same evening, president Francois Hollande, who was earlier evacuated from the Stade de France, closed France’s borders and declared a state of national emergency. These security measures, which have been extended until at least July 2017, have given French authorities exceptional powers, including the right to prohibit mass gatherings, severely constraining the public’s freedom of expression.

The March

Standing March – known as COP21 – took place in Paris. This event was of major importance, because, for the first time in over 20 years of UN negotiations, world leaders aimed to achieve a universal, legally-binding climate agreement (the Paris Climate Agreement). Given the importance of the meeting, massive protests had been planned by environmental groups. However, due to the ongoing state of emergency, French authorities forbade all mass gatherings, severely constraining the public’s freedom of expression.

Representing humanity

Despite this protest ban, many people found creative ways to make their voices heard. On 29 November 2015, at the start of COP21, people passing by the Assemblée Nationale building in the heart of Paris were stunned. Staring back at them were the faces of over 500 people from all over the world, projected on the building’s massive façade. The video projection – titled ‘The Standing March’ – was created by renowned French artist JR and Brooklyn-based film director Darren Aronofsky. These ‘artivists’ used their skill and creativity to protest when protestation not only from passers-by in the streets, but also from people all over the world.

On the Standing March website, JR explains the power of his work: “For security reasons, marches are forbidden in Paris. But our art piece is a silent march. We are marching, backed by the Assemblée Nationale, the heart of the French democracy”. So, even though people were not allowed to be physically present, JR and Aronofsky managed to make a clear statement to the 25,000 officials gathered for the COP21. “It symbolizes that people are watching, and everyone on this building, and everyone in the world is watching to see what our diplomats do”, explained Aronofsky.

After its initial showing on the Assemblée Nationale, the art piece was project at different locations throughout Paris during the conference, including the Louvre, the Pantheon, and the Bibliothèque Sainte Genevieve. Thus, the piece itself marched through the city and, thanks to social media, attracted attention not only from passers-by in the streets, but also from people all over the world.

Whether because of fear of terrorist attacks, anti-terrorism legislation, repressive regimes or cultural norms, all around the world people find themselves in situations where their right to protest is restricted. What the Standing March shows is that human creativity, and art in particular, goes a long way to circumventing such restrictions. And, although many individuals, grass-roots groups and civil society organizations (CSOs) may not have the means to produce their own massive video projection, if we take a closer look at what makes the Standing March so effective, other forms of protest art could be created that would have a similar effect.

The Standing March transformed a well-known public space – in this case the building of the French National Assembly – into something completely different: a piece of art. By addressing an issue on the minds of a broad audience (the COP21) and depicting a big crowd of people in a place where mass protests are not allowed, the Standing March not only challenged authorities, but also conveyed a message about societal resilience. This example, like all the examples contained in this report, shows that people cannot be easily silenced and, with collective energy and power, will always find a way to claim their rightful space to be heard.
Introducing civic space

The shrinking civic space

For many decades, opportunities for people to express their opinions, choose their preferred way of life and participate in politics have been expanding. Think of the formal establishment of a range of civil rights and liberties, the advance of democracy, and the ever-growing access to information. However, waves of democratization tend to be answered by counter-waves of restriction, in which democratic values are challenged and the civic space limited.

Around the world, human rights are violated, government accountability jeopardized, people silenced, and organizations shut down on a regular basis. These developments are by no means a new phenomenon, nor are they limited to the Global South. Civic freedoms have also been challenged in the Global North, in democracies that are generally thought of as open and free. Each year CIVICUS’s State of Civil Society Report provides a clear insight into these trends. In its latest report in 2017, CIVICUS concluded that the civic space has been substantially restricted in more than 100 countries and in all regions of the world. The threats to civic space have taken a multitude of forms, including legislation restricting the rights and freedoms of CSOs; bans on public demonstrations; smear campaigns and verbal attacks; the detention, disappearance and even assassination of activists; and restrictions on online freedom of expression and access to information.

While the shrinking of civic space is cause for serious concern, in reality people often find innovative ways to circumvent the most daunting obstacles. The Standing March, and the many other examples described in the following chapters, bear testimony to this fact. The energy and creativity present in civil society warrants hope and optimism. Thanks to the Internet and social media, people today are more aware of the rights abuses happening around the world. Combined with the endless possibilities for connecting with one another, this awareness is fuelling a global counter current of activism, solidarity and defiance. People are recognizing the importance of an open society and (online) communities are showing great preparedness to defend the rights and freedoms associated with this.

Types of restrictions

The structures, actors and measures that restrict civic space are highly varied, are not always easy to identify, can have paradoxical outcomes, and are continuously evolving. Yet, as this report illustrates, people are inventive and adaptable, which means that shifts in power relations or new forms of restriction are quickly matched by innovative civic action. Across the globe, people are taking innovative and proactive steps to defend and expand their civic space. This report seeks to draw attention to these initiatives and celebrate the creative people behind them. Drawing on their contagious energy, it aims to foster mutual learning, generate solidarity and inspire all who seek to reclaim lost spaces, make better use of existing spaces, or explore new spaces for civic action.

This report aims to monitor civil society’s actions and tactics and celebrate their creative and spirited initiatives. Eight types of tactics for (or instruments of) civic action are explored: visual arts, crowdsourcing, humour and public shaming, transparency and fact-checking, social media, education, music, dance and theatre, and protection. Each chapter explores one of these tactics, including its purpose and various forms, as well as examples. Thereafter, one example of each tactic is described in detail to illustrate its power in practice.

Civic space is the arena within which civil society can function. Its boundaries are defined by three fundamental rights: the right to association, the right to peaceful assembly, and the right to freedom of expression.

More on civic space and other definitions can be found on page 68.
Artivism: when art meets action
Visual arts
Since the mid-1990s, art has attracted increasing attention as an instrument for social movements and organizations. Scholars have begun to appreciate the importance of art in forming a movement’s identity, mobilizing resources and ensuring effectiveness. Of all the art forms, visual arts are probably the most commonly used in civic action and, although the variety of artistic expression is endless, paintings, photographs, sculptures, videos, graffiti and holograms are some of the forms used. Especially in countries where freedom of expression is severely limited, art functions as an alternative channel of communication: when demonstrations are banned, organizations shut down or media subjected to severe censorship, art is often the only possible instrument of protest.

Repressive regimes can spark creativity and make people who would not usually consider themselves artists seek ways to communicate that evade censorship. The production of Arpillera tapestries in Pinochet’s Chile (described in more detail on page 16) testify to this fact. They show that, for a movement or organization, art can be much more than a ‘vehicle’ for transmitting key messages. Art can attract new recruits, mobilize financial resources, generate media attention, and even stand as a symbol of a cause, thereby fostering commitment and recognisability.

In addition to being instrumental to movements and organizations, art works (and artists) can be a form of protest in their own right. Politically-engaged artists – or ‘artistivists’ – come in all shapes and sizes. Probably the most famous artistivist in contemporary times is the Chinese artist Ai WeiWei, whose works, which often criticize the Chinese government and led to his imprisonment in 2011, are shown all across the globe.

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Artivism: when art meets action

In order to more effectively reach the public and influence change, eye-catching artwork is increasingly being used to attract attention. Street art is particularly successful in drawing attention, mostly associated with political graffiti, such as the work of the elusive Banksy. Lesser known or unknown artists also engage in this form of ‘artistivism’, often in direct response to current events. After Trump’s election in America, for instance, anti-Trump artistivism spread across the USA; in Europe, the refugee crisis is featuring in many shocking (street) art works.

Nature activists have also used street art to further their cause. By painting underwater images on buildings around the world, The Sea Walls public art programme seeks to bring the sea to the street to give the oceans a ‘voice’. For more links to these and other projects visit https://thespindle.org/project/trends-report/
Arpilleras

Case:

Arpilleras against Pinochet

Following the military coup in 1973, a brutal military regime was established in Chile under the leadership of Augusto Pinochet. Exercising complete control over civil society and closing down any opportunity for peaceful dissent, Pinochet inadvertently created the conditions for the development of alternative and creative forms of political protest. Under military rule, Chilean women were regarded as politically passive and encouraged to embrace traditional gender roles. However, extreme poverty forced women to seek employment and social involvement outside the home. For thousands of women, participation in clandestine grass-roots organizations was a way for them to provide for themselves and their families, as these organizations arranged communal kitchens, ‘collective buying’ groups, and work. One of these organizations was the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, established by the Catholic Church. In the slums surrounding Santiago the Vicaría began organizing Arpillera workshops for the women living in shantytowns.

Tapestries as instruments of protest

Arpilleras are small, colourful tapestries made of scraps of cloth and other unrefined materials, sewn and embroidered upon pieces of burlap. They depict the women’s daily experiences of limited freedom under the dictatorship and the atrocities committed by the Pinochet’s Chilean state army. By being involved in a collective activity that positively affected their lives and also educated them (or, indoctrinated them, as some would say), these women were effectively recruited as activists for the movement. Second, by selling the Arpilleras abroad, not only was the pro-democracy message spread beyond Chile’s borders, but the Vicaría was also able to secure an income for the artists while at the same time generating financial resources for its operations. Moreover, because the artworks fostered increasing awareness about the situation in Chile, they helped generate political pressure from abroad. Eventually, the Arpilleras became a symbol of the struggle against Pinochet.

The creation of the Arpilleras started as a way for the shantytown women of Chile to earn a living and express their grievances. Soon, however, these tapestries became much more, and it is from these additional functions that other movements and organizations beyond Chile can learn. Throughout South America, Arpilleras have been used as a tool for peaceful resistance. Examples of similar forms of protest can also be found in Europe (in memory of the Spanish Civil war), Africa (in protest against the atrocities committed by the Zimbabwean state) and Tibet (as part of the free Tibet campaign in London). Although in other places the artworks did not acquire the significance that they did in Pinochet’s Chile, the colourful and painfully frank tapestries testified to the universal power and transferability of this art form.

Inspiration

Apart from the art itself, the workshops and the distribution of the Arpilleras can serve as inspiration for contemporary movements. A creative workshop that offers practical benefits for participants – such as a social network and an income – is more likely to attract disadvantaged people than, for instance, educational lectures. Using a creative workshop as a site for education, to raise awareness and to nurture collective solidarity can be a highly effective way for organizations and movements to reach a broader audience and strengthen civil society.

Additionally, in contexts where direct opposition or active involvement by foreign NGOs is impossible (as was the case in Chile), the position taken by the Vicaría de la Solidaridad is instructive. As a religious and local organization, the Vicaría had more (albeit still limited) opportunity to act than other CSOs, especially compared to non-Chilean organizations. By exporting the Arpilleras abroad, the Vicaría acted as a ‘middleman’, broadcasting the voices of Chilean shantytown women to the outside world and, thereby, effectively expanding their space. Similar forms of collaboration could be useful in today’s conflict areas, as there are still plenty of people whose voices are silenced and who have limited opportunities to make their voices heard in their own countries, let alone on the international stage.
Mobilizing global knowledge
Crowdsourcing
Crowdsourcing

Mobilizing global knowledge

Social media enables activists and civil society organizations to reach large audiences quickly and easily. In addition, it allows them to engage a network of people in some form of peer production. This method, where a network of individuals is harnessed for a specific cause, is commonly known as ‘crowdsourcing’. And, although social media has proven to be a particularly useful way of crowdsourcing, other web-based instruments that serve the same purpose have emerged. Initially, crowdsourcing was developed by the private sector as an innovative and cost-effective business model. The model rests on the idea that by attracting an interested, motivated crowd of individuals, solutions can be found that are superior in quality and quantity to traditional forms of business. It is exactly this insight that is motivating organizations and activists around the globe to employ crowdsourcing in pursuit of their own not-for-profit goals.

One of the best known forms of crowdsourcing (even if some might not realize that it is indeed crowd-sourcing) is citizen journalism: the participation of amateur reporters or regular citizens in the process of collecting, reporting and disseminating news outside mainstream media institutions. In areas where professional journalists cannot work freely, either because of violent conflict or political pressure and censorship, crowdsourcing has proven to be particularly valuable. Through mobile applications like StoryMaker, people are able to capture stories and share them with the world, providing news stories that would otherwise not be told. In addition to mobilizing people to gather news, crowdsourcing is also used to create and increase collective knowledge, build communities, foster civic engagement and promote human rights. One example is the Herdix solidarity movement, which calls upon people and organizations to start their own initiatives and become change agents for the achievement of gender equality. Another example is HarrasMap, a platform that calls on people to report web blockages, such as censorship and denial of service attacks, thereby monitoring Internet accessibility around the world and visualizing the data in interactive maps.

Similar maps are used in the multiple applications provided by the Ushahidi platform, an open-source crowdsourcing technology that is increasingly being used in crisis situations and for health. The platform was initially developed to collect eyewitness reports of violence in the aftermath of the Kenyan elections in 2007 and plot them on an online live-updated map, so as to foster accountability and transparency. Since then, crowdsourcing has been used for a number of purposes, including to match people’s needs with relief efforts in earthquake-hit areas in Nepal; to collect and collate citizen reports on human rights violations in Syria; for the monitoring of elections around the world; and for locating victims and survivors after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The most famous example of the application of Ushahidi is probably Harassmap, which uses the Ushahidi platform to document sexual harassment and provide support to victims. By enabling people to report assault anonymously, Harassmap makes it easy for victims to overcome barriers to reporting harassment, such as social stigma, shame and institutional constraints. Additionally, by visualizing sexual assault in an online platform, Harassmap effectively raises awareness about and challenges the social acceptability of sexual harassment.

In these examples, crowdsourcing has facilitated the creation of an online space in which people share information, contribute to actions and become part of newly-established communities. Crowdsourcing is increasingly being used by large NGOs, because they too recognize the enormous potential of this strategy to further their cause and engage more people, despite their often dwindling membership base. World Wildlife Fund is one such organization that has developed crowdsourcing activities. One of its most recent initiatives, Climate Crowd, will be discussed on the next page.
Climate research has found that rural communities in developing countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, are greatly affected by changes in weather and climate, particularly due to their high dependence on natural resources. And, while the effects of climate change on these rural communities is becoming increasingly clear, their responses to these changes – that is, their coping and survival strategies – have received little attention in research. Yet, the way in which these rural communities are responding to climate change is creating a serious threat to the biodiversity in their surroundings.

Crowdsourcing nature

In order to protect animal wildlife, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) must inevitably concern itself with climate change and the consequences thereof. When thinking of how to deal with climate change in rural areas, lead climate researcher for WWF, Nikhil Advani, and his team found themselves faced with a challenging situation: more than climate change itself, it appeared that human responses to climate change in these rural areas were threatening biodiversity. What was lacking was sufficient and detailed information about the strategies and needs of these communities. Having dealt with weather-related challenges for generations, these people’s knowledge could be of tremendous value in designing appropriate interventions that would benefit them as well as the environment and the biodiversity around them.

To access this knowledge, and to give local communities a voice, Advani and his team came up with a crowdsourcing solution: WWF Climate Crowd. Through this new online crowdsourcing platform, WWF aims to fill the ‘rural’ information gap, with a view to improving conservation and development efforts. Rather than calling on society at large to contribute data, WWF works with a number of organizations (and their volunteers) to collect information and conduct interviews with local community members. Through Climate Crowd, WWF has already collected more than 400 observations from countries all over the world.

Inspiration

Gathering data on a massive scale, finding solutions to major societal challenges, and acquiring information about areas and locations that are difficult to access are all tasks that used to require substantial resources in terms of money and people. However, as shown by WWF Climate Crowd, this is no longer the case. Organizations and movements can now have goals that would have been far beyond their reach two decades ago. Through crowdsourcing, it is possible to mobilize a large number of people to work on a specific task. And, if this task is successfully communicated and deemed important by enough people, even the smallest organizations can achieve impressive targets. What makes the Climate Crowd platform particularly inspiring is the partnerships underpinning the project. Even though WWF is a large organization with more resources than most other CSOs, gaining access to remote areas and rural communities is still a significant barrier. What Climate Crowd shows is that crowdsourcing does not necessarily imply an open call to just anyone who is interested. In Climate Crowd, WWF is actively reaching out to, and partnering with, organizations and institutes that already have people ‘on the ground’ in the target regions to contribute to the project. Thus, even if the tasks at hand require the help of a specific kind of crowd, crowdsourcing still remains a viable, cost-effective and potentially fruitful option. Additionally, the Climate Crowd initiative shows that, if crowdsourcing starts from an issue that people care about – in this case the consequences of climate change – it is likely that they will feel motivated to contribute. This ‘caring for’ does not necessarily imply that people must always recognize a serious problem or feel a sense of urgency in order to be motivated to contribute. There are multiple examples of where the public send in data because they think of it as a fun thing to do and feel part of an online community of people with the same interests.

Case: Climate Crowd

Crowdsourcing

WWF has developed a number of other crowdsourcing initiatives, which are not only useful and important, but are also regarded as fun by contributors. One such example is the Freshwater Fish BioBlitz, which calls on people to photograph and describe the freshwater fish they encounter on their outdoor excursions.
Relax, it says McDonalds

Humour & public shaming
Humour &
public shaming

Humour can be a powerful tool for fostering solidarity and social protest. The ancient Greeks used comedy to mock the elites and comment on political developments. And, in medieval times, humour in the form of carnivals was a way to reflect on and challenge social hierarchies. The power of humour has not decreased over time and, today, it is present in civic activism. Humourologists have shown that jokes can put things in perspective, help people to reflect on situations, and bolster fellowship among groups. However, although the power of humour is universal, the type of humour that is regarded as funny, is strongly bound to culture and varies among classes, groups and over time.

At present, one of the most popular forms of humour for social activism is satire. In magazines and newspapers, cartoon characters are particularly successful — and often equally controversial — and television channels across the globe are now producing satirical – and television channels across the globe are now producing satirical cartoons are particularly successful — and often equally controversial — and television channels across the globe are now producing satirical cartoons are particularly successful — and often equally controversial — and television channels across the globe are now producing satirical cartoons are particularly successful — and often equally controversial — and television channels across the globe are now producing satirical cartoons are particularly successful — and often equally controversial — and television channels across the globe are now producing satirical cartoons are particularly successful — and often equally controversial — and television channels across the globe are now producing satirical cartoons are particularly successful — 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Barnaul is a small city in West Siberia, some 2,200 miles east of Moscow. Since 2010, its 700,000 inhabitants have not been led by an elected mayor, but by a so-called ‘city-manager’, appointed by the city council, thus keeping the political process out of public reach. From 2010 until August 2015, Barnaul was led by Igor Savintsev, who resigned after being accused of selling off municipal land to family-owned organizations, costing the city an estimated USD 157,000. Savintsev’s successor was to be picked by a special commission from the city council, which made the people of Barnaul lose hope for a suitable candidate.

Only mice don’t vote for Barsik

In response to the upcoming appointment of a new mayor, protest group Altai Online initiated an election poll on its popular social media platform V Kontakte. This online poll was published ahead of the elections and served to determine what candidate the population of Barnaul regarded as most suitable for the job. In addition to six human candidates, a seventh was put on the ticket: an 18-month-old Scottish Fold cat named Barsik. Apart from Barsik’s appearance in the poll, Altai Online launched an electoral campaign, using both social media and banners in the street with the slogan: ‘Only mice don’t vote for Barsik’. After this tremendous success, Barsik’s fame spread beyond the confines of Barnaul. In reply to an announcement in early 2016 that the Russian population would be able to vote on the design of new banknotes, a message was posted on Barsik’s social media account. In this message the cat revealed its deep-rooted ambition to appear on either the 200 or the 2,000 denomination note. Later that year Barsik, having become a political symbol in the struggle against corruption, announced that he would run for president in 2018, and that Putin better be ready.

Inspiration

The story of Barsik lends itself well to be transported to other contexts where corruption and election fraud are serious problems. The cat’s victory in the poll communicated clearly how people felt about local politics and politicians. Additionally, Barsik’s immense popularity showed that in times of frustration and anger humour can work to mobilize people. This type of action enables them to protest, while at the same time making them smile.

Using an animal for this protest, as well as being highly effective, also provided anonymity. Altai Online’s administrator, who goes by the pseudonym ‘Altai Farmer’, pointed out that the anonymity of the Altai Online team members was of the utmost importance, as their jobs, reputations, and even safety could otherwise be in danger. Therefore, external communication was done through Barsik, on his social media account and with YouTube videos, allowing the team’s identity to remain hidden. Unfortunately, such anonymity is a necessity in many contexts. For activists faced with similar challenges, using animals to communicate their message might be a solution.

Finally, Barsik’s electoral campaign is also a source of inspiration. Altai Online used a combination of online and offline activities, thereby reaching a wide audience, while also being visible to those citizens without daily Internet access. Moreover, using the slogan ‘Only mice don’t vote for Barsik’ was a strategic choice. Not only is it a funny tag line – something that people will easily remember – but the term ‘mice’ also refers to those who are corrupt. Hence, the slogan and the use of a cat as a candidate assumes another layer of meaning, making it even more effective.

Humour & public shaming

Case: Barsik the Cat
Unmask the Corrupt

Transparency & fact-checking
As Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index shows, corruption and fraud are present everywhere. Particularly when combined with high levels of state bureaucracy, corruption forms a serious barrier to the development of a healthy civil society and democracy. In response to this, in recent years, people all over the world – from Romania and Russia to Brazil and Peru – have taken to the streets to fight corruption and demand transparency from their governments and leading corporations. In addition to these traditional forms of protests, numerous alternatives have emerged with the aim to improve transparency and check the claims made by those in power, including politicians and multi-nationals.

One of the main topics of scrutiny is budget transparency. Leading in this regard is South America, where a number of countries have developed electronic platforms that make budget information publicly available and give insight into national public expenditure and revenue. The budget transparency promoted by such platforms allows people to be the judge of whether their government officials are good stewards of public funds. Moreover, an open budget limits opportunities for governments to hide wasteful and corrupt spending, which means that, in the end, more resources will remain available for the public good.

Internationally, there are a number of organizations and initiatives whose primary goal is to foster budget transparency. The International Budget Partnership (IBP), for example, is an organization that promotes budget transparency on a global scale. Every two years, the IBP publishes an Open Budget Survey that evaluates to what extent governments give the public access to budget information and opportunities to participate in the national budget process. It is important to note that budget transparency initiatives not only focus on governments. Publishing What You Fund, for example, is an organization that promotes budget transparency on a global scale. Every two years, the IBP publishes an Open Budget Survey that evaluates to what extent governments give the public access to budget information and opportunities to participate in the national budget process. It is important to note that budget transparency initiatives not only focus on governments. Publishing What You Fund, for example, is an organization that promotes budget transparency on a global scale. Every two years, the IBP publishes an Open Budget Survey that evaluates to what extent governments give the public access to budget information and opportunities to participate in the national budget process. It is important to note that budget transparency initiatives not only focus on governments.

Fact-checking is also becoming of interest to the media. In Spain, for instance, the fact-checking TV show El Objetivo is a great hit, and the South African radio show Corruption Busters recently won the award for Best Day Time Show at the annual Liberty Radio Awards. By bringing fact-checking to the wider public, these shows are contributing to a more open and honest civic space.

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According to the most recent data, over 60% of Hondurans live below the national poverty line. And, although this means that the majority of Honduras’ population are dependent on the state for access to healthcare, for years the Honduran public health sector has been dramatically underfunded. To make matters worse, Transparency International’s Honduras chapter, the Asociación por una Sociedad más Justa (ASJ), has uncovered widespread corruption in the procurement of medicines for Honduras’ state hospitals and public health facilities. It was found that millions of dollars’ worth of medicines have gone ‘missing’ or been replaced by counterfeit drugs, only to be sold on the black market. Following the ASJ’s discovery, the state-controlled Almacén Central de Medicamentos (Central Medicines Warehouse) was raided, the Health Minister was subsequently paid a fine, and the warehouse manager and several others involved in the corruption scheme were convicted. These measures, albeit necessary, are not enough to ensure lasting change.

Public-private partnerships to fight corruption

To ensure that efforts like those by the ASJ in Honduras lead to durable reform, Transparency International emphasizes the importance of involving a variety of stakeholders. In the Honduran case, this principle found reflection in the implementation of Transparency International’s so-called ‘Integrity Pact’, a tool for preventing corruption in public contracting by establishing partnerships between a civil society actor (usually a chapter of Transparency International, the contracting authority (usually the national government) and the private sector. In March 2014, the Honduran president, Juan Orlando Hernández, agreed to such a mechanism for the purchasing of public medicine. Employees and officials of the Ministry of Health are no longer involved in purchasing public medicine, instead this is done through a special, highly-transparent trust that is observed by a committee that consists of representatives from both the public and private sectors, with Transparency International as a key member.

In a country as dangerous as Honduras, the work of Transparency International requires a great deal of persistence and courage. Fortunately, the results they have managed to achieve are extensive and go beyond that of the pharmacy pact described above. In October 2014, the Honduran president signed an unprecedented agreement with ASJ and Transparency International: The Collaboration and Good Faith Agreement. This agreement is an extensive anti-corruption plan designed by the president and ASJ that focuses on health, education, security and justice, infrastructure projects, and tax administration. To ensure compliance with the commitments made, ASJ and Transparency International’s headquarters have taken up the task of monitoring and reporting on Honduras’ progress.

Inspiration

With an impressive international network and numerous success stories of real impact, many of the activities of Transparency International could feature in a ‘best practice’ guide for CSOs. Focusing on the achievements in Honduras, what stands out is the fact that Transparency International seeks to engage multiple stakeholders in its initiatives. Establishing partnerships with actors from different sectors cannot be done in all contexts or situations. However, making a conscious effort to form a diverse support base and involving even those that might at first seem possible adversaries can yield surprising results. Additionally, the Honduran example is evidence of the fact that long-term efforts, even though they require a lot of persistence and patience, will pay off in the end. Prior to their major achievements in Honduras, Transparency International is fighting its core issues – these are all activities that take time. Trying to expose networks of corruption, state officials and companies, lobbying for legislative change and building a network of like-minded partners - these are all activities that take time and manpower.

Finally, inspiration can be drawn from Transparency International’s great variety of initiatives. The organization not only works with many different partners, it also works with many different tools. From educating future leaders and providing glossaries, to engaging citizens in ‘unmasking the corrupt’ and monitoring transparency, Transparency International is fighting its core issues on all possible fronts. Diversification works and, if resources allow, can be an effective method of attracting attention, establishing a wide network and occupying as much space as possible.

At times we lose sight of the fact that CSOs, companies and state bodies are all in fact collections of people. These people do not occupy civic space and are all part - some way or another - of civil society. However, the example provided by Transparency International shows that promoting bonds between these people and establishing partnerships between CSOs, companies and state bodies can help organizations achieve their goals. By building bridges with each other, organizations can ensure wider and more powerful support for their causes and have a longer-lasting impact.
Virtual uprising

Social media
It is often argued that social media has the power to change the world, with more people than ever before using online platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. With the new possibilities offered by the Internet, gathering knowledge, sharing thoughts and raising a critical mass of supporters for a cause, has never been easier. Examples abound of the enormous impact that social media has had over the last decade. In Jamaica, health workers raised HIV/AIDS awareness by spreading information through social media. The #OscarsSoWhite campaign, which criticized the lack of racial diversity in the 2016 Oscar nominations, led to changes in voting and selection by the Academy. And, the Ice Bucket challenge, which went viral on every social media channel, raised a reported 220 million dollars worldwide for ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) organizations. Undeniably, social media has been vital for many civic causes, but, at the same time, it can sometimes be a double-edged sword. Due to the endless possibilities offered online, organizational loyalty has been eroded. Increasingly, people adopt causes, rather than institutions or organizations. So, while social media can be instrumental in reaching a broad follower base, holding on to these followers now requires continuous effort.

Social media is particularly suitable for ad hoc activism and the establishment of large networks in a short amount of time. As the NetChange report, Networked Change: How progressive campaigns are won in the 21st century, shows, there are many examples of movements and organizations that have successfully established large networks and campaigns; some of which eventually led to actual corporate or government policy changes. Two examples immediately spring to mind: the Arab Spring uprisings and the Occupy Wall Street campaign. In both cases, an activist community was formed around a pressing issue by means of social media directed-network campaigns. The Occupy Wall street and Arab Spring campaigns both intended to, and succeeded in, generating massive demonstrations in actual life, outside the virtual space.

Another example is the #GirlsChat has campaign (described in detail on the following page), which shows how social media can also build a network that remains largely virtual, but no less effective. This campaign connects women from across Southeast Asia around a common cause, without necessarily bringing them together in reality. Nonetheless, the voices of these women have formed a collective voice that has been picked up by media around the world.

Before looking at this inspiring initiative of women in Pakistan, attention must be drawn to some of the downsides to social media. Since social media, and the World Wide Web in general, are playing an ever increasing role in the distribution of knowledge and connecting people, the gap between those with and those without Internet access is increasing. Although Internet penetration is growing rapidly, over 50% of the global population, most of whom live in developing countries, remain cut off. In addition, there are many countries where, although Internet access is more readily available, civil society is still not able to fully use the power of social media due to the censorship of online content, the monitoring of social media outlets, and the imposition of severe punishments for using social media to challenge those in power. Hence, although social media has incredible potential as a tool for civic activism, as long as inequalities remain in terms of access and freedom, other channels of knowledge distribution and mass mobilization should not be neglected.

Interestingly, social media is also being used to draw attention to restrictions on ‘regular media’. A recent hashtag campaign that is doing just that is the #FreeTurkeyMedia campaign, launched by Amnesty International. This campaign aims to raise international awareness about the extreme limitations placed on free journalism in Turkey, as well as to put pressure on the Turkish government to release the more than 120 journalists who are currently imprisoned.

Virtual uprising

A post-coup curfew, training and conflict reconciliation project that supports CSOs in South Sudan; by means of the #defyhatenow hashtag, it aims to raise awareness and counter social media based hate speech. http://defyhatenow.net/
Going for a stroll around the city, having a drink at a local bar, or jumping on a bicycle to visit a friend are all activities that most women take for granted. However, in Pakistan, the streets continue to be dominated by men and women are not allowed to ‘loiter’ out and about, and certainly not without the accompaniment of a male relative. Although some areas may be forbidden, cultural norms also keep women from engaging in sport, including the immensely popular game of cricket.

**Emancipatory selfies**

Sadia Khatri, born and raised in Karachi, returned to her hometown in late 2014 after completing her education in the US. Having experienced firsthand what gender equality feels like, upon returning to Pakistan she was struck by the absence of women in public spaces. Unwilling to accept this, Khatri ventured out in the city and visited dhabas – roadside cafes or bars where food and tea (chai) are served – where she discussed with others what gender equality feels like, and why women take for granted what is a preconceived idea, but emerged organically on social media. Due to its popularity, the hashtag has now become much more than a simple mechanism to signal that women are eating and drinking in cafes; it has come to symbolize a movement that challenges longstanding cultural gender norms and seeks to reimagining public spaces while still accompanied by male friends and relatives.

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Teaching what matters

Education
Education

Teaching what matters

Ask any activist or human rights defender what he or she is striving for and the answer you will receive will usually boil down to ‘making the world a better place’. The tremendous efforts and sacrifices made for this goal are not merely to accomplish improvements for the here and now – invariably the goal is to achieve betterment that will last into the future. For today’s activists this has important implications. If their efforts are to succeed and survive, they need a wide support base as well as successors: people who will defend and expand the civic space they are now fighting for in the future.

Unsurprisingly then, education is widely recognized as an important tool for ‘raising the next generation of change makers’. For this reason, some organizations are devoted entirely to education; one such organization is Worldsavvy. This NGO, which is an initiative of the Dutch organization Butterflyworks, aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills and disposition necessary to actively engage in the global community: it also seeks to build a critical mass of global citizens who will be able to address the challenges of the future.

Other organizations, rather than making education their core business, have included education as a tool in their repertoire of social action. Many offer classrooms resources, such as interactive teaching materials and lesson plans, or have volunteers who go to classrooms to teach about the issues their organization is working on. Considering the continuity of their impact, teaching the young is of great importance for many organizations. However, unfortunately, there are still many places in the world where children do not have access to proper schooling. These include areas where families cannot afford to send their children to school, where conflict has forced schools to close down, or where cultural norms dictate that certain groups of people cannot go to school. Where states are failing to provide children with a proper education, civil society is often stepping in to support willing governments or to fill the gap where such willingness is lacking. The Bits Schools, developed by the Dutch organization Butterflyworks, are a great example. This NGO aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills and disposition necessary to actively engage in the global community: it also seeks to build a critical mass of global citizens who will be able to address the challenges of the future.

Apart from ‘regular’ education in schools, there is another type of education that takes place outside the classroom. This education includes peer learning, learning from other cultures, and learning through experience. In this type of education, CSOs have proven to be particularly valuable, because outside the classroom it is often up to civil society to create spaces – be they virtual or actual – that allow for safe and constructive learning. Love Matters, an inspirational online initiative (which is explored on the following page), is such a space. Additionally, there are countless programs that provide training and workshops to raise awareness or promote social change. ActionAid’s programmes, for instance, have developed a number of training centres, called ‘Global Platforms’, which exist for the sole purpose of training young activists and civil society organizations to lead social, political and economic change. On a much smaller scale, in the slums of Nairobi, the BoxGirls programme teaches young women to become strong and independent, through boxing. The girls not only learn how to defend themselves, but at the same time are educated about gender oppression and their rights and opportunities. As such, learning empowerment is a tool in the repertoire of social action.

Every year, more CSOs are using video games as an instrument to educate and raise awareness of their cause. In fact, they are not just using them, but also increasingly producing them to share their mission with gamers around the world. Games for Change (G4C) is a non-profit company that develops social impact games for humanitarian and educational efforts. G4C engages CSOs, the games industry, media, and governments in its efforts to launch game-based projects with a positive impact. One of the many award winning games G4C has created is Peacemaker, which challenges players to establish peace in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
Love Matters

In many parts of the world, sexuality is not something people can discuss freely. In Egypt, for instance, cultural and religious norms have placed a strong taboo on talking about sex, even more so for women. And, because there is no curriculum for reproductive health in primary or secondary schools, most young people are poorly informed about the choices they have when it comes to love and sex. While there is some sex-related information available online, as journalist and researcher working at RNW Media Abir Sarras points out, "this is mostly of religious background; the discourse is usually directed to the 'haram' and 'forbidden'". However, during a period of field-research in Egypt, Sarras found that young people are looking for objective and reliable information about love and sex. To fill the gap, RNW Media has developed its ground-breaking platform Love Matters.

Love Matters was first launched in India, where young people encounter barriers similar to those in Egypt. The website offers sexual health information with a positive take on pleasure and relationship satisfaction, giving young people the information they need to have safer and happier sex. After its huge success in India (3 million sessions, 14 million page views, and 682,000 Facebook fans after 5 years of online presence), RNW Media developed similar platforms in Latin America (focusing on Mexico and Venezuela), Africa (focusing on Kenya) and China. Each of the various editions of Love Matters are attuned to the different customs, questions and sensitivities of the regions they serve, as well as the culture and languages.

The Arabic version of Love Matters – called Culture of Love (with the Arabic word for culture ‘thaqafa’ also referring to knowledge) – is the latest addition to the Love Matters family. Young people in the Middle East now finally have a place where they can find unambiguous, reliable information in their own language. Most importantly, the platform is interactive. People can ask questions on the discussion board or via social media and there is an online forum where they can talk and share experiences among themselves. Young people are thus enabled by the platform to discuss sexual issues freely and openly, something they cannot do safely in their daily lives.

Inspiration

Since its launch in 2014, Culture of Love has accumulated more than 11 million page views, 10,000 Twitter followers and 421,000 Facebook fans, and its YouTube channel has had over 12 million views. Just like the other Love Matters platforms, it has been an enormous success, which shows just how much people long for information and the chance to discuss issues that are taboo in their communities. RNW Media has succeeded in creating a safe space where young people can go for such information, and, as such, has set an example for other organizations. The Love Matters initiative shows that providing reliable information is of profound importance, especially when no authority is doing so. It is also inspiring to see how young people engage in peer learning when they feel safe to do so. Such peer learning creates an informed and empowered community, which has value far beyond the pure knowledge that is exchanged.

Education

Case: Love Matters
Performing civic power

Music, dance & theatre
Apart from visual arts, there are many other forms of art that people use to express their feelings and as tools for activism. Music, for example, has a long history of being used for political and social activism. Dating as far back as the ancient Greeks, music has been recognized as having the ability to foster desirable social and political attitudes and effectively convey ideologies. Apart from the creative protest songs that often form an integral part of marches and demonstrations, more professional performances by popular artists and orchestras have been instrumental in many instances of civic action. Well-known examples are the 1985 Live Aid and 2005 Live 8 concerts, which raised money for, and awareness of, world poverty. These concerts became ‘sites of political communication’, conveying strong statements related to human rights and social justice.

As for theatre, things are not much different. This genre is also used for civic activism, also in a variety of forms and for a variety of purposes, both hidden and public. In Wales, for instance, the National Theatre used its plays as a means to re-engage citizens in (thinking about) the democratic process; a subject that was mostly limited to the ‘official’ or academic sphere. And, the plays of Václav Havel, although dating back a number of decades, also testify to the power of theatre as an instrument of change. By the end of the 1960s, Havel’s works were banned from theatres in Czechoslovakia, because they were seen as anti-communist. Given their popularity and forceful message, people continued to perform his plays in their living rooms and distributed illegal copies throughout the country. Through this process, Havel’s reputation as a dissident and activist was built, eventually resulting in his rise as the leader of the Velvet Revolution. Havel’s plays were a form of rebellion that successfully captured the imagination of a nation. Today, the power of his art is still tangible, as the underground Belarus Free Theatre – which, to date, performs illegal plays that protest against the Belarusian dictatorial regime – refers to Havel as a major source of inspiration.
When thinking of flamenco, most people think of dark-haired men and women, passionately clapping and dancing for their audience. But, as flamenco expert Matthew Machin-Ausone points out, dance has a lesser known side to it, “a side that is in ‘service’ of social activism and political protest, a side that attempts to resist power structures.” In fact, flamenco has a long history of protest and activism, adding to the contemporary power of this dance form. It has always been the musical outlet of the poor and marginalized, including the Roma and Andalusian regionalists, who used the dance as a symbol of their region’s culture and their struggle for sovereignty. In recent years, the Spanish flash mob group Flo6x8 has once again rekindled the spirit of political flamenco.

The Spanish debt crisis and protest dance
Since 2008, the Spanish population has increasingly suffered the consequences of the global financial crisis and the collapse of the real estate bubble. In the aftermath, banks crumbled and the collapse of the real estate bubble has greatly intensified. To give payments. In response to this crisis, public anger against state institutions and banks has greatly intensified. To give expression to this feeling, activists across the country have found creative ways to protest against the injustice and growing poverty.

Arguably the most successful of these creative protests in Spain is the work of Flo6x8 – Flo being short for Flamenco and 6x8 a much used rhythmical pattern in flamenco music. By means of flamenco, the group aims to draw attention to the mounting unemployment rates, oppressive economic policies, widespread government corruption, and drastic rise in corporate control. Most of the group’s performances take place in banks, cash points and even government buildings – places that symbolize the power and protest. In these places, the impact of the dance is particularly powerful, because bodily movement and people’s “use of space” is strictly organized and regulated there (people queue up, keep distance from the next client and talk in discrete whispers). With their passionate flamenco music and dance, Flo6x8 dancers disrupt this structure and claim the space with body and sound, if only for a few minutes.

“Flamenco captures perfectly how we feel about the crisis,” said one of the dancers, who goes by the pseudonym La Nina Ninja. “Through flamenco and 6x8 we can express desperation, rage, pain and the desire to change things.” The continued success of Flo6x8 testifies to the fact that it is not only their own desperation that the dancers are expressing: the Flo6x8 videos on YouTube are immensely popular among the millions of Spaniards who have been hit hard by the crisis and the majority of the Spanish public is sympathetic to the initiative. Ultimately, those behind the flamenco group hope that their actions will inspire and encourage other Spaniards to use their voice – or body – to take a stand against the banks, corporations and government, which they see as responsible for the crisis.

Inspiration
What is particularly special about Flo6x8 is how the group uses dance and music as its mode of communi- cation. It is often said that actions speak louder than the words and, in the case of Flamenco, this is most definitely the case. Flamenco is a dance with sharp, forceful and often aggressive movements, capturing exactly the emotions many Spaniards have about the crisis they are facing. Of course, putting those feelings and protests into words is also valuable, and the dance performances should not be seen as a substitute. Rather, they add another channel of communication, further strengthening the message of protest. The disruptive, yet peaceful quality of the Flo6x8 performances is also inspiring. For the duration of their song and dance, the dancers bring business to a halt. However, instead of causing panic, anger or provoking a confrontation with the police, the performances make bystanders smile, clap along or even join in the dancing. Flo6x8 shows that there are alternatives to riots and slander, and that disruptive action can be peaceful and even joyful, without losing meaning or power.

Finally, considering the relationship of flash mob flamenco with civic space, Flo6x8 is expanding as well as making better use of this space. By taking dance to sites that are not usu- ally locations for such performances, the group is expanding its arena of action. Additionally, if one starts from the assumption that banks, cash points and government buildings are public spaces and, hence, already part of the civic space, one could also say the Flox8 dancers are simply making better use of the space already available to them. Organizations all over the world could translate this idea for use in their own context: they too can find public places available for effective, disruptive and yet peaceful flash mob performances, even if these are currently subject to (unwritten) rules and regulations about their use.

Music, dance & theatre
Case: Flo6x8
Human rights defenders all over the world are trying to promote social justice and human rights for all. In doing so they are posing a threat to those individuals, organizations, companies and authorities that violate human rights. Sadly, this means that human rights defenders are often the subject of reprisals. Ranging from public vilification and the hacking of online accounts, to direct threats, violent attacks, kidnapping and even murder, the risks that human rights defenders face are as varied as they are numerous. In response, many CSOs have developed initiatives that seek to offer human rights defenders spaces – digital or actual – that provide protection from outside threats.

Because the people who expose corruption, fight human rights violations, and strive for justice and democracy are increasingly using the Internet to achieve their goals, threats and persecution are also taking place online. Consequently, initiatives have emerged that focus specifically on countering these threats. Organizations have developed tools that enable human rights defenders to protect their data and communications, including encryption technology, apps that guarantee online anonymity, and programmes that prevent the interception of communication. Additionally, there are platforms devoted entirely to online protection, such as Security Without Borders (SWB), which was co-founded by hacker and security researcher Claudio Guarnieri. Recognizing that civil society does not have the expertise required to adequately secure itself, SWB’s cyber experts and hackers assist journalists, human rights defenders, and NGOs with cyber security issues.

Outside the digital realm, providing protection to human rights defenders is also a major field of work for CSOs. Programmes include provision of emergency funds, protective fellowships, training opportunities and guidelines for protection methods. However, unfortunately, support is not always sufficient. Even though most organizations prioritize prevention and support mechanisms over reactive strategies, sometimes the situation for human rights defenders becomes so dangerous that offering a safe place of shelter is the only option left. Safe houses have emerged everywhere in the world, often in the form of temporary stays in facilities outside of the activists’ region, or even country of residence. The Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras) (which is described on the following page) is one such organization that provides safe houses.

Whistleblowers are a special type of activist. Exposing those who constitute a threat to justice, freedom and human rights often comes with great risks. Therefore, numerous platforms have been created specifically aimed at protecting whistleblowers. PPLAAF (Plateforme de Protections des Lanceurs d’Alerte en Afrique) is one such interesting platform. It provides a combination of technical, legal, media and advocacy assistance, all adjusted to the specific needs of the whistleblower.
In addition to facing the same risks as men, women human rights defenders (WHRDs) face additional risks specific to their gender. When women defend human rights, they are often perceived as challenging accepted socio-cultural norms and traditions about femininity and their role in society. This also holds true in Mesoamerica, where women face increased risk of violence and systematic human rights violations. Such violations often go unpunished with the countries in the region all ranking high in the world-wide index of impunity (transnational women activists). The Mesoamerican Initiative for Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras) is taking heed of this context where both violence and impunity loom large, women are disproportionately affected and WHRDs, in particular, face stigmatization, threats and assaults that remain unpunished. Because state authorities and other powerful actors in Mesoamerica have failed to protect them, WHRDs, such as Makrina Álvarez, have used their activism to seek refuge, meet like-minded women and be temporarily away from their precarious situations.

**Safe houses**

Founded in 2010, IM-Defensoras is a network of over 350 local, regional and international women's rights groups in Mexico and Central America. The initiative brings together a broad range of WHRDs – from journalists to LGBT activists, from mothers pursuing justice for family members to indigenous women defending their land against illegal mining. What they share, apart from their efforts to defend their rights, are the challenges specific to their region. Tackling these challenges requires a tail order for these (often small) groups and organizations. By bringing them together, IM-Defensoras is enabling WHRDs to protect themselves and each other more effectively. The IM-Defensoras network now covers Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. In three of the network countries – Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala – shelters have been built for WHRDs. In these safe houses, women who are threatened because of their activism can seek refuge, meet like-minded women and be temporarily away from their precarious situations.

**Markina Guttiel Álvarez**

Markina Álvarez experienced first-hand the value of IM-Defensoras. Her father, a UN-commended human rights defender, had been fighting corruption and impunity in Guatemala, was brutally murdered in December 2004 by supporters of a new upper class, such as military and paramilitary [...]. Makrina could rely on the support of the broad IM-Defensoras network of fellow WHRDs to help her move away from the area where she had been attacked. She found shelter in a Guatemalan safe house, where she stayed for two months. This gave her the necessary time and safety to analyse her situation and find a new place to live, while staying part of the women's human rights struggle.

Apart from the very real and practical assistance IM-Defensoras offers WHRDs in their safe houses, one of its most important strengths lies elsewhere. As shadow to the organization, Gladys Lanza, who recently passed away, pointed out, “Empowerment becomes a form of protection. For organizations across the globe, this example shows that if those responsible fail to provide safety, taking shared responsibility can go a long way towards providing protection.” Additionally, IM-Defensoras testifies to the fact that protection does not mean only physical protection. Yes, Makrina Álvarez needed a safe place to go, but what she also needed was support and people standing by her. More than anything, that is the type of protection IM-Defensoras offers; a kind of protection that many initiatives could realize without a tremendous amount of resources. “I am very grateful”, says Lolita Chávez, another WHRD from Guatemala, “because, thanks to the strength that my sisters from all over [Mesoamerica] have given me, I believe in life.”
Activism, artivism and the need to go beyond

A taste of civic power

Girls taking selfies in teahouses in Pakistan, women dancing the flamenco in the banks and government offices of Spain, a group of Russians turning a cat into a token of democratic values, and artists creating a video projection of a protesting crowd in the heart of Paris. These people, so different and far apart, would never have thought that they would appear in the same narrative or be seen as part of the same community. And, yet, all the inspirational people, groups and organizations discussed in this report are manifestations of our human right to mobilize and organize. All of them are standing up for a goal they believe in, to make the world a better and fairer place.

Activism, Artivism and Beyond gives an insight into the wealth of actions and tactics that, across centuries and cultures, have served to defend, expand, resist or redefine our civic space. We have chosen to highlight a variety of different and particularly inspiring tactics used in our world today. In particular, we have showcased eight different tactics used by civil society to pursue its goals, namely: 1) visual arts, 2) crowdsourcing, 3) humour & public shaming, 4) transparency & fact-checking, 5) social media, 6) education, 7) music, dance & theatre, and 8) protection. These tactics are continuously evolving. Some of them are as old as human kind, such as the use of visual arts, music, dance & theatre. Others are relatively new and typical of today’s globalized and digitalized world, such as the use of social media and crowdsourcing. They are, in other words, reflections of the spirit of their time. Some of them are merely reactions to the deliberate actions of agents, mostly governments, but also others, limiting civic space. Others unfold in response to structural forces in society, such as globalization and religious oppression. As times change, the tactics for civic action also change, and consequently, there is a need to expand the stories we have presented here.

All that remains

The key aim of this report is to generate new ideas to inspire readers. There are now have made a decision to steer clear of too much theory and avoided trying to give a complete overview of all of the types of actions that are out there. Consequently, some issues remain that warrant further exploration. For one, some geographical areas have not received the attention they deserve, given current political circumstances, including Central and Eastern Europe, the Sahel, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. Second, the involvement of the private sector in civic action, either on its own or in partnerships with CSOs, grass-roots organizations or governments, is an area that has not been sufficiently covered. Third, we have not included the role of trade unions, despite their importance in guaranteeing workers’ rights in an era of economic and financial globalization. Finally, we have not included examples of actions that arise from a desperate need for resources. Lack of funding is a major obstacle for practically all CSOs, and even more for grass-roots organizations. In search of resources, creative activities have emerged, including crowdfunding, social entrepreneurship and partnerships with the private sector. Hence, in updating this report, it will be worthwhile to expand its geographical scope, to include a focus on actions pursued or supported by the private sector, and labour organizations, as well as to include inspiring examples of how civil society is managing to overcome financial constraints.

Standing together

Network organizations like CIVICUS, Partos (including its innovation programme The Spindle) and The Broker serve as a platform in which organizations can learn from one another. As such, this report serves as a kick-starter for other crowdsourcing and joint-learning efforts, both online and offline, aimed at exchanging experiences and assimilating new ideas to more effectively defend and expand civic space. Actors, measures and structural forces that limit civic space will continue to emerge and evolve. Therefore, civil society’s job is to stand its ground and give shape to this space – a job that is never finished. Civil society must be creative and innovative at all times and adaptive to changing circumstances, in order to keep civic action alive.

Activism, Artivism and Beyond is an attempt to foster such innovation. What all of the examples in this report share is passion, resilience, a desire to make the world better and, above all, a contagious energy. Be it online or offline, large or small, global or local, all initiatives covered in this book are the outcome of people’s creativity and strength in the face of obstacles that limit their freedoms in some way; the power and energy that emanates from the stories told in this book show that people bounce back, stand together, and have the most brilliant ideas, from which others can learn.
The many actions and initiatives discussed in this report all seek to defend, expand or make better use of civic space. They are a response to governmental repression, as exemplified by the women in Chile who made Arpilleras to protest against state corruption; the ‘election’ of Barsik the cat in the poll for Mayor of Barnaul in West Siberia, and the Standing March in Paris, which effectively circumvented measures designed to restrict protests at the COP21. What the stories in the preceding pages have shown is that civic space is by no means only curtailed by governments. Other actors, including private companies, can also have a negative impact on civic space, as shown by the corruption in Honduras’ medicine industry.

As well as the visible actions and measures that trigger civic responses, more complex, structural forces are often at work. These forces impact upon society and, consequently, influence our civic space. The #GirlsAtDhabas campaign, for instance, challenges cultural norms that have developed over the course of centuries. The dancers of Flo6x8 are also addressing structural developments, rather than specific triggers. Hence, the mechanisms affecting civic space are embedded in and motivated by the structural context. This context enables, limits and motivates actors – whether or not they are conscious of this motivation – to behave in specific ways. As the work of CIVICUS shows, in many cases the behaviour of individuals, organizations, private corporations and government bodies – or agents – can have detrimental effects on human rights and freedoms, thereby negatively affecting the civic space.

This chapter looks at the many barriers to civic action, starting with structural barriers, such as globalization and financialization. It then describes a number of practical measures and mechanisms (by agents), which form immediate and, at times, dramatic barriers for civil society: These include (counter)terrorism, legal and financial barriers and limitations, censorship and fake news, and bureaucracy and corruption. The examples that are included are far from exhaustive, but they do provide an indication of the variety and scope of barriers facing activists.

Globalization and financialization

The system that drives the way our society acts, connects and develops consists of large-scale developments like modernization, democratization, urbanization and globalization. These forces give direction to our daily realities and influence our actions, relations and decisions. The institutional arrangements and ideological frameworks that people have drawn up over time – including capitalism, communism and our religious institutions – should also be seen as part of this context. They too affect behaviour and have proven to be strong motivations for human action. Given the multi-faceted nature of the structure on which societies are built, it is impossible to speak of simple cause and effect when discussing the notion of a ‘shrinking civic space’. Naturally, there are clearly identifiable actions that place direct boundaries on the freedoms of civil society, but, on the level of structure, the story is far less straightforward. One development that testifies to the complex and often paradoxical impact of structural factors on civic space is globalization.

Today, globalization is often referred to as one of the main drivers of societal change. Interestingly, the phenomenon is found to have a paradoxical effect. That is, it contributes to the shrinking as well as the expansion of civic space. Globalization is the process of increased interactions and connections between people over the world. Aided by factors like international trade and technological advances – most particularly in terms
of transportation and communication – globalization – tends to be an un-
stopable force that is resulting in a so-called ‘hyper-connectedness’ and,
some even argue, a global civil soci-
ety. The Internet is making the world ‘smaller’ and connecting actors from
all walks of life with one another; ini-
tiatives like WWF Climate Crowd and
#GirlsatDhabas testify to this fact.

From individual people, grass-roots movements and CSOs, to govern-
ments, private companies and ex-
tremist groups, all actors are claiming their place in the virtual arena, where
they can access more information
and reach bigger audiences cheaper
and reach bigger audiences cheaper
and faster than ever before.

However, although globalization is
incredibly valuable for civil society –
because it is opening up new and of-
ten virtual spaces – it can at the same
time have the opposite effect. Glo-
balization can diminish meaningful
connections and foster localization
and individualization. Membership of the ‘global society’ is not based on
a strong sense of common culture, tradition, history or language. The
fluid and undefined community that constitutes this global society does
not offer ground for a strong collec-
tive identity. As such, globalization is
giving impetus to the desire of people
to clearly define their own individual
identities. It is, in other words, result-
ing in more individualization, a weak-
ening of meaningful connections and
a turning away from civil society.

Apart from the far-reaching social ef-
fec ts of globalization, it is also impor-
tant to briefly discuss its economic
implications. Over the last few de-

c ades, financial services (such as bank-
ing, insurance, and investment serv-
ices) have gained greater importance
and caused a real transformation of
the economic system. Studies show
that this process, also referred to as
financialization, has had a number of
d negative outcomes. Financialization
has been associated with increased
inequality, slower GDP growth, higher
unemployment rates, increased vol-
umes of debt, and the emergence of
the so-called ‘credit bubbles’. How
this works exactly would involve a long and technical economic explana-
tion, which is well beyond the scope
of this report. However, it is impor-
tant to understand that the combined
processes of globalization and finan-
cialization have had consequences
that have greatly impacted upon peo-
ple’s lives and civil society including:
- increased dominance of the finan-
cial sector; mounting debt across the

globe; greater integration of different
national and international markets;
- tighter international financial rela-
tions and (inter)dependencies; and
risks to global financial inequality and
exclusion. As some of the examples in
this report show (the Floo68 dancers
immediately spring to mind), these
trends have triggered civic activism in
multiple contexts.

**Counterterrorism**

When thinking of practical mecha-
nisms that contribute to the shrinking
civic space, an obvious development
is the explosive growth of security,
and counterterrorism measures. Apart
from these measures, interna-
tional terrorism itself, and the
Individualism, has already placed great
limitations on civic space’s scope for
action. Because terrorism aims at the
very destruction of human rights –
in particular the rights to life, liberty
and physical integrity – states across
the globe have been adopting laws to
protect their populations from harm
and more effectively hunt down and
punish (potential) terrorists. Howev-
er, it is one of the key responsibilities
of the state to protect its citizens, but
these protections can be dangerously
broad, vague and intrusive.

Counterterrorism has grown to be-
come an instrument of power that
states employ, not only to attack ter-
rorists, but also to restrict civic space
and silence the critical voices that dis-
agree with those in power. In many
cases, counterterrorism programmes
fail to clearly define words like ‘ex-
tremism’, ‘radicalization’ and ‘terror-
ism’. As such, these programmes
have paved the way for governments to
draft open-ended laws and expand
their powers for, among other things,
emergency surveillance, arrest and
detention.

In addition to such vague terminol-
yogy, the actual content of ‘protective
measures’ can severely limit civic space and threaten a number of hu-
man rights, including property rights,
torture and discrimination, freedom
of expression, and the right to pri-
vacy. Much of the rights violations
and limits on civic action derive from
provisions that expand police or intel-
ligence powers in response to terror-
ism-related cases. Such powers often
impact on people’s rights to privacy,
as they allow for the surveillance of indi-
viduals without a court order and can
be used to force Internet providers to
hand over data on their users. In
many cases, the expansion of police
or intelligence powers is done dur-
ing a ‘state of emergency’. In recent
years, a number of countries, includ-
ing Egypt, Mali, France, Tunisia and
Turkey, have taken this measure in
response to threats of terrorist at-
tacks. While this type of reaction is
understandable in light of the horrors
the world has witnessed, the conse-
quences of these states of emergency
are far-reaching and greatly affect ba-
sic human rights, as was highlighted
in the ‘Standing March’ example.

**Legal and financial barriers**

In addition to counterterrorism legis-
lation, **other measures** are also pos-
 ing threats to civil society. Laws that
restrict the opportunities for CSOs to
organize and operate, or that even
shut down organizations entirely,
have been implemented in a number of
countries. Those organizations involved
in advocacy and political reform have
been particularly targeted. Additionally, in response to the increase in large-scale
protests across the globe, the intensity
and number of measures to contain them
has risen dramatically. In Egypt, for
example, a harsh set of measures
was adopted in 2013 giving Egyptian
authorities the power to deport, to con-
fine and arrest criminals. As a result,
then, hundreds of Egyptians have
been arrested, wounded and even
killed for participating in peaceful
demonstrations.

Because CSOs are often dependent
on external funding for their contin-
ued survival, measures that restrict
access to resources are particularly
effective tools for actors seeking to
put a stop to their activities. For gov-
ernments, the recommendations of
the Financial Action Task Force
(FATF), an inter-governmental body
that aims to combat money launder-
ing and terrorism, are often used as
justification for such measures. Anti-
money laundering measures based
on FATF guidelines, for instance,
make it harder to transfer resources
to NGOs in conflict areas. And, be-
cause FATF advises countries to apply
‘proportionate measures’ to protect organizations potentially vulnerable to
terrorism, governments will often use
control over the funds that civil society can
receive has tightened dramatically.

**Censorship and fake news**

The history of censorship dates back
to ancient times, as does the struggle
for freedom of expression. And, while
in ancient times censorship was seen
as an honourable task that served to
shape the character of the people,
nowadays it is generally regarded as
a violation of freedom of expression.
Despite this shift, censorship contin-
ues to be used in practically all na-
tions and by a variety of methods and
actors, corresponding to the endless
variety of ways in which people ex-
press their opinions: newspapers are
shut down for exposing corrupt politi-
cians, certain forms of art are made
shut down for exposing corrupt politi-
cians, certain forms of art are made
shut down for exposing corrupt politi-
cians, certain forms of art are made
shut down for exposing corrupt politi-
cians, certain forms of art are made

illegal because they do not comply with religious rules, demonstrations that challenge state authorities are prohibited, and artists are forced to cancel shows that are considered offensive to the state religion.

Not only governments, but also the private sector is at times guilty of illegitimate censorship. In 2004, for example, the Walt Disney Company refused to produce and distribute the documentary by Michael Moore called Fahrenheit 9/11. The documentary linked the then-president George W. Bush to the family of Osama Bin Laden and was very critical of the president’s actions prior to and immediately after the terrorist attacks on America on September 11. Former Disney CEO Michael Eisner argued that Disney did not want to be associated with this controversial and political film, because consumers would not want Disney to take sides, but to remain non-partisan. However, others pointed out that Disney’s censorship had a very different motivation: According to the New York Times, Disney regarded Moore’s documentary as ‘bad for business’, because the company feared losing the tax breaks it received for its Florida theme parks, where Jeb Bush – the president’s brother – was governor. Whether Disney’s motivation was political, economic, or a mixture of both, the fact remains that the company never published Moore’s documentary; a decision some regard as an attack on freedom of expression. Given the promise of huge revenue, the film was eventually published by Lionsgate Films. Yet, this example does raise the question of how many movies, less likely to yield such profits, were never produced due to corporative censorship.

Because the Internet offers people almost limitless opportunities to communicate, spread and receive information, the digital arena has become a prime target for censorship. Such censorship can take many forms, from shutting down particular websites to preventing internet access altogether. The 2015 Freedom on the Net Report by Freedom House found that “topics that attract most restriction are criticism of authorities, expression of corruption, mobilisation of the public and social commentary”.

In addition to restrictions, censorship has increasingly taken a different form, particularly online, for example, the spread of so-called ‘fake news’. Although it is not an example of censorship in its ‘purest form’, fake news has become a powerful way to silence dissident voices and ensure that truths that are ‘inconvenient’ to those in power – be they the government, private companies or others – are replaced by more convenient information. Cause for additional worry is the fact that efforts against the spread of fake news are now leading to increased censorship. Many governments, for example, are exploring legislation to make the spread of fake news a criminal act. If put in practice, this would mean that governments will be in charge of what is ‘accurate’ and what constitutes ‘truth’. Such a situation would greatly undermine freedom of expression and Internet freedom.

Bureaucracy and corruption

Perhaps less deadly than police crackdowns on demonstrations, and not as visibly infringing upon human rights, are bureaucratic arrangements. However, these can still be an enormous obstacle for civil society. In the Civil Society Europe Survey, respondents pointed out that increased bureaucracy and additional requirements for registering associations, for example, make it harder for people – especially those with a lower level of formal education and poor access to information – to establish an organization. Organizations that are already active are often overwhelmed by the need to process a variety of documents, which makes them less effective and limits their time to undertake core activities. In Venezuela, some have even argued that bureaucracy is the greatest barrier to social change, as it makes productivity and efficiency for organizations, movements and individual citizens practically impossible.

Often related to these bureaucratic obstacles – whether deliberate or not – is corruption, a practice that numerous organizations, including Transparency International, are seeking to curb. Political leaders, companies and civil society itself have all been guilty of corruption in a variety of contexts. Positions of power are abused to aid illicit financial outflows, extract resources, and steal and hide vast amounts of wealth. In Guatemala, for instance, it was estimated that “some 30 per cent of the state budget is lost to corruption”. Additionally, in many countries, ongoing corruption is causing natural devastation, posing a threat to peace and security, and hampering the ability of governments to serve their citizens. However, corruption is by no means limited to state institutions. Private companies are often intimately involved in corruption practices by state officials, as well as having their own corruption schemes. While these systems greatly affect civil society, CSOs themselves do not always have a clear conscience when it comes to corruption or arbitrariness.
Definitions

Civil society

As civil society across the globe is highly varied in its nature and composition, a multitude of definitions exist. For the purpose of this report the broad definition of civil society, as employed by CIVICUS is used:

Civil society, in its broadest and simplest terms refers to “The arena – outside of the family, the state, and the market – which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests”. This formulation includes non-governmental organizations, private voluntary organisations, peoples’ movements, community-based organizations, trade unions, charities, social and sports clubs, cooperatives, environmental groups, professional associations, consumer organizations, faith-based organizations and the not for profit media, in the definition of civil society.

As this definition is still too broad for the scope of this report, an additional guiding principle is applied in the selection of civil society initiatives and organizations. Only those actions and organizations that have purposes or values compatible with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and are committed to the promotion and protection of these rights are included. Examples include: human rights organizations, development aid organizations (NGOs, associations), peace movements, pro-democracy movements.

Civic activism

When we think of civic activism, political activism is usually the first thing that springs to mind. As Duncan Green, Oxfam GB’s Senior Strategic Adviser, points out in his latest book, How Change Happens, civic activism indeed includes, but is not limited to, political activism. He argues that a good definition would be any individual action with social consequences, many of which involve collective activity. In line with Green’s definition, at the heart of this report are (collective) actions with social impact, often with a political purpose. Examples of civic activism described in this report have shown innovative ways to ensure that society and its institutions respect people’s rights and meet their needs. At the same time, again borrowing from Green’s work, the examples of civic activism are not only a means, but also an end in themselves: a crucial kind of freedom that is continuously under threat.

Civic space

Civic space is not a space that can be seen or drawn on a map. It is, as Samuel Worthington so aptly described, “the ability for health clinics in Pakistan to operate freely”, “the [opportunity] for humanitarians to rapidly deliver shelter in the Philippines”, and “the freedom for people-based organizations to fight for human rights”. Civic space, in other words, is the arena within which civil society can function. Its boundaries are defined by three fundamental rights: the right to association, the right to peaceful assembly, and the right to freedom of expression. If these rights are in some way threatened or taken away, the boundaries of civic space tighten and, consequently, the healthy functioning of civil society will be limited.

While we have tried to steer clear of technical jargon in this report, some civil society-related terminology has been used. Therefore, we offer a few words here by way of definitions.
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