

ASSESSING CIVIL SOCIETY IN CYPRUS AND ACROSS THE WORLD - THE CIVICUS CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX

Volkhart Finn Heinrich & Mahi Khallaf
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

1. Introduction

This paper introduces the conceptual, methodological and operational building blocks of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI)¹, a participatory action-research project assessing the state of civil society in countries around the world. It also provides a first glimpse on its interesting application in the context of Cyprus, which at the point of writing this paper, had just begun.

The CSI project links an assessment of the state of civil society with a reflection and action-planning process by civil society stakeholders, aiming to strengthen civil society in those areas where weaknesses or challenges are detected. By seeking to combine valid assessment, broad-based reflection and joint action, the CSI attempts to make a contribution to the perennial debate on how research can inform policy and practice.

2. Addressing the Civil Society Knowledge Gap

Civil society, broadly defined as the sphere of voluntary action between the market and the state, is one of today's most frequently encountered social science and public policy buzzwords. Whereas over the past two decades, the number of civil society actors and their influence in public life has grown significantly, global knowledge about civil society is still astonishingly limited.

There is growing recognition about the fact that the scientific and practitioner communities know little about the strength, shape and development of civil society around the world, let alone the factors fostering or inhibiting a strong civil society (Anheier 2004:11; Edwards 2004:108; Knight/Chigudu et al. 2002:54). Similarly, many of the international agencies and institutions that support civil society have come to realise that limited knowledge hampers effective support and that a contextual analysis of civil society in a given country is an essential precondition for successful programmatic activity on strengthening civil society (SIDA 2004, NORAD 2002: 2). However, the elusiveness of the civil society concept, misused as an 'analytical hat-stand' (van Rooy 1998:6) for widely diverging ideologies and policy agendas, as well as the greatly differing manifestations of civil society around the world have proved to be formidable challenges for the task of empirical civil society analysis.

The lack of an overall understanding of civil society's empirical manifestations has hampered both the advancement of scientific knowledge on the subject, as well as an appreciation by practitioners and the development community of civil society's actual role in governance and development (Uphoff/Krishna 2001; Howell/Pearce 2002). These are clearly relevant practical and scientific reasons for improving the understanding of civil society through empirical assessment and analysis.

Also, the record of turning civil society into an "operational reality" in terms of discourse, engagement, or even joint actions by its diverse members, is mixed. In many countries, civil society is increasingly used in the discourse of policy-makers and donor agencies and also by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) themselves. Yet, it is rarely brought to life by bringing various civil society actors together at a public forum, let alone behind a common goal. Where such engagements are taking place, the immense collective power of civil society is evident (Knight/Chigudu et al. 2002: 56).

Even if collective actions are often impossible due to fundamental differences in values and interests among diverse civil society actors, dialogue and exchange are essential for the cohesiveness and sustainability of the civil society arena: "For a civil society to develop, then, it is necessary to establish arenas in which civil organizations can meet, negotiate and cooperate. Such arenas serve as fora for dialogue, understanding and compromise, and they provide a

¹ These sections draw heavily on the more comprehensive project description (Heinrich 2004).

means for the coordination of relations between civil society and the state” (Hadenius/Uggla 1996: 28).

CIVICUS’ own experience shows that for such fora to have impact beyond simply ad-hoc networking, they require a carefully and realistically structured agenda and a consultative process, both before and after. There are also clear benefits from declaring certain highly contentious issues as ‘off-limits’ and focusing on shared concerns, such as the protection or enlargement of common civic space. Yet, in reality, spaces for such engagement among the broad ambit of civil society actors are extremely rare.

This brief review of the current state of civil society research and action has identified two gaps: (a) a contextual and valid tool to assess the state of civil society at country level; and (b) a framework and forum for civil society actors to engage and co-ordinate at national level. Together, these two contributions are likely to address some aspects of the current impasse surrounding civil society. In a bold attempt, the international civil society network *CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation* has initiated the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI), a programme seeking to address both of these needs simultaneously.

In the design of such an international assessment project, a number of critical conceptual and methodological choices had to be made. These choices are described in the following sections, before the authors turn to the operational aspects of the project and describe its implementation in Cyprus.

3. Defining and conceptualising civil society

Civil society clearly is a complex concept and the CSI’s task of defining and operationalising the concept, identifying its essential features and designing a strategy to assess its state was, in itself, a complex (and potentially controversial) process. Given the apparent elusiveness of the civil society concept, this task can be likened to an attempt to nail a pudding to the wall!²

Whereas this process drew on conceptual tools from other fields and disciplines, this was the first time an attempt was made to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework to assess the state of civil society cross-nationally. The following principles guided the design of the conceptual framework.

Design a globally relevant and applicable framework

Both the concept and the reality of civil society vary greatly around the world. Given the global nature of the CSI, the conceptual framework seeks to accommodate cultural variations in understandings of civil society and diverse forms and functions of civil society as observed in different countries around the world. In particular, the CSI seeks to avoid a ‘Western’ bias in defining key concepts and choosing indicators. It recognises the debate among civil society scholars as to whether the civil society concept is applicable to non-western contexts, given its historical roots in the Scottish Enlightenment and the subsequent discourse around the Western nation-state and capitalism (Kasfir 1998; Blaney/Pasha 1993; Lewis 2002). As stated in the pilot phase reflection paper (Heinrich/Naidoo 2001), CIVICUS contends that collective citizen action is a feature common to all societies around the world and civil society is an adequate concept to describe this universal reality irrespective of its philosophical roots. Such an explicitly a-historical use of the civil society concept as a heuristic tool to understand the socio-political dynamics in today’s societies is one of the foundations of the CSI’s conceptual framework.

Be as inclusive as possible

² This metaphor has been used to describe the conceptualisation of a similarly elusive concept, namely political culture (Kaase 1983).

Debates around (1) how to operationalise and measure civil society and (2) how to strengthen 'real civil societies' are still in their infancy. Given the current lack of consensus around the concept of civil society, the CSI framework seeks to accommodate a variety of theoretical perspectives by identifying and generating knowledge about a range of different features and dimensions of civil society. The CSI has therefore adopted a very inclusive and multi-disciplinary approach in terms of the civil society definition, indicators, actors and processes, incorporating the development-oriented literature as well as approaches situating civil society in relation to democracy and governance. This both eases the task of conceptualisation and data collection as well as facilitates engagement within the field of civil society research and related themes, such as democracy, governance and development.

Reflect the reality of civil society

There is much debate concerning civil society's normative content. Some argue that to belong to civil society, actors must be democratic (Diamond 1994), oriented towards the public good (Knight/Hartnell 2001) or at least adhere to basic civil manners (Shils 1991; Merkel/Lauth 1998). Whereas these definitions and concepts are useful in defining civil society as an 'ideal', they are less useful in seeking to understand and assess the reality of civil society across the globe. Since the CSI seeks to 'assess the state of civil society', this assessment would obviously be pre-determined to yield a more positive result if, from the outset, any undesirable or 'uncivil' elements were by definition excluded from the investigation. The CSI, therefore, adopts a 'realistic' view by acknowledging that civil society is composed of positive and negative, peaceful and violent forces that may advance or obstruct social progress. It also acknowledges that civil society is not a homogenous entity, but rather a complex arena where diverse values and interests interact and power struggles occur (Fowler 1996:18).

Take a normative stance

In selecting certain indicators and scaling them from "most negative" to "most positive", the CSI necessarily had to make normative judgments as to what the defining features of civil society are, what functions civil society should serve, what values it should embrace, and so on. To tackle this issue, the CSI took guidance from universal standards (such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights), CIVICUS' own values (see www.civicus.org) and the broad academic and practitioners' literature on civil society's characteristics, roles and enabling factors.

Ensure action-orientation

The CSI, as opposed to academically-focused research initiatives, aims to generate practical information for civil society practitioners and other primary stakeholders. It therefore seeks to identify aspects of civil society that can be *changed* and to generate information and knowledge relevant to *action-oriented* goals. This action-orientation informs the choice of indicators, particularly in the structure, values and impact dimensions.

3.1. Civil Society Definition

The CSI defines civil society as '***the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market where people associate to advance common interests***'.

In conceptualising civil society as an *arena*, the CSI emphasises the importance of civil society's role in providing a public space where diverse societal values and interests interact. The term 'arena' is used to describe the particular realm or space in a society where people come together to debate, discuss, associate, and seek to influence broader society. CIVICUS strongly believes that this 'arena' is distinctly different from other arenas in society, such as the market, state or family. Based on the CSI's practical interest in strengthening civil society, it conceptualises civil society as a *political* term, rather than an *economic* one synonymous to the non-profit sector.

While acknowledging theoretical boundaries between civil society, state, market and family, the CSI recognises that in reality the boundaries between these spheres are fuzzy. First, as shown in Figure 1, there can be some overlap between the different spheres. For example, co-operatives that have both profit-based and value-based goals might be seen to occupy the overlapping

space of civil society and market.³ Second, the CSI defines ‘membership’ in civil society according to “function” (i.e. what activity or role an actor is undertaking) rather than organisational “form”. This means that actors can move from one arena to another – or even inhabit more than one simultaneously – depending on the nature of their activity. For example, a private firm engaged in profit-making activities is clearly acting within the realm of the market. The same firm, however, undertaking philanthropy activities, can be said to be acting within civil society. This framework places less emphasis on organisational forms and allows for a broader focus on the functions and roles of informal associations, movements and instances of collective citizen action. Whereas this definition makes it more difficult to identify who belongs to civil society and who does not than one which defines civil society by its organisational form (for example, non-profit, independent of state etc.), only such a definition can take account of the full range of civil society actors.

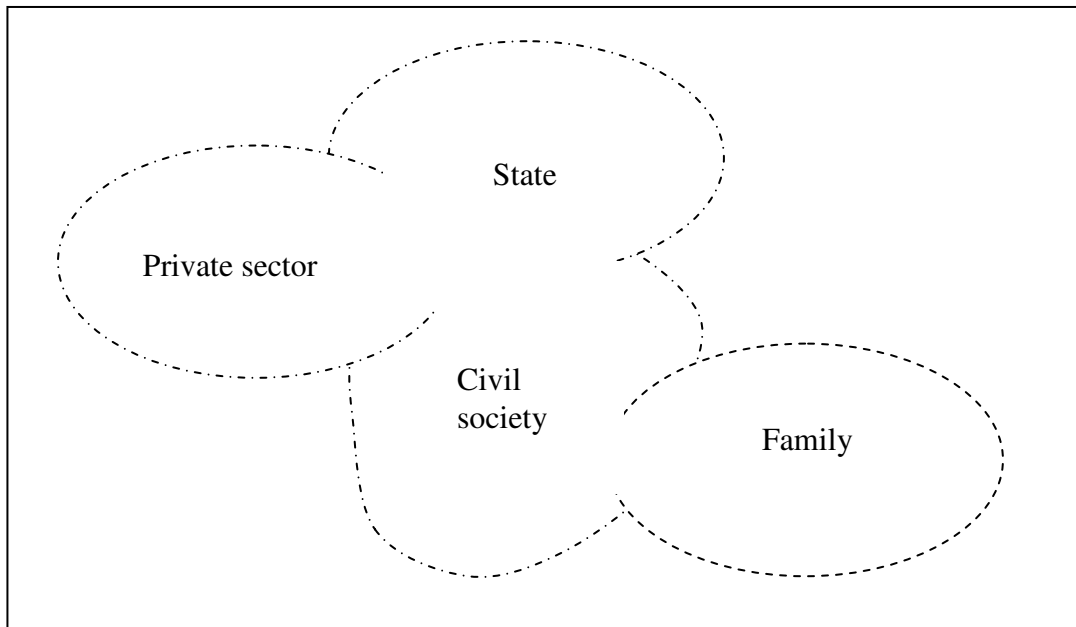


Figure 1: Civil Society Arena's Fuzzy Boundaries

Thus, the CSI purposefully chose to avoid a focus on organisations. Firstly, while people often “associate” with one another by belonging to a CSO, they can also join a street demonstration or an informal group. Civil society definitions that focus on “organisations” fail to account for such informal and ephemeral forms of collective action. Secondly, such definitions tend towards an assessment of civil society according to the number and forms of existing organisations. This approach is biased towards mainly Western countries where formal or registered organisations are more prevalent and is biased against those countries where, for a variety of cultural, political or practical reasons, most civil society associations are informal or not registered. Thirdly, a comprehensive assessment of the state of civil society requires a focus on the quality and content of civil society’s activities, which a merely quantitative measurement of organisations could not achieve (Howard 2003: 52). The CSI recognises **citizens** rather than organisations as the basic building block of civil society and bases its assessment of the size and vibrancy of civil society on the prevalence of all forms of collective citizen action rather than on “counting organisations”. The CSI is also interested in civil society as a public *arena* or *space* with its specific characteristics, which cannot be detected when civil society is regarded as the simple aggregate of a *set of*

³ For example, parastatals represent a borderline case between government and the market; and political parties are sometimes cited as an example of a borderline case between civil society and government.

organisations. To refer again to van Rooy, commenting on the drawbacks of an organisation-focused approach, “In our fascination with trees, we do not see forests” (van Rooy 1998:29).

3.2. The Civil Society Diamond - Conceptualising the State of Civil Society in Four Dimensions

To render the abstract civil society concept useful for empirical research, an operational concept has to be established. In this task, one should be guided by the specific goals of the project – in the CSI's case the generation of an accurate, comprehensive and comparable assessment of the state of civil society in a given country which can be used to detect specific strengths and weaknesses and eventually design strategies and activities to improve the state of civil society. To interpret the current condition of civil society holistically, the CSI uses a broad understanding of the concept of the ‘state of civil society’. This covers the structural and normative manifestations of civil society, but also encompasses the conditions that support or inhibit civil society's development as well as the consequences of civil society's activities for society at large⁴. The CSI identifies the following four components:

- (1) The **structure** of civil society denoting the structural characteristics of the civil society arena and its actors;
- (2) The **values** held and advocated in the civil society arena, describing the attitudinal characteristics of civil society actors;
- (3) Disabling or enabling factors for civil society, located in the external **environment** in which civil society exists and functions;
- (4) The **impact** of activities pursued by civil society actors on society at large.

These four dimensions can be represented graphically as the Civil Society Diamond⁵ (see Figure 2).

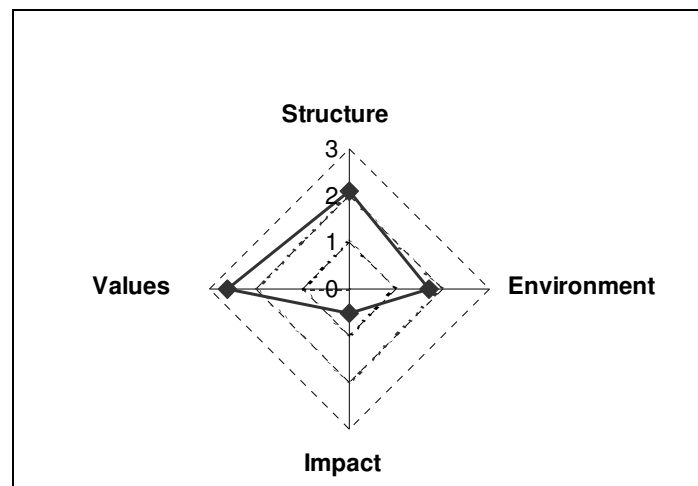


Figure 2: Civil Society Diamond

⁴ For a more detailed account of the four dimensions and their rationale, see Anheier 2004.

⁵ The four-dimensional framework and Diamond tool was developed for CIVICUS by Dr. Helmut Anheier in 1999, then Director of the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics.

Each dimension is divided into several sub-dimensions composed of individual indicators. The CSI uses 74 different indicators to analyse the state of civil society, each measuring an important and specific aspect of the state of civil society⁶.

4. Data Collection & Aggregation

The accurate measurement of complex and abstract socio-political phenomena – such as civil society – has long been neglected in the social sciences, especially in the field of comparative research. It has only recently received the attention it deserves (Adcock/Collier 2001; Munck/Verkuilen 2002). It is closely related to the challenge of data availability, which, in the context of cross-national civil society assessment, poses a considerable problem. There is a large difference in the amount of available data on civil society between better-researched Western countries and countries of the global South, where information is often scarce, or even non-existent. In many countries, research on civil society issues is truly an exploration into a “no man’s land”.

A second and related problem concerns the lack of a widely used and agreed set of data collection tools and instruments for civil society assessment. Due to the relatively recent rediscovery of the concept and the focus on theoretical and descriptive studies, only a few attempts have been made at measuring aspects of civil society on a cross-national basis⁷, which have developed a limited number of tested tools and methodological insights. Based on a review of existing tools, it was clear to the CSI project team that civil society in its myriad forms, expressions and manifestations at various levels from the national to the local, requires multiple and flexible data collection methods.

In this context, the CSI project developed a flexible research framework, seeking to address the challenges of data availability, lack of research tools and diversity of contexts within the framework of participatory action-research. Firstly, all available sources of information should be used to avoid ‘re-inventing research wheels’ and wasting scarce resources. Additionally, in many countries, information on civil society is more comprehensive than generally assumed, but a comprehensive framework, such as the CSI, is needed for the information to be effectively compiled and presented.

Secondly, as the CSI seeks to gather information on different aspects of the state of civil society, it is crucial to select and design appropriate data-gathering instruments. No single source can provide all the information the CSI requires. As a result, the CSI proposes a relatively large number of research methods and a resource-intensive research design. This mix of different methods is essential to ensure accurate and useful research outputs, but also to accommodate the variations of civil society, for example in rural vs. urban areas etc.

Lastly, the research methodology is explicitly designed to promote learning and, ultimately, action on the part of participants. Besides feeding into the final national-level workshop, data collection processes also aim to contribute to participant learning. This is done, for example, through group-based approaches that challenge participants to see themselves as part of a “bigger picture”, think beyond their own organisational or sectoral context, reflect strategically about relations within and between civil society and other parts of society, identify key strengths and weaknesses of their civil society and assess collective needs.

⁶ A complete list of indicators, including their score descriptions, can be found in Heinrich 2004.

⁷ See, for example, Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (<http://www.jhu.edu/~cnp/>); Civil Society & Governance Project at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex (<http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/civsoc/>); ESF Network on Citizenship, Involvement, and Democracy (<http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/cid/>); World Value Survey co-ordinated by Ron Inglehart at the University of Michigan (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>); London School of Economics’ Global Civil Society Yearbook (<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Yearbook/>).

Civil society is situated at the confluence of various societal forces and actors. The state, social norms and traditions as well as the socio-economic environment strongly shape the specific character of civil society. For a valid and comprehensive assessment of civil society, a variety of perspectives need to be included – insider, external stakeholder and outsider views, ranging from the national, regional to the local level. Thus, finding the right mix of research methods and data sources is key to a successful measurement of the state of civil society.

With this in mind, the following CSI research methods have been designed: (1) **Regional stakeholder consultations** to be held in different locations in the country. Participants respond to individual questionnaires and subsequently participate in a one-day group discussion; (2) **Community surveys** investigating the value dispositions of community members, their activities within civil society and attitudes towards, and engagement with, community-level CSOs; (3) A **review** of appropriate **media** to gather information on civil society activities, attitudes and values expressed by civil society and other public actors as well as to establish the media image of civil society, (4) A set of **fact-finding studies** to assemble information about civil society that already exists but that is not necessarily published or publicly disseminated.

Together, these instruments collect the data required for scoring indicators and preparing a narrative report on the state of civil society⁸. But how to aggregate a myriad of data collected by these methods in a meaningful way?

Data aggregation is performed through an indicator scoring process. The CSI's scoring method seeks to combine the data collection process outlined above with a transparent and participatory scoring process. Figure 3 depicts the specific data aggregation steps, beginning with the primary and secondary data research methods synthesised into indicator scores (ranging from 0 to 3), which are then aggregated into sub-dimension and dimension scores, eventually forming the Civil Society Diamond.

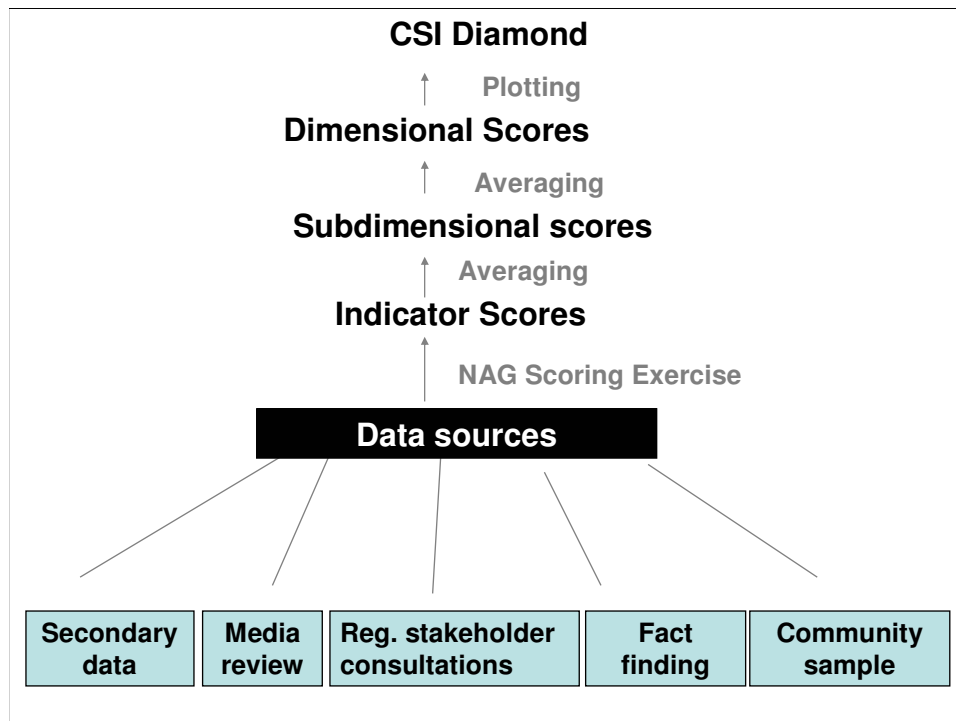


Figure 3: Data Aggregation Steps

⁸ For more information on each of these research methods, please refer to Heinrich 2004.

The National Advisory Group (NAG) scoring exercise is at the heart of the scoring. Indicators are scored by the NAG using a “citizen jury” approach (Jefferson Center 2002), in which citizens come together to deliberate, and make decision on a public issue, based on presented facts. The NAG’s role is to give a score (similar to passing a judgement) on each indicator based on the evidence (or data) presented by the National Index Team.

The clear guidelines and transparent and participatory process of the NAG scoring exercise lends credibility to the results as well as yields accurate indicator scores. Generating the indicator scores through a consultative process among civil society practitioners and other stakeholders provides NAG members with a broad ownership of the results. The subsequent scrutinising of the indicator scores through national workshop participants provides the NAG with effective checks and balances to score realistically and accurately.

Accurate scores are crucial to the overall success of the CSI process as they form an important part of the final CSI Country Report and provide information on the state of civil society that is comparable across countries. However, the scoring exercise and the resulting Civil Society Diamond is only one part of a larger analysis of civil society that is captured in a comprehensive country report on the state of civil society. The main purpose of the indicators is to highlight interesting issues and to allow cross-country comparisons on critical aspects of civil society. The country report is aimed at providing a detailed picture that draws on all the available information without being constrained by demands for quantifiable information and comparability.

By combining the high degree of flexibility inherent in the CSI research mix with a rigorous indicator scoring approach, the CSI seeks to achieve an appropriate balance between the needs of contextual validity and the desire for cross-country comparability. This two-step process of aggregating individual research findings into comparable indicators through a participatory process is one of the unique features of the CSI’s research process.

5. Linking Assessment with Reflection and Action

The CSI does not stop at the generation of knowledge alone: it actively seeks to link knowledge-generation on civil society with reflection and action by civil society stakeholders. To ensure this link, it uses participatory action-research methods and principles (see Freire 1974; Fals-Borda/Rahman 1991; Chambers 1997; Knight/Chigudu et al. 2002:33-36):

Firstly, the CSI is implemented by, and for, civil society with the ultimate aim of enhancing the capacity of civil society. It is not only aimed at producing knowledge, but to promote social change. Secondly, the CSI involves its ‘beneficiaries’ and actors – in this case, civil society stakeholders – in all stages of the process, from the design and implementation to the deliberation and dissemination stages. Thirdly, and linked to this, the participatory process ensures that desired courses of action and policy are chartered by the stakeholders through a combination of empirical data-gathering and normative assessment. Fourthly, the engagement of researchers and practitioners throughout the project helps to break down barriers and allows for a mutually empowering relationship.

Whereas the CSI draws on principles and techniques developed by participatory research, it also uses mainstream social research methods, such as surveys and desk reviews. This eclectic mix of research methods is deemed the most appropriate path to achieving both insightful knowledge on the state of civil society at country level and meaningful action on the part of civil society stakeholders.

At the heart of the CSI’s knowledge-action link is the national CSI workshop, which brings together a variety of civil society stakeholders, many of which have been actively involved in the CSI research process, for instance as NAG members, participants in the regional stakeholder consultations or as key informants for specific research questions. The national workshop goal is twofold. Firstly, it aims to engage stakeholders in a critical discussion of, and reflection on, the results of the CSI initiative in order to arrive at a common understanding of its current state and

major challenges. This is a prerequisite for the second goal, namely for participants to use the findings as a basis for the identification of specific strengths and weaknesses as well as potential areas of improvement for civil society. If deemed appropriate, the national workshop could culminate in the development of a specific action agenda, which is subsequently carried out by the stakeholders. It is this cycle of assessment, reflection and action (see figure 4), coupled with the general participatory nature of the project, which are at the core of CSI's attempt to successfully link research with action.

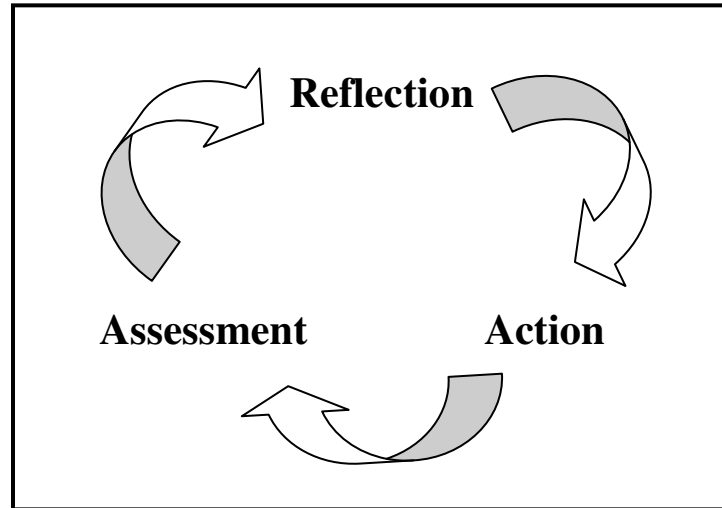


Figure 4: CSI Project Cycle

But how is a participatory cycle relevant to efforts to strengthen civil society in a country? One reason is that such a mechanism can foster the self-awareness of civil society actors as being part of something larger - namely, civil society itself. As a purely educational gain, it broadens the horizon of CSO representatives through a process of reflecting upon, and engaging with, generic civil society issues which may go beyond the more narrow foci of their respective organisations.

A strong collective self-awareness among civil society actors can also function as an important catalyst for joint advocacy activities to defend civic space when under threat or to advance the common interests of civil society vis-à-vis external forces. These generic civil society issues, on which there is presumably more commonality than differences among civil society actors, are at the core of the CSI assessment.

It should, of course, be kept in mind that in many instances, civil society actors and external stakeholders will not be able to find common ground due to irreconcilable differences in values, interests and strategies. Even then, however, the relevance of dialogue, constructive engagement and of 'agreeing to disagree' should not be underestimated (Edwards 2004:100). This is especially important in many places where civil society experiences internal fragmentation, parochialism and divisions within the sector, as well as between civil society and government.

There are many ways of strengthening the cohesiveness and long-term sustainability of civil society. The CSI's unique approach is to combine an *analytical assessment* with a *participatory approach* to convene, engage and mobilise civil society's diverse actors and external stakeholders. The following section outlines the actual steps in implementing the CSI

6. Overview of the CSI Implementation Approach

The CSI is implemented in every country by prominent civil society organisations that take responsibility for co-ordinating input from a wide range of civil society actors and other stakeholders ranging from government, business, and international agencies to media and academia. These stakeholders assess the state of civil society in their national context along the four dimensions of the Civil Society Diamond.

The specific sequence of the CSI implementation approach is as follows:

1. The NCO identifies an in-country National Index Team (NIT) made up of: (1) a project co-ordinator, who is responsible for the overall co-ordination and management of the project; (2) a civil society expert, who is responsible for drafting the country report; and (3) a participatory researcher, who conducts and facilitates the various research activities.
2. The NIT carries out a preliminary stakeholder analysis and identifies an in-country National Advisory Group (NAG), consisting of approximately 12 persons representing a diverse set of civil society stakeholders.
3. A review of secondary data is conducted by the NIT and a draft overview report is prepared and distributed to the NAG and CIVICUS for comment and input.
4. The NAG meets to: (i) review the overview report; (ii) discuss and adapt as necessary the proposed project methodology; (iii) discuss the concept and definition of “civil society” in the country, and (iv) conduct an analysis of key actors and power relations in society at large as well as within civil society to help contextualise civil society within the broader context of societal actors and power relations;
5. Some or all of the primary research tools, described in the previous section are applied, depending on the extent of available secondary data.
6. All findings are submitted to the civil society expert who prepares a draft country report.
7. The NAG meets to assign scores for the CSI indicators based on data presented in the draft country report and according to scoring guidelines. These scores are aggregated into sub-dimension and dimension scores. The scoring results for the four identified dimensions of civil society are graphically represented in the form of a Civil Society Diamond.
8. A national workshop, convening civil society actors and external stakeholders from government, media, academic institutions and the business sector, takes place. Participants receive the draft country report prior to the workshop. The goals of the workshop are to review and validate CSI research findings, to analyse principal strengths and weaknesses of civil society and to identify and plan potential civil society strengthening activities.
9. Final scores and national workshop results are incorporated into a final country report which is published and disseminated widely.

The project is currently implemented in more than 60 countries around the world⁹. NCOs are responsible for leading the various project activities at country level as well as for raising the necessary financial resources. CIVICUS provides a comprehensive implementation toolkit, develops capacity and provides technical assistance and quality assurance to the in-country work on the CSI. Based on the knowledge generated at country level, a global report and additional papers and documents will be published by CIVICUS upon completion of this implementation phase in 2006. It is envisioned that the CSI will eventually become a regular benchmarking and monitoring tool implemented by national civil society stakeholders every two to three years.

⁹ For a list of participating countries and organisations, see www.civicus.org

7. The CSI implementation in Cyprus

The CSI is currently being implemented in Cyprus by the Management Centre of the Mediterranean (MCM) in the North and Intercollege in the South. The project was launched after CIVICUS conducted a three day training workshop for both project teams in Cyprus between the 28th February and 1st March 2005. At the time of writing this paper both teams are fully operational and the main systems and structures of the project are in place. The first Project Advisory Group meetings (PAG)¹⁰ took place in both communities in April 2005 and subsequently a set of primary and secondary research activities have been launched. CIVICUS continues to coordinate the overall implementation of the project and to provide regular support to both teams.

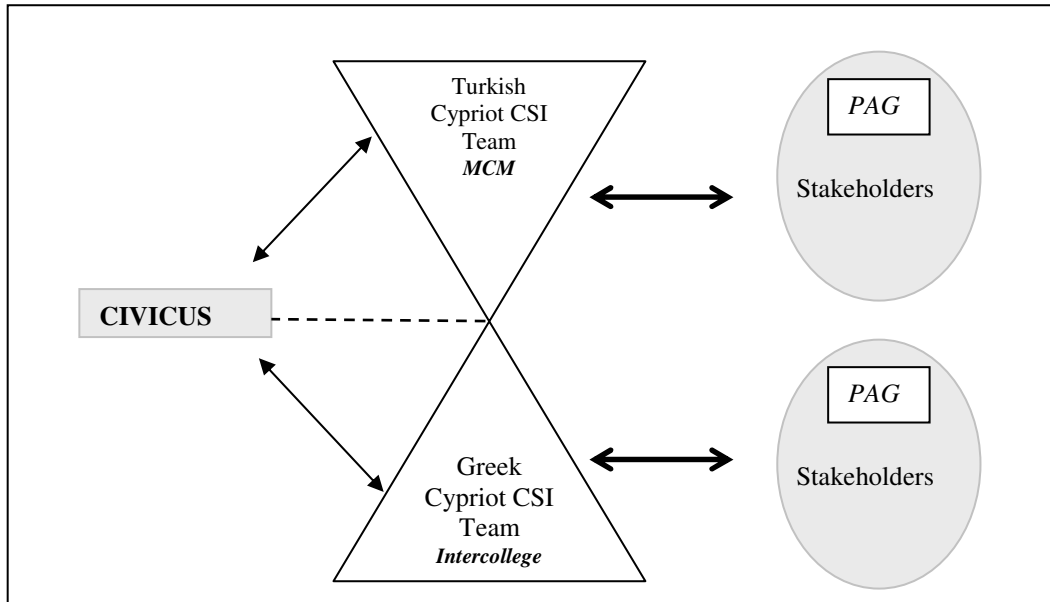


Figure 5: CSI Actors in Cyprus

CSI in Cyprus – Special features

Cyprus has been divided for over 30 years due to ethnic strife which started in the early 1960s and culminated with the Turkish invasion of 1974 resulting in a physical division of the island between the Turkish Cypriot minority in the North and the Greek Cypriot majority in the South. Through out the years, no solution to the conflict was acceptable to both sides and as a result this island of 780,133 inhabitants remains divided along the UN monitored green line¹¹.

Given the unique political situation of Cyprus and the division between the North and the South, the two communities have developed into fairly separate and autonomous entities. Civil society has also evolved separately within both communities and developed distinguishing features that cater to the distinct needs of the two communities. As a result, the CSI assessment is being undertaken separately but in parallel in the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities.

In both parts of Cyprus, the impact of the ethnic conflict has stifled the development of civil society. In both communities, strong state as well as strong traditional institutions did not leave

¹⁰ Both teams from the North and the South have chosen to name the National Advisory Group as project advisory group due to the irrelevance of the term “national” in the Cypriot context.

¹¹ For more information about the political situation in Cyprus please refer to <http://www.cyprus-conflict.net/>

much room for independent voluntary action by citizens. In the Turkish Cypriot community, the military and economic presence of the Turkish state further de-motivated the growth of civic initiatives. However, over the past few years civil society has grown stronger in both communities. With support from international donors and NGOs, a range of civil society groups have taken on the task of establishing closer relationships between ordinary citizens of both communities as well as of lobbying for a peaceful solution to the conflict at high levels.

Nevertheless, the rapprochement between the two communities is slow and civil society retains its distinct features in both parts of the island. To acknowledge, assess and build on these characteristics, a separate assessment of civil society in both communities is an important first step towards strengthening its role in the development of Cyprus.

Whereas capturing the specificities of civil society in both communities is a priority, the need for comparison, drawing lessons learnt across both communities and bringing civil society closer together is also of importance. The implementing organizations in the North and the South are therefore working closely together to ensure that the project design and methodology is comparable between the North and the South. Through a series of meetings the teams from the North and South have worked to streamline the primary research tools, such as regional stakeholder consultation questionnaires, community level questionnaires and the media review methodology. Also a series of indicators were added to assess civil society's role in the bi-communal initiatives within the North and South. The aim of these adjustments is to be able to compare data and to come up with insightful revelations that will show the similarities and differences between civil society in both communities. This will be documented in a separate analytical paper with the ultimate aim to strengthen civil society's contribution to the solution of the Cyprus problem.

Civil society clearly has a strong role to play to end the ethnic division of Cyprus. In fact research conducted on ethnic conflict and civil society has shown that associational forms of engagement between interethnic groups tends to promote peace as they "do a better job of withstanding the exogenous communal shocks- like partitions, civil wars..." (Varshney 2001: 378). In Cyprus, interethnic engagement is taking place through some bi-communal initiatives involving Greek and Turkish Cypriot civil society organizations and individuals. The CSI hopes to generate much needed knowledge about the operations and values practiced within the Turkish and Greek Cypriot civil society which will demystify and promote trust within these sectors as a further step towards stronger cooperation and constructive interethnic engagement.

The following are the envisioned main outputs of the CSI implementation in Cyprus:

1. Two regional stakeholder consultations will be conducted in the North and South respectively, to give civil society stakeholders the opportunity to discuss the state of civil society with in their community.
2. A study of a selection of media will be carried out in the North and the South. Based on this study two reports will be produced examining the media's perception of civil society in both communities.
3. Two mono-communal reports and CSI diamonds will be produced for the North and South.
4. A bi-communal analytical paper will highlight the main differences and similarities based on the CSI findings.
5. Two mono communal final workshops will be conducted to discuss and disseminate the CSI findings in both communities and to devise an action agenda for strengthening civil society in both communities.
6. One bi-communal final workshop to discuss the possibility for increased bi-communal activities between civil society actors of both communities and the role of civil society in solving the Cyprus problem

So why is the CSI implementation relevant for Cyprus? There are numerous reasons that prove the relevance and in many ways the urgency of the CSI implementation in Cyprus. Some of

these reasons are relevant for each community separately, while some are related to bi-communal needs. The following are but a few of these motivations:

- Lack of a comprehensive needs assessment of civil society in both the North and the South.
- Need to bring civil society stakeholders together to deliberate on the state of civil society within their communities.
- Open dialogue and networking opportunities between civil society stakeholders in the North and South.
- Share lessons learnt and expertise between the two implementing organizations and other stakeholders in the North and South and pave the way for similar activities in the future.

The CSI implementation in Cyprus will be concluded in October 2005 with the publishing of the two mono-communal reports and the bi-communal paper. Based on the findings of these reports stakeholders will engage in a reflective discussion in an attempt to come up with an action agenda for the strengthening of civil society. CIVICUS will include chapters about civil society in both communities in a global publication that will be published in mid 2006. In addition, representatives from the Management Centre of the Mediterranean and Intercollege will participate in a global conference to discuss the findings of the CSI and share lessons learnt among project partners and civil society stakeholders from all over the world.

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