

**Reconciling Top-down and Bottom-up Models of Civil Society Building in Political
Development: Case Studies in Bulgaria**

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(ABSTRACT)

The concept of civil society has gained popularity among development organizations since the end of the cold war. Having a strong civil society is said to be an important foundation for democracy and even a necessity for an effective and prospering economy. This has resulted in large sums of money being funneled into programs meant to build civil society in developing countries and societies described as being in transition. Some scholars have argued that money intended to build civil society is being spent on programs that build on a top-down model. These scholars argue that a potentially valuable bottom-up model of civil society is often ignored or disrupted by donor organizations.

I explore the validity of the idea of two models for civil society building within the context of case studies in Bulgaria. I further look into possibilities that a mix of the two models can occur between civil society organizations and also within them. This hybridization can give us potential solutions to the problems many scholars find with current donor practices.

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List of Acronyms

ACCESS	Association for Contacts and Cooperation – East Europe Self-Support
BNA	Borrowed Nature Association
CEGA	Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives
CIL	Center for Independent Living
CSDF	Civil Society Development Foundation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAI	Development Alternatives, Inc.
DemNet	Democracy Network
FELE	European Fund for Freedom of Expression
FLGR	Foundation for Local Government Reform
IGO	Inter-Governmental Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISC	Institute for Sustainable Communities
ISO	Intermediate Support Organization
LGI	Local Government Initiative
MSI	Management Systems International
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NOVIB	Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation
Oxfam	Name based on original organization, Oxford Famine Relief
OSF – Sofia	Open Society Foundation - Sofia
Phare	Name based on original program, Poland and Hungary: Action for the Restructuring of the Economy
RTI	Research Triangle Institute
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

**Chapter One:
Introduction**

Introduction:

After the Cold War many of the world's authoritarian regimes subsided in the face of democracy movements¹. The transition of these countries has drawn attention to a need for political development as well as economic development.² The world's wealthy societies have seized upon this and are attempting to bolster democratization around the world through political development aid. One of the most intriguing facets of this effort is attempts at civil society building.

Civil society is commonly described as the groups³ that form between the state and family. There are widely divergent ideas on what these groups do,⁴ but the political development model⁵ of civil society assumes that they serve as the autonomous foundation for democratic rule, the place where a national⁶ consensus can be formed with

¹ Freedom House, FH Country Ratings. <<http://freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>>.

² Putnam, Robert with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton; Princeton University Press. (pp.152-162). Putnam has added a new twist to this by arguing that political development could also lead to economic development. Legitimate rule of law for business contracts, greater trust for market relations, etc. Putnam is describing His book is unlikely to have become quite so popular were it not for the new wave of democratization that had academics and the public scratching their heads for explanation for how democratization works.

³ Which groups count as civil society and which don't is a subject of great debate. Depending on who one consults these groups vary between political parties, bowling clubs, church groups and unions. This question, who is civil society, is very important to this paper as the reader will see.

⁴ As a very old idea, civil society has accumulated quite a few schools of thought. It is often attributed to Aristotle and did not have a normative aspect to it until Gramsci suggested that it served to protect the state from revolution. The normative aspect here could be a negative one. But a closer read also suggests that Gramsci does not view civil society itself too be reactionary but that those who control it have made it so. Gramsci argues that civil society groups must be taken over by revolutionary forces. In this way civil society is empty of normative meaning and only a battle ground over which class forces clash. The positive normative aspect has really not been added to civil society until very recently with the fall of the cold war and the resulting appreciation for how fragile a state can be in the face of a rebellious society. This is where scholars such as Robert Putnam and Benjamin Barber in the United States take up the concept and argue that a "strong" civil society is needed and produces good democratic rule. The fact that strong civil society groups were needed to create Nazi Germany is a subject of debate. None the less, it is this positive idea of civil society that dominates political development thoughts on the subject.

⁵ World Bank Group, What is Civil Society? <<http://www.worldbank.org/wbp/scapital/sources/civil2.htm>>. USAID, Agency Objectives, Civil Society <<http://www.usaid.gov/democracy/civ.html>>.

⁶ In other words a national consciousness can be molded over which a state can be laid. When I say nation I am not referring to a country, which usually contains multiple nations, nor a state. I am referring to the common body of nations that consent to a state. A strong cross cutting civil society is needed to create such a nation of nations. For instance the United States contains many nations, indigenous nations and immigrant nations. But a vibrant civil society can and does to a certain extent mold them into an imperfect and fluctuating greater American nation.

minimal coercion.⁷ This sort of civil society has gained prominence on the agenda of a variety of international institutions and is surfacing on a regular basis at the meetings⁸ where these organizations strategize.⁹ Coinciding with this, the number of books published on the topic picked up in the late 1980s¹⁰ and on through the 1990s.¹¹ As the number and diversity of venues focusing on civil society multiply, one salient feature has become clear. The rhetoric attached to the concept by those scholars who have been adopted by development organizations favors a bottom-up approach with civil society groups typified by horizontal relations, autonomy and volunteerism.¹² However, donor organizations claiming to build civil society have been accused by some scholars,¹³ some beneficiaries,¹⁴ and the popular press,¹⁵ of using methods that result in an “artificial” civil society that is too hierarchical, lacks autonomy and is too mercenary.¹⁶

⁷ Carothers, Thomas. (1999). *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve*. Washington, D.C.; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The idea here is that there have to be some common principles which will be used to hold a government accountable and thereby determine its legitimacy. Families are too small and self-regarding to provide this function. The state with its monopoly on force cannot generate this consensus without attempting to force it down and risk becoming anti-democratic. Other groups whose coercive powers are curbed yet can bridge kinship and other lines are then the logical place for a national consensus and for that matter a national imagination to be formed. Obviously the family will influence these groups as will the state, but for the consensus to be genuine and not verily contrived these groups need a certain amount of autonomy from these influences. To take this further, it can be argued, and is argued, that these groups must also be independent of other exogenous forces such as businesses and donor organizations.

⁸ Geneva 2000: The Next Step in Social Development. (2000). Geneva 2000 Forum: Official Programme. Geneva; Geneva 2000: The Next Step in Social Development. One of many good examples is the large Non-Governmental forum held in Geneva in 2000 to attempt to make sense out of the UN social development agenda.

⁹ Carothers. (pp.87- 94, 207-210).

¹⁰ Keane, John. (1988). *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions*. Stanford; Stanford University Press. (pp.4-11). Most of these books are academic in nature and come out of the political science tradition. There are exceptions and the previously mentioned work of Benjamin Barber and Robert Putnam have popularized the idea bringing it before the general public and policy makers.

¹¹ Carothers. (pp.207-208).

¹² Barber, Benjamin. (1998). *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong*. New York; Hill and Wang.

--- (1995). *Jihad vs. McWorld*. New York; Times Books.

Putnam. (1993).

--- (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York; Simon and Schuster.

¹³ See Chapter Two.

¹⁴ Milosheva, Mariana, Deyan Kiuranov and Ivan Krastev. (1997) “Western Assistance, NGO Community and Civil Society in Bulgaria.” Initiative for Civil Society Building in Bulgaria. Sofia: ACCESS

¹⁵ Dobbs, Michael. (2001). “The Politics of Compassion.” *The Washington Post*. Transcript of online discussion that occurred Friday, Jan. 26; 11 a.m. EST at <<http://www.washingtonpost.com>>.

--- (2001) “Aid Abroad Is Business Back Home: Washington Firms Profit From Overseas Projects.” *The Washington Post*. January 26.

¹⁶ I say mercenary because this is a pejorative form of professionalism that accusers are veering towards. Professionalism itself does not upset them as much as an unaccountable and detached variety. Mercenary

Proposals of how civil society should be built and allegations of how it is built by donor states and organizations seem to establish a dichotomy of practice. On one hand, there is the accusation of donor overemphasis on problem solving through administration¹⁷, an overemphasis on bureaucracy¹⁸, staffing of civil society groups by professionals¹⁹ who

also implies the lack of sustainability that comes with doing a job as long as pay is still forthcoming. It has been argued by some that when donor money dries up so does donor civil society.

Putnam, Barber and others cite civil society's ability to build the sort of trust and bottom up agreement upon which to found governance. In order to do this the groups that compose civil society should be horizontal, there need to be a lot of them, they need to have open membership and they must be very accountable to the larger population which they may claim to represent.

¹⁷ Escobar, Arturo. (1995). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton; Princeton University Press

My understanding of the knowledge that allows for problem solving through administration is guided by Arturo Escobar's concept of professionalization. Escobar tells us that it is "the process that brings the Third World into the politics of expert knowledge and Western science in general". In the administrative environment civil society is a discourse that allows politics to be inducted into the "manifold professional practices through which a politics of truth is created and maintained". From this perspective, civil society is not something that generates and accumulates its own meanings from below. Rather, it is brought in at high cost and carefully injected through highly trained experts who have, through bureaucratic mechanisms, acquired the correct official credentials to be recognized as capable of carrying the concept to new settings. In an idealized version of Escobar's process Bulgarian NGOs would learn through workshops how to administer civil society through the deployment of expert knowledge into bureaucratized processes. These NGOs can even set up their own research arms to reproduce the enfolding of social activities into expert representations and prepare them for handling by technocrats.

The point of all of this is that the knowledge with which to identify and deal with problems is located in places out of reach to the average citizen. The mechanisms for problem solving become highly specialized so that a division of labor can be developed to efficiently and with a great deal of information target elements of the problem and address it. But this is an exclusive realm which excludes "average" citizens whose chief concern is not the specialized knowledge required to navigate the development mechanisms of the donors and NGOs that operate in this field.

¹⁸ Weber, Max, trans. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. (1947). *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York; The Free Press.

I rely on Weber for my understanding of bureaucratic organization. Of particular importance is the binding character of rules, the separation of the bureaucrat from ownership and the careerist nature of office holders.¹⁸ Weber tells us that bureaucracy is characterized by "a continuous organization of official functions bound by rules." These rules are governed by efficacy and rationality and are impersonal. This allows for greater efficiency and the ability to standardize behavior which leads to benefits of interchangeability and scale of operations.

Unfortunately it can also generate an inordinate focus on measurable results and following rule to the exclusion of more abstract and intangible ends that the rules are supposed to work toward. Weber is adamant that bureaucrats are separated from the means of production and ownership. This is one of the defining features of the professional. There is nothing in the ends of the bureaucracy that tangibly benefits the bureaucrat. Tangible benefits are derived from the means of achieving the goal of the organization, not necessarily its achievement.

Bureaucrats become focused on the immediate utility of an office for them. Functionaries come to view the differences between government, business, or NGO offices as being a matter of the office rather than the overall objectives the office is meant to facilitate. A particularly good example of this is Maria Ianeva, the executive director of ACCESS a Bulgarian NGO funded by a number of international donors.

One might expect the executive director of an NGO to be personally committed to whatever enterprise it is engaged in. However, over the course of an interview that I had with her in the summer of 2000, I came to understand that her ending up in ACCESS was purely accidental. She had been expecting to gain a post in

are not accountable to the populations they are meant to serve, and an overall impression of top-down activity. This is logically called the “top-down model.” On the other side of the dichotomy, there is a body of prescriptive literature²⁰ that focuses on problem solving through collective action²¹, organization through volunteerism²², staffing of organs by

the Foreign Ministry until she found herself joining a friend, already on the ACCESS staff, due to the recommendation of a professor. She also saw herself leaving the NGO field after earning her doctorate and working for a political consulting business. It seems that she regards careers with government, non-profit, and business bureaucracies as fully interchangeable. When asked what factors determined her career decisions she referred mainly to the ability of different bureaucracies to promote her career as a political analyst. The political content of prospective organizations and their normative position in society is of marginal importance when compared to the attractiveness of the offices they contain.

Along with the above is the careerist nature of the bureaucrat. The office holder's sole occupation can become the holding of the salaried office. If alternative ways of making a living are disallowed, the bureaucrat's attention can be focused on extracting a living from politics with or without living for it. This may characterize the movement of several NGOs in Bulgaria from a founding mission with various focuses, to ones that may be more attractive to donor investment.

¹⁹ Weber (1947).

The distinction between amateur and professional is one that I have also drawn from Weber and concerns whether “the individual is able to live for politics” or expects a “living from politics.” A certain aspect of this is admittedly a question of motive. However, it also speaks to the question of what incentives are used to encourage involvement in the organization. Usually there is a mix, but it is not difficult to discern whether they are material or symbolic. That is to say whether they involve a salary and access to resources such as a car, or have to do with prestige, power and the status expressed in the act of advising and informing others of their best interests.

The key to deciphering the difference is best found in the direction in which resources flow between members and the organization. If they flow to members of the organizations, typically in the form of a salary, then the member is likely a professional for the purposes of this research. If resources flow from the member into the organization's operations the member is likely an amateur and a volunteer if the resource is time, skills and work. Most organizations have a mix of amateurs and professionals but the presence of one group or another often dominates thus placing them on one pole or the other.

²⁰ Barber (1998).

--- (1995).

Biklen, Douglas P. (1983). *Community Organizing: Theory and Practice*. Englewood Cliffs; Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Della Porta, Donatella and Mario Diani. (1999). *Social Movements: An Introduction*. Malden; Blackwell Publishers Inc.

Eckstein, Susan ed. (1989). *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*. Berkeley; University of California Press.

Petras, James. (1999). “NGOs: In the Service of Imperialism.” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*; Oct, v29, i4. (p.434).

Putnam, Robert (1993).

--- (2000).

²¹ Putnam, Robert with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton; Princeton University Press.

Collective action, as with the other attributes on the bottom-up end of the spectrum, is in direct opposition to what is described on the top-down side. Problems on the top-down end are identified through the exercise of expert knowledge and embedded in the discourse of science. On the bottom-up side they are articulated through popular knowledge and embedded in a large range of potential popular discourses of which science can be one. The emphasis on the collective here denotes a certain equality of participation in any process embarked on. This is directly linked to Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*.

In *Making Democracy Work* Putnam compares local government structures set up at the same time across Italy and tracks the decline and dysfunction of the ones in the south and the thriving success of the ones in

amateurs²³ and an overall impression of bottom-up activity, which I label the “bottom-up model.”

the north. The reason for this, Putnam concludes, is that civil society is strong in the north and weak in the south. The idea being that democratic government suffers when there is a lack of trust and mutual feeling. This greatly simplifies what is, for him, a very elaborate concept. None the less, democratic society functions better, for Putnam, in a place of strong civil society. Putnam describes this strong type as being characterized by a horizontal plain of participants. This is to say that there is both a material and functional equality between the participants. Offices and decisions within the organ are not bound by hierarchical, personalistic or office based regard. Rather mutual regard leads to a more consensus-based approach rather than an administrative one. Everyone becomes invested in the decision or success of offices due to their voluntaristic contribution and perception of mutual return. It is in this sense that I use the term collective.

I am not referring to a collection of people, nor just working together, but rather a horizontal sharing of risk, responsibility and an equality of condition within the organization. Collective action indicates a process with a degree of ownership of the decision making process by the group, of directly engaging issues and developing approaches to them.

²² Voluntarism and volunteerism can be confused and conflated. My selection of the latter term is intentional. Voluntarism when used by Barber, refers to voluntary participation. Ideal civil society is often characterized as being voluntary but for theoretical purposes this lacks the specificity needed. Both ends of the civil society spectrum can be considered voluntary in that one can voluntarily decide whether or not to join either a popular organization or a bureaucratic one. The distinction is not revealed. Voluntarism can get to the point of distinction but it takes a few logical steps. In order to get there we must assume that when one voluntarily receives compensation for an action, one is then bound to fulfill the specific actions thereby contracted to. So while entering into the contract relationship might be voluntary, the resulting arrangement is binding.

All of this can be avoided with the greater specificity of volunteerism. Volunteerism gets us there more directly since it not only encompasses voluntary action but also action that does not require compensation. Since resources, including time, flow from the volunteer to the organization, the organization has less of a hold on the member. This can only bolster the voluntary nature of the position and actions of the member.

To be organized through volunteerism is to combine efforts without the structure and boundaries of bureaucracy. Bureaucratic hierarchy and offices are possible but is less sustainable without the incentives and penalties which structure bureaucratic offices. Volunteeristic structures must conform more closely to the needs of their members and adhere to them despite the attractions of outside donors. After all, the resources of the volunteers can disappear quickly since there is less exchange involved in the relation.

²³ Putnam, Robert with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton; Princeton University Press.

--- (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York; Simon and Schuster.

Carothers, Thomas and Marina Ottaway. (2000) *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*. Washington DC; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

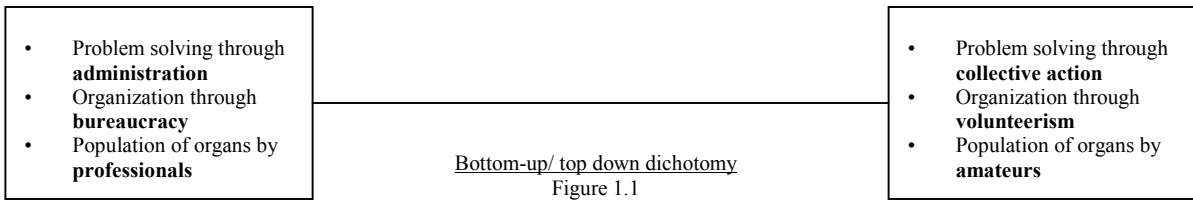
Barber, Benjamin. (1998). *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong*. New York; Hill and Wang.

--- (1995). *Jihad vs. McWorld*. New York; Times Books.

Weber, Max, trans. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. (1947). *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York; The Free Press.

The amateurs here are the volunteers in volunteerism. The idea of the amateur is again drawn from Weber. Amateur give their lives for politics rather than deriving a living from it. The key here again is the reimbursement that comes from participation in the group. Limited reimbursement forces the participants to derive income from outside of the formal organization. This also means that controlling aspects of participant's lives are exogenous to organization activities. This means that what members do inside the organization is for its sake rather than for their own basic needs. These needs are taken care of outside of the organization.

Weber points out a problem with volunteerism which seems to escape Putnam in *Making Democracy Work* (though he tries to account for it later in *Bowling Alone*) and Barber in *A Place for Us*



Does this dichotomy accurately portray the range of civil society building efforts and their accompanying organizations as they exist in the real world? Even if the critics are right and donors are building a problematic top-down civil society, is this dichotomous conceptualization useful in finding solutions? The dichotomy does not allow for any middle ground where problematic top-down practices can be mitigated by bottom-up ones. It can only result in two warring models doomed to conflict. As I will show, the critics do not see very much interaction occurring in practice between the top-down and bottom-up models. Or if they do, they do not see it as positive. My objective in this thesis is to argue that a dichotomy may be too simple and hides interactions that may potentially offer solutions. My point is not to prove the accuracy of an alternative but to show that there are grounds to question the current dichotomy. To offer a plausible alternative. I propose a continuum, as opposed to a dichotomy.

In order to pursue this I have made some assumptions that merit mention. I am assuming that the critical scholars and donors have selected the correct conceptualization of civil society, one that believes that a strong civil society leads to democracy. This idea is not

(though he accounts for it somewhat better in Jihad versus McWorld). Weber argues that organs staffed by amateurs are necessarily staffed by people of means. This is to say that only those who have a sufficient income outside of the organ can afford to participate in it as an amateur volunteer. We will see this issue come up in the case studies. This limitation makes large-scale social change, as sought by different scholars and advocates of amateur civil society seem difficult.

What Weber does not account for is the fact, as one might expect in a revolution, there comes a time when problems can be endured no longer and one will cast one's lot with an organization voluntarily or at a cost in order to bring some change. Sometimes this is also the case even when large-scale change is not promised by joining. A few pieces from the news prove the possibility of this.

A recent article in the Washington Post points out that the civil society organs springing up in Brazil are often materially supported and staffed by the poor. These organizations are often formed of and by slum dwellers and other poverty stricken groups who have little to give but do so anyway. The organizations have a great deal of influence and often are an important safety net in the community. Marina Ottaway says something similar of African social movements in the literature review.

The point of this is that amateurs often are people of means, but they need not be. On the other hand it is probably safe to presume that, if given a choice of becoming a professional or an amateur, the resource poor will almost always become professionals, even if this means sacrificing autonomy.

universally accepted,²⁴ but to tackle it would be to write another paper. I also do not question the critical scholars' normative assumptions regarding top-down and bottom-up characteristics. Again, to debate this point is to engage in a different project.

The reader should understand that the scholars I will cite do not consider bureaucracy, administration, hierarchy or professionalism to be inherently bad. Nor do they consider volunteerism, amateurs and collective action to be universally good. Rather the critics see a certain type of top-down behavior that is not accountable to the populations the donors intended civil society groups too serve. I am sure they would also acknowledge that a purely bottom-up group without any bureaucracy, administration or professionals would probably lack capacity and is neither a sustainable nor suitable foundation upon which to establish democratic governance. Certainly bottom-up could acquire a pejorative feeling to it, just as top-down tends to in this paper. If donors were accused of setting up violent disorganized mobs in an effort to build civil society, critics would likely talk about a need to mitigate this with more top-down elements. But this is not the situation and instead one sees bottom-up presented in a positive light rather than a negative one. The point here is that neither the bottom-up model nor the top-down one are considered an end unto themselves. They are both equally likely to go bad but if joined together can perhaps mitigate the worst aspects of both.

Even if one acknowledges that the critics' dichotomy is not as simplistic as it may seem at first, it is still a dichotomy and one must ask where on a continuum between top-down and bottom-up models should one look for additional models? My analysis suggests that it is reasonable to begin filling in the continuum with two new models. If bottom-up and top-down models of civil society building are to meet it can happen either between different groups or within a single group. Of course there are many variations proceeding from this but I just want to demonstrate that the dichotomy can be broken up, and not to establish a new set of models.

²⁴ Putnam, Robert. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York; Simon and Schuster.

The first new model is the “between groups” one. Here top-down civil society building and the bottom-up variety interact when a top-down group and a bottom-up group work together. The idea of top-down and bottom-up being mutually exclusive within a single organization is retained here.²⁵ The twist is that this model assumes that top-down and bottom-up groups cooperate and not be mutually exclusive in all ways. Very few of the critical scholars appear willing to admit that this occurs. Instead, they either see donor built top-down groups not interacting with bottom-up groups or making the bottom-up groups top-down when they do work together.

The second model is one where the characteristics of the two poles can be found within a single organization. I call this the “within group” model because it allows bottom-up and top-down aspects to mix within a single group rather than only during the meeting of a top-down and a bottom-up group.

Top-down Model	Between Groups Model	Within Group Model	Bottom-up Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving through administration • Organization through bureaucracy • Population of organs by professionals 	<p>A group of organs, which individually specialize in one of the pole models, yet together present a mix of the two sides.</p>	<p>An organ that internally mixes the top-down and bottom-up poles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving through collective action • Organization through volunteerism • Population of organs by amateurs

Bottom-up/ top down continuum
Figure 1.2

These two models allow the two poles of the dichotomy to interact and become blended in many different ways to produce a variety of approaches between top-down and bottom-up taken by different groups. The result is a diverse set of groups that cannot be entirely pegged to one pole or the other and fall somewhere in an undefined middle. The purpose of this is to give a whole new field within which to look for groups that demonstrate positive aspects of both the top-down and bottom-up models.

To underpin my inquiry, I draw information from the Bulgarian political development experience. Bulgaria, as the place for a case study, offers elements one finds in most

²⁵ Though, again, I request that the reader keep in mind that I am not talking about exclusively bottom-up or top-down organizations, but rather ones that tend heavily in one direction or another.

developing and transitional societies.²⁶ It is economically impoverished and poverty exacerbates the need for outside resources, or at least provides a justification for outside aid. Democracy is a rather new political venture. A wavering move toward formal democracy after years of communist dictatorship implies the need for political development to facilitate the transition.

In all, Bulgaria is an excellent middle ground for this investigation. On one hand it is not as underdeveloped as much of Africa and parts of Asia.²⁷ On the other hand it is still not as closely integrated into the Western European economy as Poland, Hungary, or the Czech Republic. It also avoids some of the problems that make its immediate neighbors less convenient for study. It has, for instance, largely settled the ethnic issues that distort the politics of other Balkan countries.²⁸ Finally Bulgaria was occupied and exploited by the Ottoman Empire and Soviet Union for quite some time leaving it with some of the colonial legacies found in other developing countries.²⁹

I use a variety of methods to investigate the civil society building going on in Bulgaria. I rely on NGO and donor organization literature, budget documents, and interviews with players at various levels of the process. I focus initially on thirteen different NGOs and civil society groups in Bulgaria. This sample includes most of the biggest players in civil society building in that country.³⁰ They are a diverse group that represent interests as varied as the mayors of Bulgaria to the disabled.

²⁶ Karatynnycky, Adrian, Alexander Motyl and Aili Piano, Eds. (2000). *Nations in Transit 1999 – 2000: Civil Society, Democracy, and Market in Eastern Central Europe and the Newly Independent States*. Washington DC; Freedom House.

²⁷ Wyzan, Michael L. and John D. Bell ed. (1989). "Bulgarian Economic Policy and Performance, 1991-97." *Bulgaria in Transition*. Boulder; Westview Press. (pp.93-122).

²⁸ Kucera, Joshua. Personal interview. March 6, 2001. Kucera is a journalist based in Belgrade. The subject of this conversation was where we should locate a potential article and it was determined to focus on Bulgaria for the reasons cited in this paper.

²⁹ Crampton.

³⁰ I say this on the basis of my research in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria where most of the biggest NGOs are based. If one looks through a directory of organizations claiming to build civil society in Bulgaria, like the one put out by the Open Society Foundation - Sofia that I used, you will find that I have interviewed most of them, though I may not have included all of them in this paper. You will also find if you look at where these organizations get their funding from that I have examined the major donors involved in civil society building.

Out of this group I have chosen donor networks³¹ that best represent the breadth of civil society building in Bulgaria. I do not write about all thirteen NGOs. Rather I only include those which best represent the rest. The remaining NGOs bolster what I demonstrate through references to the ones I have included. The reader should understand that I do not claim to present a statistically representative sample of development organizations existing in Bulgaria. The groups that I have chosen are those that best bring into relief the possibilities that I see as being missing in the literature and, as I have said, cover the breadth of donor led civil society building in Bulgaria.

I will investigate these organizations through the following paper structure. I will set the stage with a literature review that will identify the origins of the concepts and language I will use and what the framework of knowledge on civil society building looks like right now. I will point out the relative lack of room for complexity in the framework.

After laying out the gap in the literature, I will proceed with a series of inquiries designed to empirically identify the elements of a continuum in Bulgarian civil society development. My first task will be to establish whether the scholars' initial argument for the existence of a dichotomy is warranted in the civil society groups that I examine or if the dichotomy begins to break down into the more complex picture of a continuum. The chapters where I lay this out will be developed around two questions. Where, on a continuum between top-down and bottom-up, do various frames deployed by different donor organizations aim civil society building efforts? How do donor civil society building operations negotiate top-down and bottom-up?

The objective of the first question is to learn how development organizations begin positioning civil society operations through their conceptualizations. By frames I mean the ways we organize our experiences to make sense of our actions and the world in which they take place. These are mainly embedded and discernable in communications. The stated priorities and the idealized groups for civil society will be of primary interest.

³¹ A donor network for the purposes of this paper is the donor, its intermediate contractors and whatever domestic organizations constitute what it considers the civil society it is building.

I will also pay attention to how the target community both at the national and local level is described by donors.

The second question follows the trail from conceptualization to practice. I will explore how various development organizations in Bulgaria implement projects on the ground. Because of the uneven types of information available on different donor projects, I will use the best approach to information gathering available for each organization.

The last issue to be addressed in this introduction is an explanation where I will place the line between donor organizations and civil society groups. This is important because it defines whether I am studying civil society groups in Bulgaria or donors who are not necessarily organs of civil society. Specifically, where does one place the domestic intermediate organizations that funnel foreign donor money to domestic civil society groups? On one hand they are indigenous groups that benefit from foreign donor funds, does this make them local civil society? On the other hand their primary function is to distribute money and in effect become another donor. Are they then donors, and not to be considered part of civil society proper? If one considers them to be donors, one will take issue with their being included in my sample of civil society groups. From this perspective the professionalization necessary to move the funds contaminates our sample. Are these organs more fruitfully considered extensions of the donors?

My position is that these groups are both civil society organizations and agents of donors. Therefore, they are suitable targets for inquiry into the behavior of both sides of the relationship. As I will show, the foreign donors' definitions of civil society are ambiguous. Many of these intermediary organizations do advocacy work on behalf of public constituencies, something that civil society groups are supposed to do. They will at the same time attempt to disseminate funds as objective builders of a civil society. If they take on both these roles each must come under the investigation appropriate to that role. The line of inquiry for donors is aimed at finding how they are characterizing their actions and with what organizations they are working. For civil society groups, it is

important to know how they are positioned with respect to the two poles of the continuum and how that place is managed.

In conclusion, this thesis will lay the foundation for a more complete picture of civil society building practices in the development community. I will work toward a fuller account of the terrain that exists between the top-down and bottom-up poles. Only when this more sensitive account is built can the more normatively charged questions regarding the poles be addressed. Ultimately, if a better understanding of civil society building cannot be reached, the process both abroad and at home is in jeopardy. This means finding ways to correct the dysfunctional aspects of the donor/civil society relationship that scholars note.

There is a sense of urgency in this work. Benjamin Barber has predicted a disastrous decline in civil space, crushed globally by the state, ethno-nationalism and most importantly for him, accelerating global capitalism.³² Robert Putnam likewise sees a decline in American civil society³³ which is mirrored in daily news reports.³⁴ Both see this as a foreboding of the potential decline of the democratic tradition and its accompanying benefits and rights. I hope to propose a way to find a more detailed picture of the functioning of civil society development. This will allow us to build new possibilities and hope in struggling societies and to rebuild the communities that we seem to be losing in the core countries.

³² Barber. (1995).

³³ Putnam. (2001).

³⁴ Bach, Ashley. (2000). "Retiring From Service?; Sun Cities' New Generation Lacks Spirit of Volunteerism." The Arizona Republic. Phoenix; December 27, Section; Valley and State. (p.B1).

Chapter 2:
Literature Review

Introduction:

This chapter is a review of scholarly work criticizing civil society building by donor organizations. I have selected five scholars for this review: James Petras, David Abramson, Thomas Carothers, Marina Ottaway and Diana Mitlin. I have chosen these particular five because they have written the most widely available pieces on my topic. Coincidentally they are all critics of contemporary donor led civil society development.

The reader may either be surprised that I have only found five scholars, or that I have decided to include all five. As for the first issue, one would think, considering the popularity of civil society, more would have been written on the donor built variety. While much has been written on a range of similar topics, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international civil society, donor relations with local NGOs and civil society in general, very little has been written on civil society *building* specifically. Civil society building is a special type of activity and while other scholarship may touch on peripheral elements of it,³⁵ few have dealt exclusively with the practice as a distinct subject for investigation. More than five scholars have written on my subject, but not a great many more. Of what there is, I have chosen work that is the clearest and makes the best attempt at generalization.

I have not narrowed the number of scholars down further because these five compose a convenient range of opinions on how civil society building is going. This range stretches from the strict black and white³⁶ Marxist perspective of James Petras to the greater nuance of Mitlin and Ottaway's observations. I think together the five cover the spectrum of scholarship available at the time of my writing.

I will review each scholar with attention paid to three issues. How do they normatively see the poles of the continuum? How distinctly do they draw the line between the two? Finally, do they see any interaction occurring between the top-down and bottom-up poles

³⁵ Like studies of social movements, NGOs, community organizing or civil society theory.

such as the two new models I introduced in chapter one suggest should be observable? As I work through the critical scholars the reader will find that they build on each other toward great complexity. To maintain this progression I will begin with the starkest portrayal of the dichotomy.

James Petras:

James Petras of the sociology department of Binghamton University has written an article entitled “NGOs: In the Service of Imperialism” for the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*.³⁷ Here he analogizes contemporary NGOs with religious missionary groups of European colonization. He argues that those groups were meant to deflect oppressed communities in the direction of more spiritual and submissive pursuits as opposed to resistance. The NGOs, he says, are similarly charged with preoccupying the current oppressed world with integration into the market system and “self-exploitation”³⁸ exercises. These exercises deflect from what he considers to be important class analysis and direct political action along class lines. Direct political action for Petras is synonymous with direct confrontation with power structures and overt shows of political force on the street.

Petras does not dignify the concept of civil society with any meaning.³⁹ He argues that the conception of civil society obfuscates the role of class in the creation of poverty and undemocratic rule.⁴⁰ However, he certainly has definite ideas about the NGOs that purport to build it. From the perspective of this paper he places these organizations squarely on the top-down end of the continuum. On his bottom-up pole sits workers, peasants and small business people in popular organizations.

³⁶ Petras, James. (1999). “NGOs: In the Service of Imperialism.” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*; Oct, v29, i4. (p.434). Or reductionist, if one were to allow a pejorative spin on it. Petras, on page 434, is strongly against the term reductionist and all it implies.

³⁷ Petras. (p.429).

³⁸ Petras. (p.430). Petras’ renaming of self-help programs.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ This is because it tends to lump different classes and their associations into the same field of civil society. Therefore the class distinctions disappear in the pool of civil society.

Petras describes officials in NGOs as being “functionaries” who are “more adept at writing up new proposals to bring in hard currency for ‘deserving professionals’ than risking a rap on the head from the police attacking a demonstration of underpaid rural school teachers.”⁴¹ He goes on to say: “NGO leaders are a new class not based on property ownership or government resources but derived from imperial funding and their capacity to control significant popular groups.”⁴² Between these two statements one gets a fair idea of Petras’ poles.

On the top-down side are NGO functionaries and professionals who are remote from or even mildly oppressing popular groups. Between them and the popular groups there is a great deal of space. The NGOs gather up and disseminate funds from dominant institutions through a set of bureaucratic and specialized mechanisms which privilege experts.⁴³ The funds are used to meet bureaucratic targets that will in turn attract more funds from power centers while not quite solving any problems, in fact Petras would argue that the problems become worse.⁴⁴ Petras further characterizes NGO staffers with the following statement:

The NGOs world-wide have become the latest vehicle for upward mobility for the ambitious educated classes: academics, journalists, and professionals have abandoned earlier excursions in the poorly rewarded leftists⁴⁵ movements for a lucrative career managing an NGO, bring with them their organizational and rhetorical skills as well as a certain populist vocabulary.⁴⁶

Here again one finds Petras seeing NGOs as staffed by professionals whose career is within the NGO, not outside it as would be the case of an amateur. Their task is that of managing as opposed to leading and they do not share risks. Petras directly attacks the

⁴¹ Petras. (p.430).

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Petras. (p.431).

⁴⁵ One presumes he means leftist, this is likely a typo on the journal’s part.

⁴⁶ Petras. (p.430).

NGO staffers' conception of themselves as grassroots leaders and says that they erode true grassroots groups.⁴⁷ He goes on to say that rather than being grassroots, NGOs are hierarchical with specially compartmentalized decision making and responsibility spheres that mirror Weber's descriptions of bureaucracy.⁴⁸ Petras even goes so far as to describe NGO directors as viceroys,⁴⁹ which helps to fully deploy his colonial imagery. Petras poses his professionally staffed, hierarchical, bureaucratic NGOs against what he alternately refers to as popular movements and socio-political movements. He says that these groups are led by "'organic' intellectuals."⁵⁰ These leaders are different from NGO professionals because they are part of the movement they lead and share the consequences of it. This sharing of consequences is what he calls solidarity.⁵¹

Petras decries "NGOers" for standing aloof from the consequences that might attend their wards after a project has come and gone.⁵² He even feels the need to place the word "project" in quotes⁵³ as if to highlight its constructed and artificial nature. While Petras' NGOers are busy setting up training seminars, his organic intellectuals are out in the street demonstrating side by side with socio-political movements and shaping their ideology to achieve material results.⁵⁴

In summary, Petras sets up our most normatively charged and distinct polarization. On the top-down pole sits NGOs, deploying managerial processes, organized bureaucratically, staffed by professionals, detached from their charges and actually making the economic and political situation worse by distracting populations from more dramatic endeavors.

On Petras' bottom-up end are organic amateur leaders at the head of socio-political collective action movements, taking to the streets and closely bound to the long-term

⁴⁷ Petras. (p.436).

⁴⁸ Petras. (p.433).

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Petras. (p.436).

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² Petras. (p.438).

⁵³ Petras. (p.436).

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

results of their work. It is in this latter group that Petras rests his hope for legitimate social and economic change.

At first blush Petras appears not to recognize any positive blending of top-down and bottom-up. But, he must see some bureaucracy, hierarchy and administration in his popular groups, otherwise how do they have leaders, how can they delegate and what about unions which are certainly hierarchical? In fact one might wonder if Petras is not as against top-down methods in general as much as how unaccountable they are in donor hands. I disagree with this interpretation.

A close reading of Petras reveals that he places no value in the top-down aspects of popular groups but only how harnessed they are by bottom-up aspects. Top-down has no value for him, it is rather a necessary evil, if he even recognizes it as quite necessary. Does this mean that his bottom-up groups fit into my within group model? I don't agree with this either because again, even though he does seem to admit some top-down aspects he refuses to give them much credit for the ability of bottom-up groups to operate. In a way Petras' bottom-up groups do indeed fit into my within group model but Petras does not acknowledge anything like this in his writing. So while Petras does seem to observe a continuum, he does not interpret it as such to the reader. Few scholars paint such a stark picture.

It is not clear what Petras' solution to the problem he describes would be. If NGOs mix with popular groups as in the between groups model, the top-down group erodes bottom-up aspects, making this model untenable. I have already dealt with his lack of recognition of a within group model. Perhaps he seeks the abolishment of donor built civil society operations altogether. He at least gives no reason why or how they could be reformed. Rather, he is interested in promoting more popular organizations. But if one still has donors with the best of intentions, who take the critics seriously and seek to build a better civil society, Petras' solution may be too much for them to stomach. Our next scholar is less strident than Petras but nevertheless leaves with a similar picture of NGOs.

David Abramson:

David Abramson, brings an anthropologist's perspective to the investigation of donor led civil society building in his 1999 article "A Critical Look at NGOs and Civil Society as Means to An End in Uzbekistan."⁵⁵ He has two critiques of importance to my analysis. The most important he raises is that the donor development process creates new elites, which counter the objectives of civil society as set forth by theorists and at international conferences.⁵⁶ The second is that civil society suffers a slippage of meaning when it enters certain targeted environments, due to a resource differential between donors and domestic communities. These two arguments examine aspects of the same problem, which is the introduction of large amounts of resources⁵⁷ into a resource poor area. Abramson's examination of the power relations that develop around this resource imbalance gives us a new wrinkle which lends greater texture to the stark picture that Petras has laid out.

Abramson first observes an international level conference in Washington D.C. on civil society construction in central Asia. Here he notes a lot of bottom-up rhetoric. He then observes a workshop in Uzbekistan intended to train NGO personnel to construct civil society. The workshop appears to be pulled from American seminar ritual, complete with a "kofe bryek"⁵⁸ and a bag of free stuff.⁵⁹ More to the point, in a country where Uzbek is the official language and it is spoken by most citizens, the workshop is carried out mostly in Russian with a little impinging English. Participants are even gently reprimanded for using Uzbek.

Abramson argues that this is evidence that the donor programs are not creating a relatively horizontal, community based,⁶⁰ form of cooperation outside of the state, as one

⁵⁵ Abramson, David M. (1999). "A Critical Look at NGOs and Civil Society as Means To An End in Uzbekistan." *Human Organization*; November 1.

⁵⁶ This of course meshes quite well with what I have covered with Putnam and Barber in the previous chapter

⁵⁷ Money mostly but other assets as well including prestige

⁵⁸ Coffee Break

⁵⁹ a folder, notepad, pen and brochures

⁶⁰ As Barber and Putnam would ask for

should find on the bottom-up end of the spectrum, but rather a language distinguished professional elite, built on the previous Soviet⁶¹ elite. He continues to argue that rather than NGOs creating new democratic structures, the old undemocratic and bureaucratic power structures are reproduced with US tax-dollars. This links to a certain extent with Petras' argument that NGOs produce elite hierarchies rather than democratic movements.

While Petras detects a global capitalist plot, Abramson does not see any premeditated oppression from the international donor level but rather clumsiness and lack of understanding. He argues that this is due to concept slippage which is driven primarily by the resource and economic environment in the receiving country and also a certain carrying forward of past concepts and expectations.

No matter the intentions set at the international level, according to Abramson, when the resource heavy donor sets up in a resource poor locale⁶² a power relationship almost instantaneously sets itself up with a local orientation toward divesting the donor of its resources. As a UN official lamented in a recent article in *The Economist*, "Anybody who's anybody is an NGO these days."⁶³ Meaning that everyone, especially in a so-called developing country, wants to be an NGO because that's where the money is.⁶⁴ This is especially true in Eastern Europe. When the economy is too weak and the government is shrinking too fast to support a sufficiently large professional sector, indigenous college graduates seek out NGOs for the type of employment they seek. Unfortunately this runs counter to the rhetoric surrounding NGOs and not-for-profits.

⁶¹ Previous Russian speaking elites

⁶² Bauman, Zygmunt. (2000). *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. New York; Columbia University Press. I mean local and locals as the opposite of global and globals in a binary set up by Zygmunt Bauman in this book.

⁶³ *The Economist*. (2000) "Sins of the Secular Missionaries." *The Economist*. January 29. This excellent article also includes the following exchange on the same topic:

Visitor: What do you do?

Young man (presumably a local): I have formed an NGO.

Visitor: Yes, but what does it do?

Young man: Whatever they want. I am waiting for a some funds and then I will make a project."

⁶⁴ Friends in Bulgaria have noted an accelerating shift of professionals out of private business and into NGOs since it is easier to maintain a career and comfortable professional setting in that sector.

Non-profit, for instance, implies that some other object, other than monetary gain or self-interest, is the goal of the organization.⁶⁵ This banishment of self-interest thus renders these organizations trustworthy. However, Abramson argues that this concept often gets turned on its head in target locals. His evidence rests on the relatively high salaries and nice offices that many recipient NGOs receive, as well as the tradition of populating local recipients or partner NGOs with ex-government officials transitioning from one line of work to a more profitable one. At least in Abramson's post-communist world, the shift from the communist era official to the NGO leader is not much. Both are able to create elite spaces out of a concentration of resources marked for the betterment of the greater population.

In summary Abramson does not provide us an ideal type of civil society except perhaps the horizontal democratic structures discussed in international donor conferences. Unfortunately he does not see these structures coming out of donor activities, rather he sees organizations similar to Petras,' though with a slightly less sinister quality to them, if perhaps more opportunistic. Abramson's NGO based civil society is one that mirrors businesses. This is a civil society where not only does a detachment from target communities exist, but target communities become instrumentalized for purely personal gain.

Problem solving through management is present, as is the bureaucracy and staffing by professionals. Abramson does not present us with any interaction between the top-down and bottom-up poles. Therefore he does not see any of the models I would like to start populating my continuum with. The substantive contribution that I will carry forward is Abramson's reason for a dichotomy. The intervention of resource-heavy donors and the distortion this exerts on civil society building. I now move to Thomas Carothers and re-cross this ground with a deeper look at a particular donor.

⁶⁵ The NGO world is a strange one that defines itself in negative terms which heavily marks it as a new actor on the international stage. They are non-governmental and they are non-profit which are the two dominant sectors that one envisages in the market economy west. There for NGOs inhabit a strange otherworld where anything is possible since the evils of government and the

Thomas Carothers:

Thomas Carothers is Vice President of Global Policy at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and has an extensive history working on political development programs. His writing in *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve*⁶⁶ and the edited volume *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*⁶⁷ focuses primarily on USAID. At the risk of over simplification Carothers' central thesis is that USAID is too bureaucratic and could benefit from greater flexibility. He believes that donors do not fund the bottom-up model of civil society. He believes that they should and that they can improve over time, that there can be a learning curve.

Carothers argues that USAID's definition of civil society as being composed of NGOs who do public interest advocacy is too narrow. He tells the reader that USAID prefers NGOs that utilize technocratic knowledge rather than "bombastic"⁶⁸ propaganda; dialogue rather than confrontation and are staffed by "young, and up-and-coming, western oriented professionals rather than older, well-entrenched pols"⁶⁹ of the political parties and unions.⁷⁰ Ascriptive organizations are also intentionally placed off of the USAID radar. Non-partisanship is emphasized. Carothers mirrors what Abramson says about NGOs focusing on advocacy training, and its becoming a minor sub-culture. He points out a general tendency toward specialization and technocratic pursuit.⁷¹

Carothers implicitly deploys Weber's distinction between the professional and amateur. He argues that NGO staffers view donor built civil society as a professional lifestyle as opposed to a personal cause.⁷² In other words, civil society is about personal gain, not a public good. He complements Abramson by agreeing that this is an attractive lifestyle

profit sector are absent. However, as this paper indicates, these organizations still retain their own special problems.

⁶⁶ Carothers, Thomas. (1999) *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve*. Washington D.C.; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

⁶⁷ Carothers, Thomas and Marina Ottaway. (2000) *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

⁶⁸ Carothers. (p.208).

⁶⁹ politicians

⁷⁰ Carothers. (p.212).

⁷¹ Carothers. (p.216).

indeed, considering the bleak state of many of the societies where these projects are established.⁷³ NGO professionals, he tells us, are viewed indigenously as arrogant, overpriced and self-interested.⁷⁴

Carothers sets NGOs apart from the idealized bottom-up side on the continuum. He writes that “elite associations formed by small circles of people possessing expert knowledge”⁷⁵ fail to gain citizen participation and suffer from a weak popular base. He argues that the average NGO “relies much less on public mobilization or involvement than on expert-based persuasion directed at government officials.”⁷⁶ This lack of emphasis on public mobilization should also be read as a lack of collective action and rather an emphasis on the knowledge generating ability of bureaucracy.⁷⁷

What Carothers has to say about citizen participation in projects is important and will be returned to later. He says that attempts to educate the public often are directed at informing them rather than involving them in the actual work. In other words, it is passive and occurs through vertical channels rather than horizontal ones. The public remains passive in the process just as they had in governmental bureaucratic efforts. He even goes far enough to say that in one case study, volunteers could only be incorporated in an NGO’s work if they were paid, which of course is farcical and signifies the degree of detachment that existed between the NGO’s mission and the community it was supposed to serve.⁷⁸

Clearly citizens are being allowed to participate. However the method with which they are being brought into the process is one in which they are dealt with as individuals and where they remain largely spectators. Community cooperation or horizontal connections through which to start negotiating and consolidating a community voice is replaced. In

⁷² Carothers. (p.217).

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Carothers. (p.218).

⁷⁶ Carothers. (p.218).

⁷⁷ Weber. (339). Weber discusses this as being the premier strength of bureaucracy, its power to gather, process and generate information.

⁷⁸ Carothers. (p.219).

its place is a vertical relationship between the survey designer, the NGO and the targeted citizen. Demands, opinions, etc. are formulated independent of community bodies. Therefore I would call this passive vertical participation.

In the same case study Carothers highlights the dependency this sort of civil society has on foreign donors by describing the stunned reception a USAID seminar, on self-sustainability, received from the domestic NGO. After self-sustainability was imposed by a withdrawal of USAID funds the NGO collapsed. Carothers' summary judgment is that the NGO model pushed by U.S. civil society assistance simply may not be appropriate as a generalized approach to building civil society in many transitional countries. The professionalized NGO model comes out of a society that has wealthy, private grant-making foundations, a large middle class, with considerable discretionary income, and a corporate world with a tradition of philanthropy.⁷⁹

In summary, Carothers does not offer us a view of the bottom-up end of the spectrum except that it must exist opposite an NGO/civil society that is concentrated fairly solidly on the top-down. As with Abramson, Carothers views the ineffectiveness of the professional civil society NGOs as less of a threat against the world proletariat as a waste of US tax payer dollars. Carothers tells the reader that top-down USAID civil society is perpetually at risk of collapsing in the wake left by a donor departure.⁸⁰ It is certainly not mass based.

While Abramson attributes this to landing large amounts of money in poor areas Carothers blames it on the paranoia surrounding U.S. congressional cuts of USAID funding. In order to avoid such cuts USAID plays its civil society building super safe and only funds non-controversial groups and places such a heavy emphasis on measurement that NGOs are hamstrung.⁸¹ Accountability often means that the more informal and controversy charged popular groups remain off of the USAID picture. The heavy

⁷⁹ Carothers. (p.221).

⁸⁰ Carothers. (p.220).

⁸¹ Carothers. (p.218).

emphasis on measurement when coupled with an agency tendency toward global templates results in an overly bureaucratized structure and procedures.

This all meshes with Petras and Abramson, though Carothers avoids many of Petras' calls for class consciousness. One does find Carothers tells the reader that this top-down nature often results in a loss of perspective of what is happening on the ground and generates a sort of imaginary civil society that exists mostly on paper.

The two new models where top-down meets bottom-up do not come up for Carothers either. Rather he sees USAID interactions leading to more top-down organs. Carothers offers some sweeping recommendations which more or less add up to a need for USAID to loosen up, give to bottom-up groups and not to be overly pressed for short-term results. What bottom-up groups look like for Carothers is not clear. Our last two scholars will pursue Carothers' and Abramson's work further but will present an alternative civil society that is more mass based but not quite as Marxist as Petras'.

Marina Ottaway:

Marina Ottaway is senior associate and co-director of the Democracy and Rule of Law Project at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. She is an academic with considerable experience in Africa, which she brings to bear in her analysis in *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*,⁸² which she co-edited with Carothers. Ottaway sets up two poles, with donor civil society at the top-down end, and indigenous civil society on the bottom-up end.⁸³ The donor inspired sort, she tells us, is quite weak and unsustainable. The indigenous type is strong and likely to remain so. The distinguishing feature, that separates weak from strong, is the ability of the groups to remain active for a long period and achieve meaningful change for the lives of those they claim to represent. It also has to do with the ability of the organization to stay staffed and active. For NGO/civil society this means money to pay staff, for indigenous civil society it means a cause meaningful enough to attract people to staff a movement.

⁸² Carothers. (2000).

Ottaway recounts the characterizations of NGO civil society that Carothers and Abramson have outlined, except to emphasize further how detached the NGOs are from the public and any particular constituency they represent. She also adds the term “grantsmanship” to describe the NGO skill of marketing projects to donors or conversely determining what projects will sell and pitching them to donors.⁸⁴ This is a specialized knowledge which is not easily gained by civil society organizations which are grounded in the everyday activities of the marginalized or dispossessed.

The alternative, on the bottom-up side of the spectrum, is volunteeristic, membership based organizations. Membership for Ottaway involves the flow of resources, in the form of money or more likely voluntary donation of skills and time, into the association. This activity tends, however, to be highly ascriptive and lacks methods of accountability to international financial donors, which makes them unattractive to donors unless the donor is confronted with the task of overthrowing an authoritarian regime.⁸⁵ In this last situation it has been shown that the US government will risk a great deal of perceived misuse of its money to achieve the goal of regime removal.

Ottaway draws a distinction between “trusteeship” civil society groups and “representative” groups.⁸⁶ Trusteeship groups are self-appointed and use professional, technocratic methods to manage and advocate on behalf of groups that come under their categorized jurisdiction. The populations a trusteeship NGO advocates for are relatively passive in this relationship. Representative civil society groups come directly out of the populations they claim to represent and are closely bound up with them. Here the relationship between the constituency and the organization is active and the boundaries between constituency and the organization are highly blurred. There is also a greater degree of ownership and investment in the representative organization by the represented group, resulting in a high degree of amateur participation.⁸⁷

⁸³ Ottaway. (p.77).

⁸⁴ Ottaway. (p.98).

⁸⁵ Such as the South African apartheid regime.

⁸⁶ Ottaway. (p.83).

⁸⁷ Ottaway. (p.99).

While Ottaway joins the prior scholars in seeing a distinct separation between the bottom-up and top-down side of the spectrum, she does see possibilities for interplay. Ottaway proposes that NGOs, if properly connected with bottom-up groups, can help shape the perceptions of problems that affect the bottom-up groups.⁸⁸ This hearkens to C. Wright Mills' description of the sociological imagination.⁸⁹ For Mills, local problems, called troubles by Mills, are explicated through general theories that transcend the local. The sociological imagination is the translating of these local troubles into a comprehensible problem of larger scope which civil society groups can then organize themselves around to jointly apply pressure for systematic change. The key is that rather than groups pushing for local reform, they are able to think their way through to large-scale change.

Ottaway explains the successful relationship between popular groups and NGOs striving to overthrow the South African apartheid regime with this model. While local bottom-up organizations attempt to resolve material problems of seemingly local and limited scope, NGOs have the ability to reveal the larger systemic roots of the problems and guide efforts against the underlying causes. While this interplay adds another level of complexity to the relationship between the two poles, the poles remain largely alienated from each other with distinct borders drawn between.

Ottaway gives her readers a different look at bottom-up civil society. She adds an idea of membership to Petras' characterization of tactics and leadership. She distinguishes between the professional and the amateur by tracking the flow of resources. She does not offer terribly much more in the way of explanations for the problems she sees with NGO civil society. On the other hand she suggests that donors should attempt to meld the specialties of professional NGOs with indigenous, membership sorts to form a new model. This would constitute the advocacy for my between groups model. One has to follow Diana Mitlin to see this pushed further.

⁸⁸ Ottaway. (p.88).

⁸⁹ Mills, C. Wright. (1959). *The Sociological Imagination: Fortieth Anniversary Edition*. New York; Oxford University Press.

Diana Mitlin:

Diana Mitlin is a Research Associate with the Human Settlement Programme of the International Institute for Environment and Development in London. In her contribution to the booklet *Civil Society and International Development*,⁹⁰ Mitlin is a rather subtle but more determined advocate for bottom-up civil society. She repeats the distinction laid out above between NGO civil society promoted by donors and a more bottom-up civil society that comes organically from below. Mitlin offers the following useful distinction:

NGOs are professional, non-profit, non-membership intermediary organizations which are independent of the state and which undertake a range of activities in order to further development objectives.

Grassroots organizations are membership organizations which are also independent of the state. The risks, costs and benefits are shared among the members, and the leadership and/or management are accountable to the membership. Most are non-profit organizations, but some operate as co-operative commercial enterprises.⁹¹

In this paired down polarization the main distinction appears to be the sharing of risk and the level of accountability in the two organizations. The professional's exposure to risk and accountability is limited to their exposure to a particular office. The grassroots member or leader shares risk with the rest of the group and the leaders are accountable to the group that they claim to work for in more ways than just a job. In the NGO the professional is only accountable to the donor. In other words the distinction is a matter of control either coming from above, from donors, or from below, from mass groups. This presents a possibility for a within group model. If the central issue is not what the staff is but how it is controlled, one could have a professional staff controlled by mass group or

⁹⁰ Bernard, Amanda, Henny Helmich and Percy B. Lehning, eds. (1998). *Civil Society and International Development*. Paris; North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and Development Centre of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

⁹¹ Bernard. (p.83).

visa versa. Here even professionals could theoretically staff a grassroots group, if only they remained accountable to the membership.

A level of complexity is being approached now that threatens to break up the binary. This is as close as one will come to a within group model being described by these scholars. Unfortunately Mitlin does not push all the way to a within group model. She insists on keeping a separation between her two categories after all. She does not allow for a mixed accountability that moves both up and down between mass groups and donors in a single organization. This oversight may simply be owed to the need to keep usefully distinct categories which keep her argument coherent.

None the less, Mitlin bolsters the overall scholarly call for bottom-up groups. She echoes Ottaway's emphasis on the importance of community ownership over civil society groups.⁹² She also says grassroots groups are better able to identify the needs of a target population and set an agenda appropriate to its priorities.

Mitlin argues that though NGOs are supposed to work closely with grassroots groups, this does not necessarily occur, or at least not in a useful way.⁹³ Citing other research she says that NGOs have a tendency to impose their agenda on local groups. She also says that they are often insensitive to power struggles in communities and that the NGOs tend to take on too many tasks and are guilty of imposing a state of passive involvement⁹⁴ on local groups and individuals. Finally she says that NGOs tend not to take any steps to render themselves accountable to local mass groups or populations.

Mitlin, again through other research, concedes that NGOs are better service deliverers,⁹⁵ more efficient in any case, but insists that they lack accountability to the populations they serve. This lack of accountability can make relations between NGOs and popular organizations unstable due to the latter group's questioning of the de-facto legitimacy of the former.

⁹² Bernard. (p.85).

⁹³ Bernard. (pp.86-87).

⁹⁴ Mitlin calls it clientalism. (p.87).

Mitlin also offers a reason for why donors tend to support NGOs rather than more bottom-up groups which brings us indirectly back to Petras. Mitlin cites the work of Bebbington and Riddell and says: “there is the problem of trying to impose reform from above while grassroots groups resist from below.”⁹⁶ This brings up the sinister prospect that donors, in the pursuit of a neo-liberal market and a U.S. like democratic system are consciously running counter to bottom-up civil society and are promoting the top-down sort in order to artificially construct support from below. Mitlin continues her disparagement of NGO civil society by pointing out that NGO dependency can mean a mitigation of grassroots connections as well as stifling the transmission of the grassroots agenda up.

Mitlin however is not despondent about the future and brings up a case study where an NGO has consciously retreated from setting the agenda for grassroots groups and rather acts as a professional liaison for grassroots groups. Funds are sought from donors but only according the agenda and needs articulated by the grassroots groups. Again, one has a situation here where specialization and cooperation between grassroots groups and NGOs can provide a between groups model and be productive. However, the distinction between bottom-up and top-down groups remains.

Mitlin holds onto the argument that donors tend to promote top-down civil society. She also reinforces the idea that bottom-up civil society is characterized by collective action, volunteerism and amateur staffing. The solution she promotes is essentially a between groups model. She approaches discussing a within group model, but she does not carry through.

Conclusion:

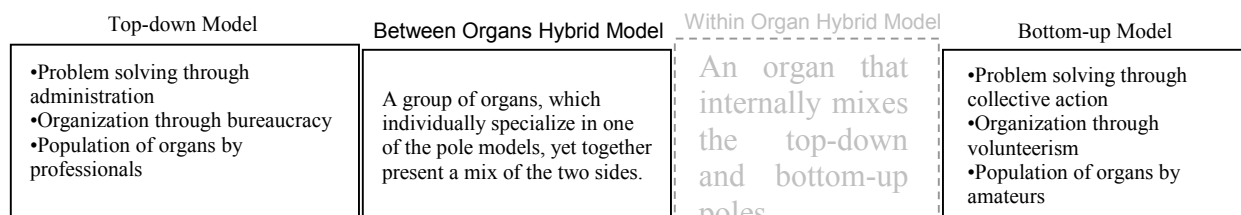
All of these scholars perceive that donor civil society building results in an NGO, top-down civil society model. Definitions of what the distinction is between bottom-up and

⁹⁵ Mitlin. (p.88).

top-down are different. Normative inflections on the resulting two models are also different, from the shrill Petras to the milder descriptions of Carothers. Two common themes however run through this body of work.

One, the common distinction for these five scholars between the top-down and bottom-up side of the dichotomy is the level of connection and sharing of responsibility that civil society organizations and their staff share with the communities they attempt to benefit. A professional in an NGO may be closely tied to the success or failure of a project, but the material benefits or harm that may occasion a target community are of less importance. What is important to such a person is the ability to portray results as success to the donor. This is part of what Ottaway describes as grantsmanship. This sort of separation between the NGO staff and the community can lead to the sort of programs that Abramson derides as opportunism. Whether this results in a world level form of new colonialism along class lines as Petras argues is not ventured by the remaining scholars. Certainly most authors agree that donors simply build top-down replications. Not everyone spoke of the co-option of bottom-up groups by top-down funding, but it is a concern.

The second theme is the distinctness of the dividing line between the bottom-up and top-down side of the dichotomy. The possibility of this line being blurred within the same organization is not allowed for though it seems intuitive that such could be the possibility. The two sides of the dichotomy is subtly different between the five scholars. Petras offers a strong version of the spectrum and Ottaway and Mitlin allow for a looser one with a between group model. None of these will, however, allow for any single organization to straddle the dichotomy in a within group model.



Bottom-up/ top down continuum II
Figure 2.1

⁹⁶ Mitlin. (p.90).

Abramson tells his readers that the top-down orientation of donor built civil society results from the appearance of vast amounts of donor money in resource poor areas. Petras and Carothers bolster this argument by describing donor supported NGOs as methods for young professionals to find some upwardly mobile avenue compatible with their educational backgrounds which the economy would not otherwise support. Petras however, and Mitlin to a much, much less degree, see another reason for the top-down orientation. This is the effort to promote a neo-liberal market agenda in countries undergoing transition or developing societies that would not otherwise go along with it. It is their argument, and again Mitlin only mentions it in passing, that groups with more bottom-up tendencies can threaten this agenda. This means that whatever civil society is built must be controlled and kept in line with neo-liberal policies. Carothers partially substantiates this when describing the reluctance of the Bush and Reagan administrations to support “people power” movements that could have easily turned against U.S. backed pro-market dictatorships.⁹⁷ How far one can go toward such an accusation about today’s civil society building is difficult to say.

At this point I will move to the third chapter and begin the investigation of how donors, and the organizations that compose their development network, frame their building of civil society. The reader should depart this chapter with a better sense of the top-down and bottom-up ends of the dichotomy set up by scholars. The reader should also be aware of the gap in the literature around the idea of how bottom-up and top-down aspects meet. It is this gap which the next chapter will begin looking to fill.

⁹⁷ Carothers (2000). (p.208).

**Chapter Three:
Donor Frames**

Introduction:

This chapter is focused on the question of where, on a continuum between top-down and bottom-up, do various frames deployed by different donor organizations aim civil society building efforts? First I will explain the concept of frames, which is special to this chapter. Next I will look at specific donor organizations and their approach to civil society. As I work through USAID, Phare, Open Society Network and NOVIB, the reader will see several major frames develop. Donor master frames include USAID's "security," Phare's "formal democracy construction," Open Society Network's "open market of ideas" and NOVIB's "community development." A series of supporting frames will be addressed including: "participation," "NGOs as civil society," "scientific management" and others. The objective is to understand how donors perceive their own operations in relation to what one has learned from scholarly critique.

Frames:

Frame analysis⁹⁸ is the examination of the symbolic language used to focus and shape perceptions of reality on certain objects and render others invisible. When engaging in this analysis one asks why certain stories, images, or words are used at the expense of others and what over-arching ideologies, myths, etc. are employed to delimit the scope of discourse. I will take advantage of this method by looking systematically at the language utilized by donor organizations in describing their mission and objectives.

The idea of civil society can be framed by certain contextual language connecting it to commonly accepted ideals. This context typically draws on broadly shared characterizations of what politics or the economy should be. Democracy for instance is often defined in the United States in terms of competitive elections with multiple parties. Therefore when democracy is spoken of, contextual language ensures that the democracy meant is one that conforms to these presumptions. Alternative ideas as to what

⁹⁸ Goffman, Erving. (1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Cambridge; Harvard University Press.
Weber, Robert Philip. (1985). *Basic Content Analysis*. Beverly Hills; Sage Publications.

democracy should be, such as an emphasis on material results rather than process, do not enter into the picture or are seen as peripheral to the discussion.

Free trade is a frame that guides ideas about the economy. Barriers to property rights must be lifted so that property and its holders can ensure the growth of the economy. The frame sets this as a forgone conclusion which serves as the basis for further agreements. Ideas of the economy ensuring advantageous participation by the entire population might be relegated to a background somewhere behind property rights. Policy generated through discussions governed by these frames would put in place laws and regulations that allow full participation in economic activity, but only as far as it did not impinge on property rights. For instance, copyright laws may restrict market activity to a few and limit participation but this conforms to the frames involved. Thus the scope of possibilities is limited and alternatives are cast into an insurgent field that must prove its legitimacy while inmate ideas are already guaranteed it. These master frames, around which a certain consensus has been generated, limit the ideas employed in debate and analysis to those that are useful to the frame generator or generators.

Ultimately frames are about benign intentions like group efficiency and the ability of groups of individuals to operate cohesively. Frames allow one to agree on certain fundamental issues so that the spectrum of options for problem solving is not overbearing. After frames have been deployed for some time they become invisible and an apparent part of the natural order. Rendering them visible allows one to better see the internal spirit and intent of organizations, which may be hidden in the broad language that inhabits pamphlets and web sites.

I will use this tool, as I have described it, to learn more about the organizations that propose to build civil society in Bulgaria. Specifically I will look at frames that plot these building efforts along a continuum between top-down and bottom-up models of civil society building. There are three big foreign donors engaging in political development in Bulgaria. These are the United States, the European Union and George Soros' Open

Rosengren, Karl Erik. (1981). *Advances in Content Analysis*. Beverly Hills; Sage Publications.

Society Network. Together these three give a multifaceted view of how big donors operate. I will look at big donors because, through sheer force of weight, one expects them to have the biggest impact. The US and EU are the two biggest state⁹⁹ actors in this arena. The United States is a single state with specific internal reasons, that will be dealt with later, for engaging in this activity and for picking Bulgaria to do it in. The European Union has different reasons, being currently made up of fifteen states and being geographically much closer to Bulgaria. There are many private donors at work in Bulgaria but George Soros' has the only permanent office in the country, making it a presence that one cannot ignore. The Open Society Network is of course a stateless transnational entity, born almost purely of capital enterprise. Out of the remaining population of donors I have picked the Dutch organization NOVIB to examine because it appears to have behavior and frames that distinguish it from the others. In my month long series of interviews, conducted in Bulgaria, most donors appeared to behave as the first three. NOVIB was the lone exception in ways that will become evident in this chapter and the next. I don't exclude the possibility that other donors in Bulgaria behave like NOVIB, but they were not immediately discernable during my study.

In order to see what frames are utilized to describe civil society I will simply examine how the idea of civil society is communicated officially in organizational literature and interviews. I will begin by giving a general description of USAID civil society building practices in their words and those found in their subcontractor literature. I will spend a larger amount of space examining USAID since it will be the first encounter with a donor program. After this I will repeat the process with the other donors, looking at differences through comparison and avoiding a general repetition of the elements shared with USAID. As I run through this I will pull out the main themes with the aid of interviews conducted in the summer of 2000. These will be matched with the continuum set out in the introduction and elaborated in the literature review.

The United States, USAID:

⁹⁹ The EU of course is not a state per-se but does explicitly represent state interests.

USAID has spent \$11,250,000 on Bulgarian political development in 2000. Another \$11,350,000 is expected to be spent in 2001. The chief rationale for spending this money in Bulgaria is that Bulgaria is a bulwark in a shaky strategic region.¹⁰⁰ While U.S. foreign policy has been absorbed with defusing or dealing with problems in the former Yugoslavia or Albania, Bulgaria has been seen as a Balkan country that, if strengthened, could begin to help grow the democracies and economies of its neighbors. If this can be accomplished the US can spend fewer resources and risk fewer assets in the region.¹⁰¹ Therefore, the master frame for USAID is a security one. Subsequent frames in the USAID case study are linked back to this one and justify US civil society building through the idea of enlightened self-interest. A concept important to security is stability and USAID's approach proceeds with a view toward this supporting concept. To better understand this frame and its implications I have to penetrate a little deeper.

USAID money for civil society is spread between three projects, project 183-021: *Increased, Better-Informed Citizens' Participation in Political and Economic Decision-Making*, project 183-022: *Legal Systems that Better Support Democratic Processes and Market Reforms* and project 183-023: *More Effective, Responsive, and Accountable Local Government*.¹⁰² All three of these projects are expected to be finished in 2005. Projects 183-021 and 183-023 both have specific civil society factors while this mission is more latent in 183-022. I can make a first observation here in that project 183-021 seems the most tailored for bottom-up support of civil society since it articulates a need for bringing citizens into the public policy realm. The latter two projects are more aimed at providing an enabling environment for civil society. This entails a top-down approach. As disparaging as the scholars tended to be about the top-down approach it is unlikely that they would oppose such an enabling environment as long it was conjoined with an aggressive bottom-up element.

¹⁰⁰ USAID, Funding Year 2001 Budget Justification. <<http://www.usaid.gov/country/ee/bg/>>

¹⁰¹ Dimitrov, Plamen. Personal interview. 11:30am, August 1, 2000, on the premises of the Institute for Sustainable Communities in Sofia, Bulgaria. Dimitrov told me in the course of this interview that the Institute For Sustainable Communities, which is a subcontractor for USAID has the ultimate aim of developing a civil society which would allow USAID to have a less intensive role in the country and to allow ISC to withdraw. This objective of departure should be contrasted with the European building of presence that I will discuss later in the paper.

¹⁰² USAID, Funding Year 2001 Program Description and Activity Data Sheets. <http://www.usaid.gov/country/ee/bg/bg_ads.html#ads>

The only frame that really reveals itself at this stage is in the idea of participation. One has to be careful at this point because participation comes up in the language of other organizations but is couched differently. I distinguish USAID participation as being a passive sort. Passive participation does not denote ownership. There is a certain amount of bottom-up activity implied because a targeted community can exert influence from below. But the NGO itself retains autonomy. This sanctity of process rather than ends is often described as a constant theme in American political discourse¹⁰³ and is here reproduced. Relations implied by USAID's participation preserve the balance of power on the NGO's side¹⁰⁴ mitigating accountability.

In the case of 831-021 with its \$4,450,000 2001 budget, the Democracy Network (DemNet)¹⁰⁵ program is disseminating, through the non-profit American subcontractor Institute for Sustainable Communities, grants to local NGOs. 831-023 with its \$4,600,000 budget, is routed through the Local Government Initiative, which is a profit-making private subcontractor out of the United States. I will leave LGI and project 831-023 for later in the paper, for now I will focus on the Democracy Network and its mission as set out in project 831-021.

In the summary for project 831-021 one learns that it is targeted at developing a "strong, flourishing and well-informed civil society."¹⁰⁶ This is needed to promote the ultimate objective of USAID development in Bulgaria which is "to establish a free-market economy and democratic institutions."¹⁰⁷ The ordering of the free-market, with all of the neo-liberal assumptions that often prefigure this term, ahead of democratic institutions

¹⁰³ Katznelson, Ira and Mark Kesselman. (1992). "Capitalism and Democracy." *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*. Second edition. New York; St. Martin's Press, Inc. (pp.714-725).

Luciak, Ilja A. (1995). *The Sandanista Legacy: Lessons from a Political Economy in Transition*. Miami; University of Florida Press. (pp.17-19).

¹⁰⁴ I do acknowledge that power does move up and down and Foucault's arguments in Foucault, Michel. Robert Hurley trans. (1990). *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*. New York; Vintage Books.

¹⁰⁵ I will use Democracy Network and DemNet interchangeably.

¹⁰⁶ USAID. (2000). *More Effective, Responsive, and Accountable Local Government, 183-021: Activity Date Sheet*. <http://www.usaid.gov/country/ee/bg/bg_ads.html#ads>

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

may be coincidence though Petras would have one think otherwise. A strong and flourishing civil society means “building the capacity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to play a key role in facilitating broad public participation in policy and decision making.”¹⁰⁸ So, USAID is building civil society inside NGOs and one sees the idea of passive participation, surfacing again, thus preserving the integrity of the formal democratic mechanisms rather democratic ends.

NGOs are a very specific type of organization, as the reader will see, and are often quite different from the more bottom-up groups favored by our critical scholars. Unfortunately there is a certain amount of circularity in the USAID characterization of civil society which leads one inextricably back to professional types of organizations. For instance USAID flatly says that “‘civil society’ is an increasingly accepted term which best describes the non-governmental, not-for-profit, independent nature of this segment of society.”¹⁰⁹ Non-governmental, which is the prefix put before professional organizations in civil society in the international context, and not-for-profit which is the American one, leads one back to the professional group. Of course a bottom-up group as described by the critical scholars can be not-for-profit and non-governmental but professional groups have captured these titles for themselves. This strengthens their position in the pool of recipients who receive support from USAID because of their association with the word civil society.

The reader should see in the preceding paragraphs, the surfacing of a second frame. In this frame, NGOs are civil society, NGOs are intrinsically linked to USAID’s conception of civil society. This is done with such regularity that other possible civil society organs recede to secondary places.

One learns from USAID literature that civil society has some sort of capacity. This capacity is supposed to lead to a “critical mass of NGOs” who “are fully developed to ensure citizens’ participation, and the broad public access to public affairs news from

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

independent media.”¹¹⁰ “Indigenous grass roots organizations and the Bulgarian populace will benefit from these activities at the community level.”¹¹¹ This last statement is odd because indigenous grass roots organizations are apparently beneficiaries of this sort of civil society. This distinction between NGOs, which receive funds to provide services through an enhanced capacity, and grass roots groups which benefit by this sets up a relationship of insiders and outsiders in the concept. This is contrary to the bottom-up mentality.

The second frame that was outlined above seems to be coming into fuller relief. NGOs are the core element and it is their capacity that drives the whole thing. It should be pointed out however that not all USAID literature buys into this. One of USAID’s subcontractors, ISC who I will say more about later, broadens the concept in at least one of its flyers into other areas. Here “Strengthening Institutions of Civil Society”¹¹² entails “enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of non-governmental organizations, government agencies, and business.”¹¹³ The inclusion of government in the civil society sphere is highly counterintuitive. Businesses are also considered outside of this sphere. This description of civil society is so out of the ordinary though that not much can be generalized from it except that these categories are not always stable.

Whether civil society is NGOs, government or business, grass-roots groups and the populace are beneficiaries but not the engine. One is beginning to see a glimpse of a hierarchy and a division of participation. One is also seeing participation for the third time and seeing it wrapped up into this NGO framed civil society. NGOs one gathers are especially adept at allowing participation.

What about the idea of capacity which is often mentioned? It is built by “working on the legal and regulatory enabling environment for civil society, and increasing advocacy

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Institute for Sustainable Communities. (1999) *Bulgaria: Democracy Network Program*. Sofia; Institute for Sustainable Communities.

¹¹³ Ibid.

coalitions for participation.”¹¹⁴ This is an exogenous target. Within the NGOs themselves USAID is “improving NGO operation and financial viability.”¹¹⁵ Operation seems to imply the efficiency of internal organization. Financial viability is rather self-evident.

Plamen Dimitrov, Program Manager for Organizational Strengthening and Monitoring for the Institute for Sustainable Communities, a USAID subcontractor, gives another perspective which seems to hit the mark. In the course of an interview conducted in the summer of 2000 he commented that many NGOs in Bulgaria rely heavily on founders. He says this is due to a lack of capacity. He follows this up by explaining that a lack of capacity means a lack of professional staff.¹¹⁶ This pinpoints the issue. Capacity building can be interpreted from Dimitrov’s comments to be about professionalization. This meshes well with the capability to absorb foreign donor funds.¹¹⁷ It also resolves the literature above, which refers to the work a professional staff can manage.

Another component in USAID’s civil society building programs is the establishment of Intermediary Support Organizations, or ISOs. These groups are indigenous surrogates for USAID that provide “grant-making, training, and networking to the NGO community.”¹¹⁸ Grant-making is the passing of USAID money down to NGOs that are considered in line with USAID objectives. Training is the demonstration of knowledge that enhances operation and leads to ways of fiscal viability. Networking is the bringing together of multiple NGOs around specific projects or eliminating redundancies between NGOs. What should be noted is the level of detachment entailed by the abilities NGOs are supposed to exhibit. NGOs fund, train and network but do not actually become

¹¹⁴ USAID. (2000). *More Effective, Responsive, and Accountable Local Government, 183-021: Activity Date Sheet*. <http://www.usaid.gov/country/ee/bg/bg_ads.html#ads>

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Dimitrov, Plamen. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) in Sofia, Bulgaria.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. In fact Dimitrov complains that the focus in the civil society donor relationship is placed too much on absorption of funds and pleasing of donors.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Same language found in: Institute for Sustainable Communities. *1999 ISC Report*. Montpelier; Institute for Sustainable Communities. (p.12). Institute for Sustainable Communities. *Democracy Network Program: Partnerships for Civil Society*. Sofia; Institute for Sustainable Communities.

enmeshed¹¹⁹ in the internal operations of grassroots groups. NGOs are manipulators of objects in the field of the citizenry. Exerting stimulus, hooking up objects to each other to provoke reactions. There is no mention of NGOs helping citizens or groups pursue objectives, nor of them organizing the public or taking some committed and conscious stand with groups. USAID's declared behavior, sans enmeshment in grassroots ground-level operations, falls directly into a realm of management rather than leadership. A third frame then is that of scientific management. This is to say it is the movement of objectified things toward greater rationality, in conformity with the master frame.

Petras says that leadership means the sharing of responsibility and risks. Here the NGOs simply move and influence assets. If a bottom-up group's leaders are arrested, the only thing lost by NGOs is some money that has already been justified, some training that has already earned pay for trainers and some networking. None of these are very long lasting assets that the NGO cannot afford to lose. Therefore the third frame arising to join that of passive participation and NGO as civil society, is that of the virtue of detached, objective and scientific management.

Thus far I have been combing through and interpreting Washington DC level literature, which is supposed to inform American taxpayers and more importantly their representatives in Congress who vote on the budget. In order to develop a better picture of what one is being told by these statements and the frames that are becoming visible I need to move down another layer to the ISOs and recipient NGOs in Bulgaria. What follows is an extensive description of the money flows, projects and official descriptions emanating out of USAID's Bulgaria level operations followed by an analysis of the frames developing out of them. It should be noted ahead of time that many recipient NGOs behave like ISOs so it is difficult to tell the difference. In reality there is not much of one except that some are designated official ISOs by USAID and others are not. A constant that arises with all of them is the question of their stability and durability. This is left in doubt by USAID.

¹¹⁹ by enmeshed I am not implying that NGOs ought to intervene in civil society group operations

In Bulgaria the Democracy Network program is administered by the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC). In turn the American led ISC works with exclusively Bulgarian partners such as the Foundation for Local Government Reform, which I will examine in the next chapter. ISC is a non-profit based out of Montpelier, Vermont. In 1999 ISC had a budget of \$5,924,641.¹²⁰ The vast majority of this budget came from USAID. This budgetary note is worth expounding on.

ISC is not an organic operation arising, bottom-up from a local problem-solving context. It is not drawing resources from a local context but has rather become has a national, highly professionalized, USAID subcontractor. ISC's location in Montpelier is largely coincidental rather than having anything to do with local support or a local movement. The organization does not depend on Vermont for its resources but rather on close ties to USAID as opposed to down, to the local community. The only localizing boundaries for ISC are the borders of the United States. USAID requires that its sub-contractors be American.¹²¹ Whether this lack of being grounded and orientation toward top-down relations is reproduced in the civil society ISC builds is another question. To seek possible answers one needs to travel down the funding trail into Bulgaria.

ISC maintains staffs in Vermont, Russia, Macedonia and Bulgaria. The Bulgarian staff, residing in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia, is composed of eight Bulgarians and one American.¹²² The American, Jane Williams-Grube, leads the Sofia operations.¹²³ From 1995 to 1998 Phase One of USAID's Democracy Network project was implemented by ISC.¹²⁴ The total Phase One budget was \$3.2 million. \$1,289,631 was disseminated to

but that the critical scholars suggest that they should share risk.

¹²⁰ Institute for Sustainable Communities. (1999). *1999 ISC Report*. Montpelier; Institute for Sustainable Communities. (p.24).

¹²¹ Dobbs, Michael. (2001) "Aid Abroad Is Business Back Home: Washington Firms Profit From Overseas Projects." *The Washington Post*. January 26.

¹²² Institute for Sustainable Communities. (1999). *1999 ISC Report*. Montpelier; Institute for Sustainable Communities. (pp.22-23).

¹²³ Jane Williams-Grube, Galya Dimitrova-Zdravkova, Plamen Dimitrov. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) in Sofia, Bulgaria. Jane Williams-Grube's official title is *country director*.

¹²⁴ Institute for Sustainable Communities. (1998). *1998 ISC Report*. Montpelier; Institute for Sustainable Communities. (p.13).

124 NGOs by ISC¹²⁵. Fifty two percent of that was targeted toward what was called “democracy building” of which civil society building is considered an integral part. This means that a huge emphasis is placed on civil society and highlights the importance of the overall investigation.

Currently ISC is implementing Phase Two and is disseminating a total of \$6,000,000 over a four year period.¹²⁶ In a country where the IMF’s World Economic Outlook Database reports the GDP per capita was \$1,439¹²⁷ in 1999 these numbers speak of the influx of a large quantity of money into a region where such resources are in short supply. David Abramson speaks to the dangers of this.

In ISC’s DemNet, Phase One literature it says that this money is supposed to “strengthen and support a diverse community of civil society organizations (CSOs).”¹²⁸ This money is targeted at “training and technical assistance.”¹²⁹ In order to understand what this means in the terms of specific projects one needs to look at a sampling of some of these expenditures.

Training and technical assistance was rendered to the Association for Dissemination of Knowledge in the municipality of Montana in a \$6,500 project.¹³⁰ The mission was called “Civil Participation and Public Education.” In order to make this happen local officials and citizens were trained on “financial management and accounting, fundraising, grant making, legal and financial regulations for NGOs, NGO governance I,¹³¹ project management and strategic planning.”¹³²

¹²⁵ Leading one to ask what happened to the rest? It was apparently absorbed by employee salaries, office rent, conferences, travel, publications etc.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ The UNDP reports \$1,513 and the CIA World Fact Book reports \$4,300 for 1999. This compares to a 1999 per capita GDP of \$34,091 according to the IMF and \$33,900 for the U.S. according the CIA World Fact Book.

¹²⁸ Institute for Sustainable Communities. (1999). *Bulgaria: Democracy Network Program*. Sofia; Institute for Sustainable Communities.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Institute for Sustainable Communities. (1999). *Democracy Network Program – Bulgaria – Phase 1*. Sofia; Institute for Sustainable Communities. (p.9).

¹³¹ The roman numerals indicate a specific training program to meet specific measurable needs.

Another \$9,900 was spent to support the Center for Social Practices in a project called “Civil Society, Media, and State Government.”¹³³ The mission was “Policy analysis and development.”¹³⁴ The training took the form of “financial management and accounting, legal and financial regulations for NGOs and project management.”¹³⁵ This project resulted in surveys and anthropological work being done to understand how citizens organized themselves to resist the former socialist regime in different parts of the country.

In another project titled the “Norm Development Project” an NGO called Democracy in Action Foundation “tested its effectiveness in soliciting expert and public opinions”¹³⁶ on two new laws. After conducting surveys and soliciting the opinions of experts in the field, a position was articulated. Using this position the foundation managed to get the laws altered. ISC literature tells one that the NGO made this happen due to “their high technical quality and internal consistency – reducing the need for parliamentarians to consider endless amendments.”¹³⁷ This project’s budget stood at \$20,000. The training involved “advocacy and lobbying, financial management and accounting, grant management, human resource management III, legal and financial regulations for NGOs, NGO governance I, project management, public involvement, strategic planning I.”¹³⁸ One finds some consistent themes in these three projects, which are a good representation of what one finds in the general population of projects.¹³⁹ The frame of scientific management comes further into relief here as well as the passive participation and NGOs as civil society frames.

The scientific element of scientific management sharpens here. The expertise doled out to the various civil society organs described as completely a-political. These training programs could be aimed at nearly any type of organization. This is scientific in the sense

¹³² Ibid. (p.9).

¹³³ Ibid. (p.30).

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid. (p.32).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ For a full listing of DemNet I projects read: Institute for Sustainable Communities. (1999). *Democracy Network Program – Bulgaria – Phase 1*. Sofia; Institute for Sustainable Communities.

of being objective and supposedly without presuppositions or judgments. Of course there are mechanisms used to sort through which groups to provide with support and which not to, but I will delve into that later.

As far as passive participation goes, the citizenry participate not by directly organizing, joining or guiding a movement's everyday operations, rather they passively fill out a survey. It also seems that the bottom-up influence the survey is not counted for much since technical experts are brought in to lend legitimacy where public will cannot.¹⁴⁰ In DemNet Phase Two literature the NGO as civil society comes further into focus. A booklet produced in 2000 by ISC titled *Partnerships for Civil Society* lays out the plan for Phase Two.¹⁴¹

The aim of DemNet II is to further strengthen DemNet Partner support organizations to serve Bulgarian civil society in the long-term.¹⁴² The NGOs who compose ISC's DemNet partner support organizations serve the amorphous object called civil society in Bulgaria. This is an apparent departure from the frame of NGOs as civil society. NGOs here lay outside the category of civil society, rather than inside. The possibility arises that the civil society mentioned may include the indigenous grassroots groups. This would run counter to Carothers and the others' argument that civil society for USAID is only NGOs. Reading further in the booklet however reinforces the scholars. During the life of the project, the DemNet Partners, in their own program activities, will provide services to NGOs throughout the country.¹⁴³

The terminus for USAID funds lies squarely in the professional NGO field. Rather the money is coursing down a succession of smaller and smaller and more and more local NGOs with each layer taking a slice for overhead. The USAID concept remains on the top-down end of the spectrum and civil society and professional NGOs remain

¹⁴⁰ It was my impression during my travels that Bulgaria has developed a strong elite cultural orientation, perhaps due to communism. Bulgarians do not think much of the average Bulgarian on the street's opinion, but a self-made expert does count.

¹⁴¹ Institute for Sustainable Communities. (2000) *Democracy Network Program: Partnerships for Civil Society*. Sofia; Institute for Sustainable Communities.

¹⁴² Ibid. (p.3).

¹⁴³ Ibid.

synonymous. The reader will need to look at one of these NGOs up close to render any opinion about the ability of these groups further down the line to be bottom-up. This will take place in the next the chapter.

The frames one sees developing out of the USAID literature are those of passive participation rather than control by a target group, professional NGOs as civil society rather than more bottom-up groups and scientific management rather than organic leadership. In other words the frames that USAID deploys appear to prove out the five scholars and their argument that donor civil society building tends to favor top-down organizations. There also seems to be an integrity of top-down quality in these frames. One does not see bottom-up elements holding out too long before being clarified back into top-down terms. It would seem then that at least in what has seen of USAID projects in Bulgaria the polarization does exist, at least in donor frames.

The USAID frames also conform to the master frame of security and stability, which in turn reinforces the top-down character. Moneys are dispersed in such a way that they do not enter into informal and more to the point, zones outside of strong US influence. More bottom-up groups, leaders enmeshed in priorities other than American ones and civil society groups that would attempt to create citizen control rather than passive participation are not likely to see USAID funds. USAID rather seeks to keep all of its money within a sphere of influence and dependency. Petras would imbue this with a world capitalist conspiracy. More likely there are a larger variety of forces pushing on this frame. One already mentioned is fear of congressional cuts to USAID funds. This also inspires necessity to keep money where it can be watched and negative uses can be vetoed.¹⁴⁴ Ultimately this does circle back to national security in that the US congress is very concerned about the risk of money being turned back around against US interests. How far the security frame should be stretched is a matter for conjecture. Certainly it can

¹⁴⁴ Carothers, Thomas. (1999). *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve*. Washington, DC; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
Dobbs, Michael (2001).

Carothers, It also results in practices heavy in quantifiable measures and short-term objectives. Both of these have been heavily condemned for leading to a civil society more interested in numbers rather than results and willing to abandon projects before they have taken on any inertia.

be argued to exist and that control is a high priority. To see how unique this is or isn't to USAID I will move to the next large governmental donor in Bulgaria, the European Union (EU).

The European Union, Phare:

The European Union is another large presence in Bulgaria's political development sector. While the United States sees aid to Bulgaria as serving a security purpose and eventually allowing it to pull out of the region, the European Union's approach is different. The EU is looking to bring Bulgaria in. Bulgaria is already chalked up to eventually enter the EU.¹⁴⁵ While USAID is using civil society aid to exercise security policy by other means¹⁴⁶ and at arm's length, Phare, the European Union's development agency at work in Bulgaria,¹⁴⁷ is trying to erect a formal democracy in Bulgaria and bring it into European standards and relations. The master frame then is the construction of formal democracy.

A number of criteria need to be met by potential member countries like Bulgaria to accomplish entry into the EU. These include the harmonization of the legal system with EU standards,¹⁴⁸ meeting economic, political, human rights and other standards.¹⁴⁹ It is from this list that Phare develops its civil society mission. The master frame here is one of assimilation. This is to say that civil society is designed to bring Bulgarian society and civic culture into line with a series of EU entry requirements. The vast number of EU flags, the blue field with a circle of stars, plastered across the country and closely worked

¹⁴⁵ Bulgaria was formally invited to begin negotiations for entry into the EU in 1999. A date for entry has not been set.

¹⁴⁶ As opposed to military force for instance.

¹⁴⁷ and other Eastern European countries

¹⁴⁸ Khalaf, Roula. (1999). "More countries abolish death penalty." *The Financial Times*. London; July 7. (p.8). Bulgaria for instance abolished the death penalty to come into line with the EU's standard on capital punishment.

¹⁴⁹ European Union. (2000). *2000 Regular Report: From the Commission of Bulgaria's Accession*. Brussels; European Union. November 8.

European Union. (1997). *Opinion on Bulgaria's Application for Membership of the European Union*. Brussels; European Union. July.

These documents are available at the following website:

<<http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/bulgaria/index.htm>>

into national symbology¹⁵⁰ attests to the desire of Bulgarians to make this a reality. While civil society was a mechanism for stability for USAID it is a mechanism for standardization and manipulation of various measures for the EU, as Phare literature attests.

According to Phare a country must have “achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities.”¹⁵¹ This is necessary for EU accession. One sees the stability part of USAID’s security frame reemerge here in formal democracy construction. One also sees a focus on institutions and mechanisms, in other words, an adherence to formal democracy and hints at passive participation.

Non-governmental organizations again come into the picture. Phare explains “Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can play an important part in the development of democracy and civil society.”¹⁵² This is an interesting departure from USAID in that NGOs are viewed as facilitators of civil society but are not necessarily part of it. While one sees a shadow of this in USAID, it is more blatantly declared here. It is not, for instance, quickly followed by any statements that revive the NGOs and civil society frame completely. The idea of capacity comes up again for Phare as they argue for “strengthening the institutional capacity of NGOs.”¹⁵³ I will not dwell much further with international level Phare language beyond this central exception with USAID language. Phare generally views civil society the same as USAID does with the exception of opening the possibility that NGOs are separate from the civil society they are meant to promote. I will proceed to Phare’s Bulgarian partner, Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF).

¹⁵⁰ The little white stickers that drivers must put on their cars to indicate the nation of origin, for instance. Bulgarians like to include the EU symbol somewhere on it.

¹⁵¹ Phare website <[http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/pas/Phare/pt/ibldg.htm#Civil society measures](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/pas/Phare/pt/ibldg.htm#Civil%20society%20measures)>

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

In the May 1995 – Decemeber 1996¹⁵⁴ report, Monica Christova, Programme¹⁵⁵ Director for the Civil Society Development Programme, said that there were “fewer and less effective civic groups”¹⁵⁶ when CSDF launched. However, this situation has changed and thanks in no small part to CSDF. She frames the organization as a “bank for social investments, with enormous positive effect in enhancing citizen involvement in public life.”¹⁵⁷ This bank frame immediately lays out a position of professional and authoritative status for the NGO. It also leaves less to question about their role as a bottom-up group, or rather the lack of it. The frame of scientific management is apparent here.

The “positive effect” was accomplished by funding 272 programs during the time the report covers.¹⁵⁸ Among these were many training programs, establishing information systems and centers, developing cooperation between NGOs, effecting policy change in the government, conducting surveys and conducting educational campaigns.¹⁵⁹ Here one has the participation frame and the passive involvement of citizens re-established. Most of the organizations assisted are governmental agencies, foreign donor supported NGOs or NGOs recently spun off from foreign donors. There are only a few appearing to be advocacy groups and only one that is known as a movement.¹⁶⁰ Few of the targeted groups can be defined as bottom-up groups or anything that the scholars in the literature review would say could be found on the bottom-up side of the dichotomy. This is not to say that there are none.

Several of the projects certainly have bottom-up aspects, these include programs for women and youth in a specific residential area by the Roma Bureau Foundation, support for the Federation of Consumers in Bulgaria, support for the Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria, funds to the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights – Plovdiv

¹⁵⁴ Decidedly older than my other materials but Civil Society Development Programme was not as cooperative during my visit as other organizations.

¹⁵⁵ I will use the European spelling where the NGO uses it.

¹⁵⁶ Civil Society Development Programme. (1997). *Civil Society Development Foundation: May 1995 – December 1996 Report*. Sofia; Civil Society Development Programme. (p.8).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. (p.1).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. (p.9).

for a lobbying campaign for the rights of socially underprivileged groups and the Society for Religious and Public Support of Prisoners. There is also a hint of volunteerism here and there with examples like the money that went to Blood Transfusion Foundation to train volunteers who would enroll blood donors. But this is the minority.

On the other hand the fact that these groups are here at all speaks to a break down of the dichotomy between the top-down and bottom-up model groups. The idea that top-down groups cannot interact meaningfully with bottom-up ones appears to be eroded in favor of a between groups model. A situation between NGOs and more bottom-up groups could be described here along the lines that Mitlin says exists. However, the relationship may still be problematic as Mitlin says most are. The distinction between the amateur and professional group also remains.

One interesting subset of programs by CSDF, that indicate frames for the staffing content of civil society groups is the Training and Civic Education program. Rumiana Ninova, Programme Director, on one hand champions the improvement of “the skills, knowledge and professional capacity of NGOs in Bulgairia.”¹⁶¹ Alternatively, she also says that her organization funds “NGO management training for the people working in the third sector and volunteers.”¹⁶² This is the first mention of volunteers in NGO literature. None the less, volunteers and employees are both supposed to pick up professional capacities. These include: “Strategic planning, proposal writing, project implementation, human resource development, monitoring and evaluating techniques.”¹⁶³ Most of this appears to be directly related to grantsmanship and though there is an emphasis on volunteers there are also frames of management being fore-grounded here. This is one of these gray areas where top-down and bottom-up elements begin to blur. It is these areas where scholarly simplification begins to break down.

What one finds in Phare and CSDF language is a high degree of ambiguity and the possibility for the blending of top-down and bottom-up characteristics in programs that

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. (pp.12-33).

¹⁶¹ Ibid. (pp.16-17).

¹⁶² Ibid.

was not evident in USAID. Volunteers with professional training and tendencies is an aspect of blending in a single organization that is not countenanced seriously by the five scholars. One also sees less of the passive participation frame seen in USAID and a greater emphasis on scientific management and technocracy with the possible mixing of top-down with bottom-up with a volunteerism frame. Grassroots as a frame also becomes possible though the credibility of this is not firmly established.

The stability aspect found in the formal democracy construction master frame and security frames remains, though it is less intense with the Europeans. For some reason the Europeans appear more comfortable with language that allows for grassroots and bottom-up possibilities. None the less, most civil society building efforts are invested into scientific management, professional organizations similar to what USAID sponsors.¹⁶⁴ In order to look outside of the state sphere and what one may conclude is its tendency toward stability master frames, I now turn to the largest private donor in Bulgaria, the Open Society Network.

Open Society Network:

One should pay special attention to the Open Society Network since it is valorized by critics of political development such as Washington Post journalist Michael Dobbs¹⁶⁵ and Carothers. Both offer Open Society as a possible alternative to the over bureaucratization that both see in USAID. Both argue that the more fluid and less rules bound Open Society Network is more effective at dodging some of the money traps that they believe USAID finds itself in.

The Open Society Foundation – Sofia (OSF – Sofia) around which much of the case study orbits,¹⁶⁶ was established in Bulgaria on April 5, 1990 by George Soros. This

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ In fact in many cases the same ones.

¹⁶⁵ Dobbs, Michael. "The Politics of Compassion." The Washington Post. Transcript of online discussion that occurred Friday, Jan. 26, 2001; 11 a.m. EST at <<http://www.washingtonpost.com>>.

¹⁶⁶ There are other Open Society institutions at work in Bulgaria. Most of them, like Open Society Institute – New York will bypass OSF – Sofia in order to directly engage Bulgarian organizations.

foundation was the latest in a web of institutions that the American financier has been spinning across Eastern Europe and the globe. Any story of the Open Society Network, even if located around a specific country, must start with this man, it is not for nothing that the global society's web page can be found at www.soros.org. It is also important to understand the highly private nature of this organization, since it is an exception to the previous two cases.

Soros was born in Hungary, leaving in 1947 for England where he graduated from the London School of Economics.¹⁶⁷ In 1956 he moved to the United States where he amassed a huge fortune through international investment and speculation. In 1979 he founded the first Open Society organization in his new hometown of New York City. In 1984 he appeared to close the circle by opening the second such institution in Budapest, Hungary. Currently these institutions can be found in every Eastern European country and sprinkled across the globe in the form of organizations and programs from Haiti to Cambodia. They are referred to as the Open Society Network.

In his 1997 *Atlantic Monthly* article, "The Capitalist Threat,"¹⁶⁸ Soros provided readers with the ideological backing¹⁶⁹ and master frame for the Open Society Network and its civil society building. He told readers that he derives his conception of the open society from the work of Karl Popper who contrasted open western capitalist society with closed communist society. The reason he gave was that communism was based on the professed truth of a social philosophy. Since no truth, for Popper, can be arrived at in the social realm, truth had to be maintained by the oppressive state. Therefore, what was needed was an open society, such as that found in the capitalist West, where alternative and challenging conceptions are allowed to compete.

¹⁶⁷ This and the following is drawn from the FAQ section of the Open Society Network website is found at <http://www.soros.org>.

¹⁶⁸ Soros, George. "The Capitalist Threat," *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1997 (cover). There's a comprehensive link on the Open Society Network's web page to all of Soros's writings, articles on him etc. This seems to point out the ideological bounds that are placed on the network.

¹⁶⁹ Which is interesting considering the anti-ideological orientation that the Open Society is supposed to have.

What is interesting is that the global financier takes the theory another step and argues that free market rhetoric has become another closed truth, which must be opened up. He claims that his organizations are attempting to affect this. It is difficult to say how well this is translating down to domestic organization activities.

What can be said is that Soros' master frame appears to be one of an open market of ideas. This is to say he works for as many alternative voices as possible to enter into national and global social dialog. The organizations in his network work against cultural or other institutions that might restrict societal possibilities. The market rhetoric is very strong here. In fact it should probably be said that the master frame at work here is the market itself. The obvious conflict between Soros' opposition to free market rhetoric and his championing of a market of ideas resolves itself if one accepts that he considers the former to be a false open market. How well this master frame of an open market of ideas plays out in the organizations' supporting frames remains to be seen.

In 1998 Open Society Foundation – Sofia (OSF - Sofia) had the fifth largest budget, at \$12,895,000, of the network's national foundations.¹⁷⁰ Only foundations in Russia, Ukraine, Yugoslavia and Soros' homeland of Hungary had larger budgets. This is out of thirty foundations. In 1999 OSF-Sofia fell back to \$9,398,000, largely due to the apparent stability that followed the successful overthrow of the former socialist regime in 1997.¹⁷¹ In 1998 civil society was OSF-Sofia's largest budget item at \$1,873,000. In 1998 it dropped to second behind education, which received a cash infusion to bring Bulgarian education standards in line with the EU's. None the less, civil society received \$1,647,000. Clearly OSF - Sofia and the supporting Open Society Network place a great deal of importance on civil society building in Bulgaria which makes this organization that much more important to this paper. But not only is OSF – Sofia's civil society push daunting, its over all presence in Bulgaria is hard to miss. Jane Williams-Grube, Country Director for the Institute for Sustainable Communities attests to this.

¹⁷⁰ Open Society Foundations Network. (2000) *Building Open Societies: Soros Foundations Network 1998*.

Positive *and* negative, Open Society has made a *huge* imprint on Bulgaria, maybe more than any other bilateral or multilateral donor.¹⁷²

One thing that is interesting about OSF-Sofia is that despite Carothers' and Dobbs' high regard for the lack of bureaucracy and high degree of flexibility of Open Society Network programs, OSF- Sofia is not necessarily seen as such in Bulgaria. To the contrary it is known as a large and "complex institution with different programs, criteria, deadlines, etc."¹⁷³ In other words, many of the characteristics of a Weberian bureaucracy are demonstrated. The best way to understand how this complex organization perceives its role in Bulgaria is to explore what frames are deployed. An excellent tool for this is OSF-Sofia's annual program report and the in-house evaluations they execute on their projects.

In the 2000 OSF-Sofia program report, Dora Petkov, coordinator for the Civil Society Program, lays out the project objectives.¹⁷⁴ She states that the program funds "initiatives of non-governmental organizations, civic associations and individual citizens establishing effective dialog between citizens, NGOs, and state institutions for the purpose of effecting sustainable social reforms."¹⁷⁵ In other words, the program is intended to bolster communication and coordination between various civil society groups and the state. Non-governmental organizations are separated from civic associations in this perspective, which seems to imply an allowance for civil society as more than NGOs. This is closer to the European perspective. The ultimate aim is sustainable social reform.

The vast majority of the text following this statement outlines an agenda for opening up lines of communication, especially inter-ethnic ones. One major thrust is the call for problem solving through self-help, and the "strengthening of professional associations

¹⁷¹ Open Society Foundations Network. (2001) *Building Open Societies: Soros Foundations Network 1999*. Nothing more recent than the 1999 report is currently available.

¹⁷² Jane Williams-Grube. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) in Sofia, Bulgaria.

¹⁷³ Strecansky, Boris. (1999) Evaluation of Civil Society Program 1996-1998: Open Society Foundation – Bulgaria. April 9. (p4)

¹⁷⁴ Open Society Foundation – Sofia. (2000) *Programs 2000*. Sofia; Open Society Foundation – Sofia.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

and the communities they represent.”¹⁷⁶ Much of this is very vague and requires some finer sifting. What is self-help and what sort of communities do professional associations represent? To acquire a better picture I move to a more specific document. Projecting into the future OSF - Sofia wrote a strategic concept paper for 2001.¹⁷⁷ Here the mission becomes sharper:

The¹⁷⁸ help citizens and civil groups promote their involvement in areas of public interest, identify alternative forms for upholding individual and collective rights, while attracting the State as a partner in building civil society. The program will support key forms of civic involvement such as¹⁷⁹ establishing effective partnerships between citizens, NGOs and state institutions, introducing contemporary models of civic involvement, and supporting the building of networks and coalitions capable of bringing about sustainable reforms.¹⁸⁰

The participation frame comes forth once more with the idea of involvement. On one hand, the concept here appears to be tentative and implicitly passive since there is an absence of language describing popular organization or grassroots activity. On the other hand, acceptance of collective rights beyond the usually supported individual rights shows a countervailing ability to support spaces of autonomy outside of the state. Between these two messages of passive involvement and active defense of autonomous zones one sees a certain amount of blending of bottom-up and top-down elements of the dichotomy.

The attraction of the state as a partner is also an interesting middle ground. On one hand the invitation of the state must accept that a differential of power must exist within most

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Open Society Foundation – Sofia. (2000) *Civil Society Program: Strategic Concept 2001*. Sofia; Open Society Foundation – Sofia.

¹⁷⁸ There is clearly a typo in the original document but I will not risk any small distortions by changing it. My guess is probably that the “the” is supposed to be a “to.”

¹⁷⁹ More typos in the original

¹⁸⁰ Open Society Foundation – Sofia. (2000) *Civil Society Program: Strategic Concept 2001*.

state territories. If the state is brought into the civil society building effort it cannot help but influence the process through its pure weight of power.

On the other hand, one notices an abandonment of passive involvement in favor of the idea of a partnership. This is not precisely citizen led policy making, but it seems to turn over to the citizen a very positive role. This is new and erodes the participation scenario established by involvement.

It should be noted that OSF – Sofia had a strong pre-1997 tendency to fund projects that would directly conflict with government policymaking and attempt to negate autonomous state decision making with citizen opposition.¹⁸¹ This ultimately resulted in street protests and the dismantling of the last vestiges of the socialist regime.¹⁸² In the pre-1997 era OSF – Sofia was one of the most conflict oriented donors and was constantly under government threat.¹⁸³ After the regime change, over to a Western looking United Democratic Force, OSF – Sofia has made a dramatic move away from conflict based civic organs and toward the reform and participatory frame.¹⁸⁴ This has not been to the extent that USAID has and one can still see a combative nature and traces of ownership and action frames in OSF – Sofia’s programs.

The idea of “introducing contemporary models of civic involvement” raises a flag for top-down NGO activity. Here is the expert introduction of behavior and persuasion. The fact that a contemporary model must be introduced implies that it is not contemporary to the locale where it is introduced. Contemporary does not mean “from Bulgaria” but rather “from somewhere else.” OSF - Sofia is risking describing indigenous repertoires as being backward at this point. Organic leadership that grows out of the Bulgarian context is replaced by outside management. This is another version of the top-down scientific management frame. Also, problems are being solved by introduction of authoritative

¹⁸¹ Strecansky. (p6).

¹⁸² Dainov, Evgenii. ed. (1998). *The Awakening: A chronicle of the Bulgarian Civic Uprising of January – February 1997*. Montpellier; Institute for Sustainable Communities.

¹⁸³ Roussanov, Valery. (1997) *The State and Non-Governmental Organizations*. Initiative for Civil Society Building in Bulgaria. Sofia: ACCESS Association, Bulgaria. (p.42).

¹⁸⁴ Strecansky. (pp.4-5).

methods. Scientific does not mean objective as much as expert high status knowledge. A top-down differential of power is apparent.

As one moves down a layer, some of the outstanding questions raised earlier are answered. As it turns out civic involvement fails when there is a “lack of specific, professional advocacy skills among members of the NGO community,”¹⁸⁵ and “lack of effective dialog, working partnerships and common will among NGOs and state institutions for bringing about sustainable civil reforms,” “civic involvement should be promoted in regions with a relatively low number of active NGOs.” Here one sees involvement deals with professional NGOs and their expert skills. The interpretation of lack of involvement is: not enough technologies and techniques. This implies the need for top-down deliveries of a resource best handled by professionals. Reform is executed through open relations rather than conflict with the state. The NGOs as civil society frame is reemerging after all, even though it was not recognizable a few layers up in the broader generalizations. These top-down frames are reiterated and reinforced as one continues down, what is important now, is to look at the indicators and measurements used to determine success or failure of a project. This will tell how the previously murky frames are being interpreted, since measures of success or failure will be drawn from the background assumptions that shape the frames.

Of foremost interest in program evaluation is the extent and process by which the target community is allowed to hold the program accountable. In OSF-Sofia’s case every indicator is measured through either in-depth interviews or a questionnaire.¹⁸⁶ The questionnaire is of course highly individualistic and does not allow for any organization or process of communal decision making. The exception to this is the use of group interviews. Here the “stakeholders” as the target community members are called, are brought together and voice their views in a setting that has horizontal elements. However, group interviews do not become organizing meetings or problem solving workshops. Rather they are passive expressions of opinion without action. Other than

¹⁸⁵ Open Society Foundation – Sofia. (2000) *Civil Society Program: Strategic Concept 2001*. (p.1).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. (pp.2-4).

this last example, the accounting procedure is a vertical reinforcing of OSF - Sofia's autonomy from the community.

What is proven through this exercise is that even when the documents and language are followed closer and closer to the ground the frames are very difficult to disentangle in OSF- Sofia and the Open Society Network in general. Self-help has been raised here and really cannot be resolved until one moves to the next chapter and deals with the issue of professional versus amateur staffing. Bottom-up and top-down frames all appear in Open Society discourse. But many of them contradict each other. To a certain extent these can be disentangled by looking closely at the context. However, the dominant lesson is that the frames in Open Society are far less monolithic than they were in USAID for instance. This blurring of frames indicates a high possibility for new civil society building models that mix bottom-up and top-down tendencies. One has to wait for the next chapter to attempt to discern how much hybridization may be in place.

It can be posited that the hybridization that one sees in the language and frame mixing deployed by Open Society has to do with a frame that expresses openness. This is to say that because the frame encourages multiple perspectives, such perspectives tend to get wound together in the organization literature. Rather than the fairly tight frames of USAID and Phare, Open Society allows multiple frames to characterize objectives in multiple ways. How this is carried through remains to be answered. First, we need to finish up our investigation of donor frames. The last donor network too to be examined is a smaller player that stands further outside the top-down monolith.

NOVIB:

NOVIB was founded in 1956 as the Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation. It is rarely known by anything else but NOVIB though. This organization, which joined Oxfam international in 1994, champions what it calls the NOVIB method. Two highlighted features of this approach are listening to domestic organizations, that are expected to be listening to local people, and sending money and

advice but not people. The idea behind this last point being to try to erode the power differential as much as possible through limited direct contact. Throughout NOVIB's 1999 annual report there is the constant emphasizing of standing up for "poor people" and cooperating with local groups.¹⁸⁷ Standing up for poor people means combating stereotypes and championing their cause in the "north."¹⁸⁸ NOVIB is the only donor that discusses the need to have a "fairer distribution of prosperity in the world."¹⁸⁹ This implies a much more radical and conflictual agenda when compared to those espoused by earlier donors.

To a certain extent the underlying stability frame found in USAID and Phare is present in NOVIB. For instance money from the Dutch government to NOVIB, for building civil society in countries bordering Kosovo, was aimed at stability.¹⁹⁰ To a certain extent the security frame also reemerges here. However, despite an individual state's retaining certain frames that rationalize distribution of funds to NOVIB, NOVIB also retains its own reasoning on how funds are best disbursed. This is the community development master frame which emphasizes a bottom-up orientation toward the target community rather than a top-down orientation on a professional NGO in a community. It would be difficult to advocate a fairer distribution of prosperity if one's focus were not oriented toward the impoverished.

Since NOVIB does not follow its money into a country with people I will shift the reader's gaze to one of its fund recipients. In this case Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives (CEGA, which means "now" in Bulgarian). One is of course struck right away by the immediate deployment of the word grassroots. Already it is implied that this organization works closely with localities and hints at horizontal relations. NOVIB is the chief donor for nearly all of CEGA's programs.¹⁹¹ The civil society building initiatives of CEGA are nearly identical to those of the previous donor groups except that they

¹⁸⁷ NOVIB. (2000). *Summary of NOVIB's Annual Report for 1999*.

<<http://www.novib.nl/partners/AnnualReport1999.pdf>>

¹⁸⁸ This refers to the wealthiest countries that tend to exist in the northern hemisphere.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ NOVIB. (2000). *Network*. No. 5, Vol. 6, October. (p3)

<<http://www.novib.nl/partners/network/200010eng.pdf>>

¹⁹¹ CEGA. (2000). *Informational sheet*. Sofia; CEGA.

expressly state they fund grassroots organizations and that they fund action oriented organizations (no think tanks for instance). The advocacy campaigning the organization engages in is said to be: “based on lessons learnt at the community level.”¹⁹² The implication here being, as with the rest, that bottom-up efforts are stressed. An example is how CEGA characterizes local change. CEGA does not discuss “municipal reform”, as others donors do. Rather, CEGA calls for community change. The orientation is no longer on the government but rather the community, centering power in a more bottom-up locale.

CEGA outlines a set of guiding principles and values where the frames are practically listed and defined. Change is said to be lodged in “day-to-day civic practices of societal behavior and organization.”¹⁹³ The lodging of meaning in the day to day has the potential to move the politics of civil society building out of the expert realm and into the vernacular activities of the public. Participation re-emerges but has a twist. When CEGA discusses participation or involvement it is in the “designing and implementation of strategies of change.”¹⁹⁴ The mention of participation in design is a new step. Participation before had to do with identifying problems and then judging how well they were addressed. Here the actual approach is crafted by stakeholders. This moving away from the participation frame laid out earlier establishes something new which corresponds with the community development master frame of NOVIB. “Openness and partnership at all levels”¹⁹⁵ takes the relationship further, building more horizontal linkages. This appears to be a more active, ownership oriented participation.

CEGA goes on to advocate a change “from dependency on top-down decisions to active involvement and ownership of the process of change.”¹⁹⁶ Discussion of ownership is wholly new as is bringing up and problematizing top-down decision making. When describing target groups CEGA calls them “initiative citizen groups.” The civil society groups in view are no longer NGOs or professional associations and they are not some

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

vague “other” that is not defined. They are groups of citizens. The grassroots organizations mentioned earlier are located in poor and marginalized communities. “Community based” programs and groups are targeted.

What one finds pervading this briefest of the case studies is a proliferation of bottom-up frames. Programs are located in communities, members are citizens, they interact with CEGA not as individuals, in fact this is not permitted, but as groups. Grassroots becomes key as opposed to its being one of many options. The master frame of community development at the NOVIB level is responded to by CEGA. It is difficult to separate out the frames involved here with CEGA but it would seem that ownership and grassroots are the strongest ones. Grassroots is the horizontal relationship implied by citizen groups and the repeated emphasis on community rather than individuals. Ownership is the relationship between the grassroots group and the program in question. This heavy emphasis on cooperation and bottom-up framing seems to prove the best of Mitlin’s hopes that built civil society groups like CEGA, which is staffed by professionals, can place themselves, at least in the frames, as second to the community being served and can bolster the target group better that way.

Conclusion:

Through the course of this chapter a progression has developed with USAID’s frames at one end and NOVIB at the other. This is a progression of frames deployed by donors. From the strong top-down orientation of USAID, the steady blurring between the two poles by Phare, further entangling of them in OSF – Sofia to what appears to be a full reversal with NOVIB. While USAID and to a lesser extent Phare appear to prove out the arguments of the scholars, the remaining two, especially CEGA, do not. Rather than there being an integrity of top-down quality, there is an intermixing. The scholars remain supported in another aspect though. Even as CEGA promotes bottom-up frames, it is not grassroots nor a social movement itself. There still seems to remain an essential dividing line between the professional and amateur civil society organs. Whether this holds out on the ground remains to be seen in the next chapter.

Finally, it should be noted that all I have investigated at this point is what the donor organizations and their surrogates on the ground say they do. One cannot conclusively even start to say anything about what they in fact do on the basis of this. For all one knows NOVIB and CEGA are simply using more bottom-up vocabulary without actually translating this into action. There is also nothing standing in the way of USAID and Phare taking what appears to be largely top-down frames and projecting money at truly bottom-up organizations. One needs the next chapter to fill some of these gaps in better so that one has a proper foundation on which to see what possibilities for alternative models exist.

Chapter Four:
Negotiation Between Bottom-up and Top-down

Introduction:

In this chapter I turn from what donors profess to be building to what organizational realities can be observed on the ground. How do donor projects negotiate between top-down and bottom-up models? Most importantly what examples can be seen matching the three major interactions between top-down and bottom-up described thus far; total disconnect between bottom-up and top-down civil society, the interconnection between them and the mixing within a single group?

I will explore how various development organizations in Bulgaria implement projects. Several approaches will be taken to apprehend how the amateur versus professional issue is handled. Because of the uneven types of information available from different donor projects, the approaches will take advantage of the best information available from each organization. For USAID I will descend down the organizational hierarchy from the American side of the Atlantic to the Bulgarian partner programs working on municipal reform on the ground. A certain amount of disentangling will be involved at each level of this hierarchy. I will then approach the European side by initially departing from Phare and looking at how the European Fund for Freedom of Expression implements municipal reform. This will give a good handle on how much of the USAID case study carries over to other donors. Next I will return to Phare and look at how money is absorbed by the Bulgarian CSDF to discern for the reader how the professional versus amateur resource issue within intermediary organizations.¹⁹⁷ After this I will return to OSF – Sofia to investigate how the entangled frames encountered in the last chapter fall out on the ground. Finally, I will examine one of NOVIB’s funding targets, the Center for Independent Living and their street level approach to advocacy. In the end I will draw some conclusions on how the frames from last chapter unfold on the ground

USAID and Municipal Reform:

¹⁹⁷ We have already made some pronouncements about them in previous chapters but this will give some hard numbers to draw up next to what was found earlier.

The structure of this section will follow the money flow from the donor to the local level through an example of each of the organizations that exist between. The goal of taking this particular route with USAID is to take advantage of the information available at the different levels of USAID's structure. Other donors do not have such easy-to-trace to money routes with obvious contractors and sub-contractors. They exist in USAID because each organization must validate its existence in order to continue to receive funds. This gives documents and statements to examine at each level. With an organization like Phare or NOVIB the process is fairly direct and there are no intermediary steps that help illustrate how frames reconcile themselves as they are transmitted down to the ground.

I will examine municipal reform here because it appears to be the most civil society oriented of the projects I investigated. Municipal reform also poses some useful choices between top-down and bottom-up practice. How does one bring about change in the municipality. Does one turn to the government, the citizens or to both? It also turns out that municipal reforms are far more tangible than other projects because they deal directly with populations and their civil institutions. NGOs like to trot them out and describe them in detail because they tend to contain good human interest stories. All of this showcasing gives the researcher plenty of material to deal with.

As mentioned in the last chapter, USAID's primary municipal reform vehicle is project *183-023: More Effective, Responsive, and Accountable Local Government*. The spearhead of this program is the American private sub-contractor Local Government Initiative (LGI). LGI is a joint venture between three private businesses. Management Systems International (MSI) is the primary contractor.¹⁹⁸ Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI) and Research Triangle Institute (RTI) are two subcontractors under MSI. It is worth focusing on the fact that LGI's backers are professional, business bureaucrats that, if they had the pretense to call themselves civil society, would certainly find themselves on the top-down end of the spectrum. MSI, for instance, is an archetype of the top-down organization.

MSI is a Washington DC based firm that advertises itself as a woman owned, consultant and worldwide service provider.¹⁹⁹ An examination of its staff, especially those who specialize in countries in transition and, democracy and governance, reveals professional expert bureaucrats. A common theme running through their histories is a rotation through US government positions, such as USAID, and inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), such as the World Bank, and private organizations. All of them are highly mobile and highly educated.

Mitlin, Abramson and Ottaway imply that this indicates a lack of connection with popular groups and, more to the point, a severe lack of grounding in any particular geographical location or political environment. Whenever these professionals show up in some place, be it Bulgaria or some other developing or transition country, they are only there to round out their orbit before moving on.²⁰⁰ This cuts directly to scholars' distinction of the bottom-up and top-down ends of the spectrum being based on sharing or not sharing risk with target communities.²⁰¹ For the professional there is very little beyond the superficial success or failure of a project as perceived or communicated to a client.

Of course neither MSI, nor do any of the other US level private contractors pretend to be civil society itself, merely promoters of it. However, it is still worth keeping the professional status of the staff in mind. Especially considering the work of Abramson and his implication that built civil society tends to attempt to mirror the behavior and apparent material success of the elite that inhabit training organizations like MSI, DAI and RTI. I will move away from these organizations now and down the money flow to LGI, the three organizations' joint venture in Bulgaria.

¹⁹⁸ Sanders, Bob. Personal interview. 3pm, August 2, 2000, on the premises of the Local Government Initiative in Sofia, Bulgaria.

¹⁹⁹ Management Systems International website.
<http://apps.bso.com/msi/staff_results.asp?find=3&id=4>

²⁰⁰ This is particularly evident if one looks at the number of places the staff has traveled to and the distance between.

²⁰¹ Especially Petras's concept of organic leadership, but Mitlin's definition as well.

LGI has fifteen core staffers and ten to fifteen additional staff.²⁰² Twelve of the core group are Bulgarians and the other three are Americans, one of which is the husband of the American leader of ISC's Bulgarian operations. In addition to this, paid consultants are brought in from the US as needed. The primary task of LGI, as opposed to ISC, is not to disseminate USAID funds but rather to offer technical assistance on how to use the funds. LGI also locates what it calls "non-governmental community organizations"²⁰³ and brings them into position to receive further training and possible USAID funding as an LGI "partner."

The community aspect of the organizations targeted implies a bottom-up condition. Bob Sanders, team leader²⁰⁴ for LGI, explains what these groups are and how they are handled.

A non-governmental community organization may be a group of any citizens, in any community, that are not directly working with, or sponsored by, the government, that have gotten together for any number of reasons. It may be to sell their crafts, their local handy-crafts, or it may be to have a bridge built or maybe... for whatever and we foster, we help these people. It is very complicated in Bulgaria, as it is in any of these Eastern European countries, to become an NGO, to be an official NGO. The registration process sometimes can take months, etc. etc., so we provide that TA [training and assistance] to anybody, I mean, they aren't our partners until they get registered anyway so we provide that to these type of groups.²⁰⁵

This indicates that groups are to be brought into the formal civil society sphere and into the regulation and monitoring of the state. This fits well with the security master frame of

²⁰² Sanders. This is how I've interpreted the numbers given to me in their literature and Mr. Sanders.

²⁰³ Local Government Initiative. (2000). *Local Government Initiative (LGI) of Bulgaria*. Sofia; Local Government Initiative. (p.2).

²⁰⁴ Which translates into executive director for an NGO.

²⁰⁵ Sanders. interview.

USAID. Technical training and assistance also allows the groups to become adequate negotiators of state and donor expectations.

LGI also stresses a non-political role, though this is less clear. To understand how LGI maneuvers in the political spaces it occupies, it is best to look at a series of statements by Sanders. Sanders explained that LGI had recently launched a national information campaign.

We initiated a national campaign a few months ago that LGI is guiding, to educate people across the country on local government, what its benefits are, why they should be involved, why they should vote. It involves posters, television and radio programs.

Also, LGI provides technical support for lobbying.

We teach how to lobby, we teach how to draft proper legislation, we teach how to deal with the media, we teach how to get the media to understand and support your side of the issue, we train them in all of these things.

However, Sanders continued to stress that LGI does not become directly involved in political battles.

We don't bring anyone to play on governmental issues, we don't get involved in any shape or form of politics. We ourselves, you'll never see LGI as the flag waver. Rather, LGI ensures that the organizations supported are the issue leaders. We are really supporting whatever their flag is, or whatever their big issue is or whatever their big interest is.

This is what the apolitical nature of the DemNet projects detailed in the last chapter looks like. There is an adamant separation of the professional from the organic connection a leader would have with a movement. To see what this can mean for staffing one has to

keep moving down the funding trail. The next step brings one to Bulgarian civil society as it is described in USAID literature, a Bulgarian NGO.

One of LGI's primary Bulgarian partners is the Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR), which means that FLGR receives technical assistance from LGI that allows them to properly spend the USAID money they receive. The lion's share of FLGR's funds comes from a direct grant from USAID, which composes 86% of its total funding.²⁰⁶ Most of FLGR's operating costs are covered by USAID. Smaller portions of the budget come from Open Society Institute – Budapest, Phare Democracy Program and an array of smaller granters including OSF – Sofia. The interesting point here is that though FLGR would likely collapse in the absence of USAID funds and is almost fully consumed with serving USAID, FLGR does not refer to itself as a USAID surrogate or ISO. FLGR presents itself in its literature as a freestanding civil society group whose funding sources are merely coincidental. This is the case with all of the NGOs that serve as domestic surrogates for western donors. This is also one of the reasons why I am reluctant to place them out of bounds for my investigation of donor built civil society groups.

Currently FLGR maintains a staff of 24 salaried professionals. Of this organization's five directors, one is American, the president of the American University of Bulgaria, a Soros creation. Another is the Training Program Coordinator for LGI. This is typical for an NGO board of directors in Bulgaria. A small set of officers from NGOs or organizations within donor groups occupy each other's boards.²⁰⁷ To what degree these boards exert control however is not always clear. Usually there is one controlling visionary individual who can be located in a number of different places in the organizational tree.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Foundation for Local Government Reform. (2000). *Annual Report 1999*. Sofia; Foundation for Local Government Reform. (p.27).

²⁰⁷ Galya Dimitrova-Zdravkova. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) in Sofia, Bulgaria. Dimitrova-Zdravkova commented that one finds "one and the same person in five boards."

²⁰⁸ Ivanov, Andrey. Personal interview. August 2, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives (CEGA) in Sofia, Bulgaria. Dr. Ivanov is a regional development expert who has been involved in founding and governance of several Bulgarian NGOs, he was the managing editor of the magazine *Kultura*, has served in various capacities with the Bulgarian government and has written multiple reports for UNDP regarding Bulgaria.

Williams-Grube, Jane, Galya Dimitrova-Zdravkova and Plamen Dimitrov. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) in

However, the point remains that the interconnectedness of these groups is very strong, whatever their connections with the surrounding community may or may not be. This tendency to sit on each other's boards may also explain the duplication of some phenomena within organizations and the tendency of scholars to lump the groups together.

Among FLGR's six strategic objectives are "to increase the capacity and broaden the professional experience of local authorities and their civic partners for more effective and democratic local governance"²⁰⁹ and "to encourage and assist innovative management and citizen participation in local government through information sharing and networking." Here one sees the strong potential for a top-down orientation, though the latter objective offers the possibility of bottom-up quality. To push this further I will examine a specific project.

In the beginning of 1998 a team was established by five Bulgarian municipalities under the joint leadership of LGI and FGLR and through the funding of USAID.²¹⁰ The purpose of this team was to develop better municipal systems to provide information to citizens. The project was supposed to encourage municipalities to look on citizens as "not just taxpayers but also customers of municipal services."²¹¹ One sees the market frame emerging here as it did earlier. This turn around in approach was achieved by "changing the behavior of the staff" and "by applying the principles of private business marketing and communication to the process of decision-making and service delivery in

Sofia, Bulgaria. Williams-Grube confirms that boards of directors and other governance structures and not what they seem in Bulgaria. She attributes this to what she considers to be the infancy of the NGO sector in the country. The common governance structure that NGOs show in their literature, she says, is merely the legal template they must agree upon to be registered with the government. In reality governance can be occurring in all manners of ways. Dimitrova-Zdravokva, a program manager with ISC, confirms what Williams-Grube had to say. Dimitrov says that some of the influence key members of NGOs have is a case of "caring too much." David Krushe. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (1:00am), on the premises of the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Sofia, Bulgaria. Krushe also confirms the commanding role of certain board leading individuals.

²⁰⁹ Foundation for Local Government Reform. (2000). *Annual Report 1999*. Sofia; Foundation for Local Government Reform. (p.5).

²¹⁰ Guerrant, Bill and Bogdana Sultanova. (1999) "Five Bulgarian Municipalities Implement Pilot Innovative Initiative For Better Services to Citizens." *The Local Self-Government Reform: Annual Newsletter Special Digest Edition 1999*. Sofia; Foundation for Local Government Reform (The edition is supported by USAID). (pp.16-17).

the public sector.”²¹² The team traveled to Poland to learn about a town that had established an information center for citizens, where they could find municipal services concentrated in one area with helpful and customer oriented employees. The team then turned around and popularized what they learned in a series of presentations in cities around Bulgaria. The results of their work were then presented at a conference in Orlando, Florida and followed up with a visit to Portsmouth, Virginia.

The reforms implemented, which won an award at the Florida conference, included creating spaces for citizens to access information,²¹³ improving information technology to handle document needs and training employees to treat citizens with respect.²¹⁴ This respect for citizens is described as a “customer friendly attitude,”²¹⁵ once again bringing up the market frame.

A common method of soliciting citizen participation in this project was through opinion polls. One unique method of soliciting citizen input was developed by the municipality of Dobrich which holds a regular radio show to answer questions on air.

A uniform aspect of these reforms is the passive and unorganized involvement of the citizenry. Citizens approach the municipality as individuals. Their opinion is mapped through polling as individuals. They address the radio station as individuals. There is no effort in any of the municipalities to organize citizens into an amateur body that could organize and articulate communal concerns to the municipality. Therefore, the balance of power and the staffing of these projects remains largely in the hands of the municipal professionals. A kinder, more easily accessible face has been constructed, but as much as citizens can now manage affairs with the government more easily, one wonders if the government can now manage and defuse citizens’ concerns easier as well.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ I had occasion to visit some of these centers and have seen pictures of others, they seem to all have the aspect of travel agencies.

²¹⁴ Which I can say from personal experience in Bulgaria is no small feat!

²¹⁵ Ibid.

To summarize, the result of this civil society building exercise has been the development and heightened sophistication of professional, bureaucratic capacity. The staffing throughout the project remains professional. Amateurs do not appear in the project at all. In fact the civil society element seems particularly hidden since the main capacity building aspect seems to be in the state rather than anywhere outside of it. Though this project is designed to open space for civil society to maneuver, it also does not take any steps to encourage amateur groups to occupy the space and maintain it. Rather it is top-down and creates a vacuum that the state is very likely to move into. One has to account for the possibility that I am targeting a type of project that cannot be done in a bottom-up manner. In order to get a fuller impression of the municipal reform enterprise I will switch gears and look at a European donor project.

Municipal Reform by the European Fund for Freedom of Expression:

In 1998 a project titled Development of Local Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe was begun by the donor European Fund for Freedom of Expression (FELE) and Phare.²¹⁶ FELE is originally a French organization, begun in 1978 by two parliamentarians of that country.²¹⁷ The program was spread across 15 municipalities in Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova. The central objective was to set up initiatives in each municipality that would "attract participation of the citizens and of civil associations in municipal activities."²¹⁸ The idea was to set up some sort of interesting program in each town and city that would get citizens into the habit of joining the municipality in decision making. The point was not the initiatives themselves but rather to engender citizen participation. What is interesting here is that citizens are attracted as more than just individuals. Here, civic associations are invited as well. This encouragement of citizen collective organization is something different from the last project examined. The civil society goal is explicit.

One of the several criteria used to select cities was the willingness of mayors to take on the projects and work with "civil organizations" and "civil groups." What civil groups

²¹⁶ Ibid. (pp.12-15).

²¹⁷ Ibid. (p.13).

²¹⁸ Ibid. (p.12).

and organizations are is not clear yet but it is clearly not a professional NGO. A special emphasis is placed on voluntary participation, shifting one toward the bottom-up end of the spectrum.

The Bulgarian coordinating NGO was Borrowed Nature Association (BNA).²¹⁹ BNA was begun in 1992 with a funded campaign to promote bicycle use as an environmentally friendly alternative to cars. The organization describes itself as being project based. In other words the organization only exists to subcontract the projects of various donors. The staff of the organization swells or shrinks depending on the number of projects being implemented. A core staff of six professionals manages the NGO on behalf of a 26 member non-paid general assembly. Information about the selection of these members has not been forthcoming to date but a blend of non-paid leadership and professional management appears to be a synthesis between bottom-up and top-down inside the same organization. I will say more about this later when it is encountered again.

Most of the other projects were similar to the USAID/LGI project described earlier. In other words they involved the setting up of a government information or service center, or a public awareness campaign that did not demand the organization of citizens but rather their passive involvement.

Lovech moved away from the passive model with the inclusion of NGOs in a discussion on how they and the municipality could work together. This resulted in a signed agreement outlining how this interaction would occur. The NGOs involved were Znanie Society, the Association of Journalists, the Women's Democratic Union, the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections, Ekoglasnost National Movement, the Young Lawyers Association, the Municipal Information Center and the Orpheus Association. Most of these are either professional NGOs or represent professionals. None the less, the latter type of group at least shows a certain bent, which the reader has not seen so far, toward amateur groups. It also shows a slight blurring of the line between the top-down and

²¹⁹ The organization name comes from the idea that we borrow nature from future generations.

bottom-up within the same project. This is not the same as within the same group but it pierces, to a certain extent, the argument that the two ends of the spectrum do not interact. One of the most interesting of the five municipal programs in Bulgaria was the one set up by the government of Gabrovo.²²⁰ Their objective was the “establishment of neighborhood councils.” Gabrovo located its project in a residential section of the city called Bichkinya. The local population provided input and is recorded to have indicated that they wished to see:

Motivated citizens who could use concrete ideas, proposals, and initiatives to achieve public participation in activities, diversifying the forms of individual participation in activities related to traditions, culture, welfare and environmental balance.²²¹

The neighborhood council was thus formed. It was constructed as being “non-political,” though in what way is not clear from accounts. Well-known citizens were appointed, most of which were leaders of schools, churches, the readers' club, the post office and businesses. The council launched a diverse array of activities including restoring cultural landmarks, setting up a local office of the Social Welfare Directorate, re-establishing a local readers' club and other activities. Non-political seems to mean that no overt attempts were made to create major change in the government of Gabrovo itself. There was of course the establishment of the welfare office and there is a session where the competency of the municipal officials can be discussed with municipal specialists. However, the organization of demands on the municipality has not extended beyond this.

Critics like Petras may point to the sentence “Citizens are inclined to participate in public activities, which leads to less criticism and more activity and involvement.”²²² The

²²⁰ My firsthand observation of this municipality was of a place with a place for a high degree of civil society. It is very tidy and has a reputation for being well run and have an industrious population. The symbol for Gabrovo is a tailless cat. The story is that citizens of Gabrovo clip the tail of their cats so that they can close the door behind them faster to save heat. There are quite a few jokes about the industriousness of the citizens that are told through out Bulgaria.

²²¹ Ibid. (p.14).

²²² Enev, Hristo. “Municipal Services for Citizens & Citizens Participation: ‘Action Initiative’ Neighborhood Councils.” *Innovative Practices in Bulgaria: Sharing Innovations for Improving*

control of dissension here seems overt. A lot of this civil society building would fit definitions of the neo-Toquevillian sort put forth by Robert Putnam and Benjamin Barber. They are areas of civic interaction, which may some day lead to political action, but that is not their primary goal. They intended to build trust, not division. None of these projects seek to penetrate or place demands on local or national government.

Beyond this, it can be said that the new civil society group and many of its offshoots do fit the description of bottom-up groups. They are volunteeristic, leadership has less to do with bureaucratic strictures and place of office. This should not be associated with a conscious choice to pick an amateur structure but rather to the fact that money runs out at some point, after it has been siphoned off by various professional groups. If the money runs out but some sort of results are still needed, one needs volunteers.

The nature of the volunteers also might indicate a certain artificiality in the council. Many of them have governmentally related bureaucratic positions. They are employees of the post-office, school, municipal administrative staff, etc. It may be that these professionals have been directed to participate in the project to validate it. The instigator of the project was after all the mayor, Ivan Nenov.²²³ One also has employees of firms and the church. This seems to reinforce Weber's point that amateurs can only really participate in governance groups if they can afford it, that is, if they have a substantial source of income outside of the organization.

Whatever the advantages or disadvantages of this type of civil society, it certainly is on the bottom-up end of the continuum, even if it is not an ideal-type. Whether these groups are co-opted by NGOs or a larger capitalistic order, as Petras would argue, is another question. But clearly they do exist and because this organization has continued operating without further donor funds it seems that donors can build a bottom-up civil society that endures past the termination of funding. This, despite the generalizations of Ottaway and Mitlin.

Local Self-Government in Buglaria. An FLGR web-site:
<<http://www.flgr.bg/innovations/innovationsen.asp?ID=167&cid=5>>

²²³ Ibid.

To summarize on municipal reform, most of these projects adhere to the top-down frames described in the last chapter. The chief organizers are often professionals and the money stays in professional hands almost to the end. Even here it often changes to government hands as opposed to bottom-up groups. The projects at which the money terminates often fall within the frame of passive participation and are typified by a vertical relationship with the government or top-down civil society professionals presiding over them. Citizen participation is often fulfilled by citizen attendance to a lecture, through an opinion survey, a radio show or some other method by which citizens are met at the individual level where they are weakest. The donor comment on the Gabrovo project, that this is meant to minimize criticism, seems to work well with some of the most critical scholars. The frame of management is also found here. Problems are managed for citizens after citizen opinions have been solicited. This is either done by a government or a top-down civil society professional.

The distinctness of bottom-up versus top-down civil society holds up to a large degree with exceptions such as the neighborhood council in Gabrovo and efforts to include a few bottom-up civil society groups. I should note that I comment extensively on Gabrovo because it is an exception. Practically all of the rest of the municipal reform measures showed considerably fewer bottom-up components. Most terminated in the setting up of a citizen information center.

Many of the scholars might dispute what bottom-up nature exists in these projects. For instance, many of the scholars investigated may argue that even in the case of Gabrovo the civil society volunteers did not have a large stake in the organizations they belonged to since they seemed to derive legitimacy from the populations in a vertical and detached manner. Therefore they are not popular, mass or socio-political organizations.

I do not think however that this criticism can be taken too far. Clearly these organizations do have roots in the neighborhood. The church is after all a civil society group with a mass nature. Individuals did come from the small business sector. This is not exactly a

workers movement, nor does it do what many of the scholars would like it to do, which is push for large-scale systematic change, but small business owners are closely bound to the community. The neighborhood council is not entirely professional and is a grassroots organization of sorts. This contradicts the idea that the bottom-up and top-down do not meet. This is not precisely the grassroots movement that Mitlin or Petras are looking for but it is grassroots enough to demonstrate the artificiality of the top-down, bottom-up separation.

Phare, The Money Flow in a Professional NGO:

NGOs in Bulgaria tend to be highly protective of internal budgets despite rhetoric appealing to accountability and openness. While they will be audited, as businesses are, and will be accountable to other NGOs, governments and donors, their financial records are often not available to the general public or scholars. One of the few exceptions is the Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF). It behooves the researcher, then, to take advantage of this window, which is otherwise denied, and peek inside at the inner working and staffing implications of recipient budgets. In their annual report CSDF breaks down their income, expenditures and outlay in a relatively thorough manner. Thanks to this information one can see where Phare money goes and discern further how well the five scholars' arguments hold up.

The May 1995 – December 1996 report for CSDF indicates an income of 134,915,000 Bulgarian leva (BGL)²²⁴ for 1996. 121,289,000 BGL of this is from Phare programme BG9406.²²⁵ 22,780,000 BGL remained within the organization as operating expenses. 55,452,000 BGL went to grants for civil society organs. Operating expenses are listed as materials and utilities, rent, advertisement, seminars, telephone and post (mail), printing, other services, depreciation, salaries, other employee costs, business trips and other costs.

²²⁴ The lev is the official Bulgarian currency. BGL means Bulgarian Leva. According to the National Bank of Greece Group the average yearly exchange rate from leva to dollars was 175.8 leva to 1 dollar.

²²⁵ Civil Society Development Programme. (1997). *Civil Society Development Foundation: May 1995 – December 1996 Report*. Sofia; Civil Society Development Programme. (pp.52-55).

The biggest item is 9,508,000 BGL²²⁶ for salaries. The next item, after depreciation²²⁷, is other employee costs at 3,015,000 BGL²²⁸. That so much money is absorbed by employee needs indicates the highly professional nature of this organization²²⁹.

The foundation is heavily dependent upon Phare money. Most of the money in assets is balanced out by debts, leaving very little in the way of an independent reserve of funds. The description of foundation members as employees also highlights the bureaucratic nature of the organization. The foundation employs thirteen full-time staffers and an array of part-time staffers. For accountability a ten member monitoring team exists composed of representatives of other NGOs. This is not the sort of accountability the scholars examined were looking for, certainly not Mitlin. The Board of Directors is composed of academics, NGO leaders, a national gallery director, a government official and a judge. This body is in turn elected by a board of trustees which includes government officials, academics, business leaders and leaders of professional associations. One sees here an array of amateurs that fit Weber's description of the amateurs being those capable of volunteering due to a sizable income and position of status.

²²⁶ With the 1996 average annual exchange rate reported above of 175.8 BGL to one dollar this means \$54,084.19 was spent on salaries. If this was spent purely on the thirteen full-time employees of the foundation the average would come out to an annual salary of \$4,160. This does not, however take into account contractors and consultants so this number is likely to be lower. This may seem to be very little to Americans. One must keep in mind that the International Labour Organization Bureau of Statistics reported the average annual wage in the highest paid sector of the Bulgarian economy, financial intermediation, mostly involvement in pension funds, was \$1,650.92 if one uses the exchange rate offered by the National Bank of Greece Group. These figures are all a bit variable since Bulgaria was experiencing hyperinflation in 1996 (this was the same hyperinflation that eventually led to the overthrow of the socialist government). However, professionals in Bulgaria have confirmed with me that NGO professionals tend to have some of the highest paying jobs in Bulgaria.

²²⁷ 3,189,000 BGL

²²⁸ This is then followed by 2,566,000 BGL for business trips

²²⁹ Again, the salaries indicate a highly paid staff, relative to other Bulgarian professionals. If one brings 1995 into the picture one sees that even more money went to operating costs. Grants were not dispensed in large quantities until 1996. In the last six months of 1995 only 1,697,000 BGL was dispensed relative to 5,063,000 retained for operating expenses. A large quantity of money was also retained by CSDF after these years making CSDF's future grant-making plans fuzzy. After 1996's grants CSDF retained 60,443,000 BGL in surplus from 1996 and 1995. When only looking at what was given in grants relative to what was spent in operating costs, including salaries we find that roughly one third of the money spent was devoted to operating costs. What this all amounts to is a lot of money being retained inside the CSDF and a large portion of it being oriented towards the staff who are well paid by Bulgarian standards.

What this budgetary information tells is that the foundation is a highly professionalized, bureaucratic structure. It of course allows Phare funds to be absorbed and disseminated in what one imagines is the most efficient manner. It is difficult to conceive of a bottom-up group handling these funds nearly as efficiently. In other words, accountability to the donor may be lacking. However, it is significant to note that a huge portion of the money sinks into the foundation. This is undoubtedly true with USAID and other donor programs. The larger portion of their aid to civil society does not end up in amateur hands but is processed by professionals and turned into various bureaucratic activities, of which, only training seminars and conferences appear to reach the grassroots. Perhaps it should be said that more than civil society is being built, professionally staffed bureaucracies outside the government are being established which are charged with serving civil society itself.

Open Society Foundation – Sofia, Evaluating Through Blurred Frames:

In the previous chapter I examined the frames deployed by OSF – Sofia and found them to be conflictual, sitting first on one side of the top-down/bottom-up dichotomy, and then the other. Here I will attempt to gain a clearer picture of OSF-Sofia's position through an examination of the evaluation mechanisms for their civil society program. The main objective is to see what sort of organizations they privilege as targets for civil society building funds.

A unique avenue of investigation is opened up for the researcher. Most internal evaluations of NGO projects are retained within the organization. This is especially true of the harsher ones which are meant for internal consumption and not for the often critical eyes of academics. Access to an OSF – Sofia evaluation provides a look at how this organization and others approach the evaluation of how they negotiate between top-down and bottom-up tendencies.

Under the evaluation heading of “What is the capacity of the applicant organization” one finds the following questions:

Are there volunteers in the organization, what is the regular staff of the organization, staff qualification and experience in the field are high, how many projects the organization carried out since founded, How is the organization funded, what is the current operational budget.²³⁰

Information is gathered to determine the answers to these questions in a variety of ways. These include examination of CVs and interviews with donors who previously funded the organization.

While one does note OSF- Sofia's interest in determining whether volunteers are present in the organization, the vast majority of questions concern what appear to be the profile of a professional staff. There also seems to be favor for grantsmanship. This is to say the history of the organization with previous donors, demonstrated ability to handle funds and an insider's knowledge of the process. It would seem that, though volunteers are part of the evaluation for funds receipt, they are not as important as the demonstrated skills and track record a professional staff can offer.

Under the heading "Project Proposal" the question at issue is the level of commitment expressed by the stakeholders to support the project.²³¹ This swings us back to the bottom-up as it seeks validation from below for a decision made. Unfortunately it does not ask how involved or what sort of ownership the stakeholders have. The question is also asked if there are matching funds from the recipient. This measure seems to marginalize most bottom-up groups in impoverished Bulgaria and tighten the circle of recipients.

Deferment to older groups raises other issues. Plamen Dimitrov of ISC mentioned during the summer 2000 interview that older organizations tend to be founded around certain personalities. The professional staffs that are then accumulated around them become

²³⁰ Open Society Foundation – Sofia. (2000) *Civil Society Program: Strategic Concept 2001*. (p.3).

²³¹ Ibid.

more accountable to these personalities and their board of directors than any population that is meant to be served.

This representation - the very fact that the community wants someone to be on the board of this organization is not guaranteed. Because, organizations, in the founding, have a gravitation around the founding process [and founders], the establishment of the organization generated it [the organ and its board], not the will of larger social groups or interests, and sometimes boards stay frozen in this inner reality, and the reality of the constituency or constituencies or even different interest groups is not represented in the board's structure and board dynamics.²³²

Dimitrov also said that these boards tend to carry forward the top-down tendencies of communist era boards.

For a big combine, a big plant [during communism], the board was not really a board. But, it was a clerk from the ministry of industry, someone from the communist party local chapter or local committee and somebody who was monitoring the industry from the central committee or planning committee. In practice there was no feeling about shareholding, stakeholding as well. It is the case of the [NGO] boards here.²³³

Dimitrov, during this interview, continually analogized NGOs with businesses. He referred to NGOs that receive funds as customers and in this quote he is analogizing shareholders in a company with stakeholders in a community. Just as the shareholders have a direct interest in the business, the stakeholders, who are community members affected by an NGO, have a stake in that organ. Dimitrov is pointing out that practices like OSF – Sofia's, which can favor older organizations, can also end up supporting some of the top-down approaches that older organizations harbor in their boards of directors.

²³² Dimitrov, Plamen. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) in Sofia, Bulgaria.

²³³ Ibid.

With the heading “Foundation record” one finds the question “does the applicant regularly and in time presents sound financial and program reports?”²³⁴ Again professionals are better at juggling financial reports.

What one is picking up here is a high premium on professional, expert skills, skills that can be difficult for amateurs to master. However, the fact that volunteers are involved at all does break down the harshest bottom-up/top-down dichotomy. Another method for determining how OSF-Sofia negotiates between bottom-up and top-down is how they evaluate the success of failure of a project and the indicators they use.

OSF-Sofia has set up a list of common problems that need to be addressed by civil society building. What’s most interesting is the indicators chosen to measure success, failure and gradients in between. They include the following:

- Number organizations applying with innovative ideas to the OSF
- Number of adequate NGO response in the process of introducing democratic practices in local and central government
- Number of actual results produced with the joint efforts of local authorities and NGOs

Striking in this list is the total lack of emphasis on providing target communities or popular movements a mechanism for input, ownership or control. The NGO spoken of seems, according to the evaluation mechanisms to be largely professional. Other indicators deployed to solve problems include:

- Number of consumers
- Number of training seminars for NGO leaders; number of publications in the media

²³⁴ Open Society Foundation – Sofia. (2000) *Civil Society Program: Strategic Concept 2001*.

This and the previous indicators certainly show a supply-side emphasis to indicators. What the consumers do with the information, what happens to the publications once in the media, who these NGO leaders are and what they do appears to be peripheral.²³⁵ Demand is ignored. Either that, or positive results are assumed to automatically follow. The mechanism here seems highly bureaucratic, where normative processes are paired down to a repertoire of scientific management. It is difficult to judge the type of consumers served, it is difficult to objectively judge the NGO leaders or what they take from the seminar. This probably influences OSF – Sofia’s reputation for having a mechanical way about providing grants.²³⁶ What can be said is that the process is undoubtedly efficient.

This sort of highly mechanical approach to civil society building appears to clarify OSF-Sofia’s process of negotiating between the bottom-up and top-down. As the master frame of an open social market suggests; OSF-Sofia sympathizes with grass roots alternatives. The presence of volunteers is valued. This matches with what is said in the Civil Society Program’s 1996 – 1998 evaluation. Here Boris Strecansky, the outside evaluator, writes that OSF – Sofia is noted for “its openness to a broad range of proposals.”²³⁷ Strecansky also points to OSF – Sofia’s ability to react quickly to the societal environment and needs around it. This is another benefit of markets and market like activity; their fluidity and responsiveness. But not all aspects of the market are positive.

The efficient processing of funds, reporting of results and maintaining the efficient OSF - Sofia bureaucracy demands a professional staff. While amateurs are not turned away, they are expected to behave as professionals. There is also concern within OSF – Sofia about their trend toward large grants that can only be absorbed by large professional

(p.3).

²³⁵ Dimitrov, Plamen. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) in Sofia, Bulgaria. Dimitrov complained of this during the interview indicating that most of these reports seem to disappear into a void. Dimitrov said that the donor driven process is largely oriented on convincing donors of progress and acquiring more funds.

²³⁶ Strecansky, Boris. (1999) Evaluation of Civil Society Program 1996-1998: Open Society Foundation – Bulgaria. April 9. (p7).

²³⁷ Strecansky (p4).

NGOs.²³⁸ This leaves behind the smaller, grassroots organizations, that do not have the professional staff necessary to win OSF - Sofia grants. Even when looking at OSF – Sofia success stories, most appear to be organizations that have a professional bent.²³⁹

I do not want to misrepresent OSF - Sofia as only funding large professional groups whose accountability to target groups is in doubt. OSF – Sofia pioneered an advocacy group of families, with members in the military, to force the government to treat draftees better.²⁴⁰ Elements of grassroots pressure politics are not entirely absent from OSF – Sofia funding. However, OSF - Sofia’s mechanisms do seem to limit the scope of participation. It seems that just as the efficient market never turns away those who wish to participate, neither does OSF - Sofia. But, certain sacrifices and preconditions are demanded to win. For OSF - Sofia this means that a certain degree of professionalization is necessary to get more than a first look from funding evaluators.

I will return NOVIB and one of its most interesting partners in Bulgaria. This is where the reader will see a dramatic departure from the civil society picture painted thus far.

NOVIB and the Center For Independent Living, A Different Model:

To best evaluate the possibilities held out by the grassroots, community development frames of NOVIB I will examine them in action with the NOVIB-funded Center For Independent Living (CIL). NOVIB has worked with CIL since 1996.²⁴¹ The CIL is an advocacy group by and for the disabled. It organizes the disabled of Bulgaria to win “human dignity, equal opportunity, self-determination, choice and participation.”²⁴² CIL makes a distinction between rights and entitlements. Rights which were listed above, are modes of operation and being in society. Entitlements are things, such as free crutches or a government check. Entitlements do not necessarily result in rights. They

²³⁸ Strecansky (p14).

²³⁹ Strecansky (p19).

²⁴⁰ Strecansky (p15).

²⁴¹ <<http://www.novib.nl/flash/default.asp>>

²⁴² Center for Independent Living. *Equal Opportunity or Dependence?* Sofia; Center for Independent Living

point out that the Bulgarian language does not distinguish between rights and entitlements, but CIL does. They want more funds devoted to the issues of the disabled but only if it means that the disabled can exercise their rights.

CIL has difficulty making this distinction with policy makers, which is why they explain that they utilize tactics not used by other groups. This confrontation with policymaking norms leads to conflict. It also sets CIL apart from other civil society groups examined in this paper. There is anger that “only those enmeshed in the dependent role are now invited to participate in policymaking.”²⁴³ This places CIL on a course directly opposed to passive participation. CIL is opposed to its members being dependent upon a state that must be changed. Therefore CIL presents itself as being autonomous from the state and as a group through which the state can be assailed to make change.

A certain amount of anger is also reserved for international donors who fund segregated schools and workplaces for the disabled. CIL’s goal again is not material set-asides but rather full access to the rights enjoyed by other members of society. This problem with donors has lead CIL to reverse the typical relationship of NGOs and other civil society groups with donors to one bottom-up in direction. CIL has published flyers to be given to donors to educate them on the proper way to go about sending funds to help disabled persons. This is a complete reversal of the typical hierarchy . Mariana Milosheva of CEGA, also funded by NOVIB, has explained her frustration with the usual approach.

A heavy percentage of aid was disbursed to cover needed indirect assistance costs – technical assistance and training activities, to ‘coach’ the safe birth of civil society initiatives. There were a lot of cases where the predominant format was: Western experts (whose costs used up the lion’s share of a project budget) sharing ‘the bottom-up’ thoughts with a passive (also assumed as guidance-seeking and virginal) audience.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Milosheva, Mariana, Deyan Kiuranov and Ivan Krastev. (1997) *Western Assistance, NGO Community and Civil Society in Bulgaria. Initiative for Civil Society Building in Bulgaria*. Sofia: ACCESS Association, Bulgaria. (pp. 95 – 112). Marian Milosheva is the founder of Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives (CEGA, which means “now” in Bulgarian), Deyan Kiuranov and

This nearly entirely top-down approach which is typified by USAID, as cited not only by Bulgarian actors but Carothers, Ottaway, Abramson and Dobbs is rejected by CIL. CIL rather presumes the ignorance of international donors and explains to them the bottom-up policy to follow, how it is done wrong by donors and how to best implement it. CIL sets the ground rules for how donors approach it, rather than the donor setting the rules for CIL. It is therefore difficult for donors to move CIL in directions its membership does not like. CIL not only has a different attitude but a different structure.

I will investigate CIL's member versus professional nature by examining its organizational structure. One is afforded a unique opportunity with CIL. Most organs are vague about how their organizational structures operate. Some of this may have to do with the personalistic nature they exhibit, which is contrary to their literature. Access to information about CIL gives tremendous insight into why CIL acts the way it does.

Most NGOs investigated in this paper are run by an individual placed somewhere in the governance structure, usually either the executive director or someone on the board of trustees.²⁴⁵ Either way power in most of these groups is held by a few. The ultimate authority in most of these organizations is vested in the board of trustees. Few have memberships capable of influencing proceedings, in fact few have memberships at all. David Krushe a former employee with the US government, now living in Bulgaria, has had a great deal of experience working in the NGO field and has worked closely with CIL. He attests to the uniqueness of CIL's grassroots approach.

Look, the whole NGO community here, and I fault the donors, in some respects for this, in that, rather than creating grass-roots, issue based organizations with a broad constituency, or membership, you have NGOs that write projects to get money and they don't have a broad base of

Ivan Krastev are the leaders of the Centre For Liberal Strategies (CLR). The publishing organization, Association for Contacts and Cooperation – East European Self-Support (ACCESS, which means nothing in Bulgarian), currently focuses on relations between Balkan countries. It used to support a civil society development program but has abandoned it in order to specialize.

support or constituency. CIL is one of the few organizations that does have that constituency and that issue based concept.²⁴⁶

Krushe is adamant about CIL's lonely place among Bulgaria's NGOs.

The other thing you need to understand about NGOs in this country is that there are thousands of them. But there's a handful that are actually doing real work.²⁴⁷

The Center for Independent Living is an association that “has open structure for everyone, who accepts its goal and is ready to work for it and makes the initial installment of 1000 leva.”²⁴⁸ The founders of the organization, including the executive director, Kapka Panayotova,²⁴⁹ have paid the entrance fee. The supreme body within the association is the general assembly, which constitutes all founders and subsequent members. There is no limit to the size of the general assembly. The general assembly can change the character of its own decision making ability, has veto power over the budget, makes decisions regarding programming and strategic trends, opens and closes funds, decides what organization CIL does and does not belong to and can terminate CIL. The general assembly gathers at least twice annually either by request of the board of trustees or by one tenth the membership. This allowance for meeting when one tenth of the membership calls it gives tremendous control to the members to meet outside of any power structures that may solidify within the association. The meeting is legal if half the membership is present. However, if half of the membership does not show up then the meeting is postponed one hour. If the number is still not present the meeting resumes and is legal no matter how many are in attendance. Again, this gives tremendous leverage to members.

²⁴⁵ Ivanov, Andrey. Personal interview. August 2, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives (CEGA) in Sofia, Bulgaria.

²⁴⁶ Excerpted from an interview held with David Krushe, Amy Ramm and Kapka Panayotova at 2:16pm August 1, 2000 in Bulgaria on the premises of the Center for Independent Living. The quote is Mr. Krushe's.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ *The Center for Independent Living Constitution*, filed in 1990. Leva is Bulgarian currency.

²⁴⁹ Who is disabled with polio.

The board of trustees is elected by the general assembly for two year terms. There are eight members here. The board has more narrowly focused decision making capability and sets the salaried staff of the association.

Every member has the right to any information regarding the association including accounting and can participate in the management of the association. No member has any advantage or privilege over any other. If two thirds of the members decide so, a member can be expelled for not upholding the ideals of the association. A member can leave anytime by declaring intent to do so to the association.

This membership approach is far more horizontal than anything seen so far. It means that members share risks to a certain degree. However, it is incredibly difficult to distinguish whether CIL is more membership based or professional. I have to go further into CIL's mission, projects and tactics to get a better sense. Certainly the reader is seeing a high possibility of an organization that is a hybrid of both the bottom-up and top-down tendencies on the civil society building continuum. Rather than this being a relationship of a professional NGO with an amateur group, this single group demonstrates qualities of both. It is this organization more than any other that threatens the integrity of the scholar's conceptual separation of the bottom-up and top-down end of the civil society continuum.

The mission of CIL brings up most of what has been discussed in the introduction to this section. What I will focus on is the meaning of the following lines:

All CIL projects and programmes are based on the participation and involvement of people with disabilities in research, planning, decision making and implementation of activities that affect their lives. All activities of CIL are open and transparent.²⁵⁰

To retreat to the previous chapter one sees the participation frame emerging, however, there is a high degree of ownership by the target community. In this case participation does not mean a survey or group question session. Here CIL is actually employing the disabled in their everyday operations. This is not in some minor capacity but in the very meat of the organization. These are the core processes within the organization. Kapka Panayotova points out the organization was founded and is run by disabled Bulgarians. “CIL has been set up by a group of people with disabilities to promote the idea of independent living and the idea of inclusion of people with disabilities.”²⁵¹ David Krushe points out that “the people that are involved are those that have felt the discrimination.” Panayotova says that the word grassroots means a form of participation. “We are based in Sofia, we work with people in Sofia. We get them involved the planning process.”²⁵² This means that CIL’s version of participation is closer to the bottom-up ownership by members rather than the top-down passive participation by atomized individuals. It is useful to see how this orientation plays out in CIL’s projects.

CIL embarks on a number of in-house programs and donor contracted projects. One of the most provocative programs is “creating a civil movement for independent living”²⁵³ which involves organizing disabled people into groups capable of lobbying the government and promoting change. The donor project side of CIL demonstrates how the organization negotiates between donor designs and CIL objectives. For a project commissioned by NOVIB and Solon Foundations, CIL hired professionals to meet with disabled and non-disabled people to determine issues and problems in the Bulgarian work sphere. This included line workers, labor unions and various levels of management. The project was used to develop an approach to businesses in order to achieve a restructuring of the business environment. NOVIB followed up with funds to lobby businesses and train and organize disabled people so that they could better compete with others. In this

²⁵⁰ Center for Independent Living. *CIL Mission and CIL Major Goal*. Sofia; Center for Independent Living.

²⁵¹ Kapka Panayotova. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (1:00am), on the premises of the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Sofia, Bulgaria.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Center for Independent Living. *Project History*. Sofia; Center for Independent Living.

case CIL, which has seemed to fall, to a large degree, on the bottom-up of spectrum, utilizing top-down techniques and personnel. This project was funded with \$15,000.²⁵⁴

The Institute for Sustainable Communities stepped in with \$8,540 to provide institutional support such as office space, staff and a data base of disabled people. ISC, which the reader has already encountered, assisted CIL in developing its top-down capacity. It is important to bring ISC back into the picture here to demonstrate where funds cross over and how the scholars' types can begin to break down. While ISC's approach tends to be top-down, here it impacts what works as a bottom-up group. This is clearly a case of the top-down and bottom-up poles interweaving in a between groups model.

Another previously examined donor comes into the picture with Phare. With Phare assistance CIL organized a conference that brought together disabled people and humanitarian NGOs. The NGOs were encouraged to move away from simple material assistance and toward developing spaces where the disabled could meet and discuss issues, problems and organize. This constitutes a shifting of efforts from the passive to building small active popular movements.

The UNDP, OSF – Sofia, the German Marshall Fund and S.I.V.A. funded a \$15,000 international conference in Sofia to address how public policy toward the disabled should be organized.²⁵⁵ Speakers from the United States, Great Britain, Italy, Greece, the European Commission and United Nations came together in Bulgaria. CIL set the agenda, selected the speakers and contributed additional funds of its own. This event constitutes a major shift counter to what Pablo Escobar discusses in his book²⁵⁶ on development. Here CIL begins to set the agenda for development and civil society building in a periphery country as opposed to in think tanks, academic institutions and governments in the core countries. This is a logical, but striking progression from CIL's professed habit to instruct international donors on how to approach CIL's constituency.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Escobar, Arturo. (1995). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton; Princeton University Press.

This sort of aggressive advocacy distorts the power relations that often flow top–down and displays the potential power of within group models of civil society building.

The UK Know How Fund provided \$9,160 to create and disseminate a map of disabled accessible places in Sofia.²⁵⁷ This project is a subtle way of shifting the power dynamics of professionals. Here a constituency population begins to categorize the reality around them rather than be categorized. They begin to place demands on their environment and the map is used as a tool to organize against different obstacle environments and reinforce positive spaces. Technology and expert knowledge is turned out and up. The project was carried out by disabled volunteers with different disabilities. The volunteers were encouraged to travel the city and become authorities and experts themselves. They were encouraged to lay claims on their environment and turn the table. Accessible spaces were celebrated and championed as normal rather than curiosities.

Perhaps the most dramatic project is funded by OSF-Sofia with \$9,710 and is targeted at direct action for change. Here disabled people who had been labeled “unable to work” by the government organized and launched legal and public campaigns against the government to demand integration into mainstream society and a termination of the medical frame used to design policies onto the disabled. This is an example of the space that CIL opens up for disabled people in an effort to organized them and permit them to take direct confrontational action against the state. Again one should note the role of OSF-Sofia and see the potential for donors discussed earlier to contribute to bottom-up civil society operations.

Another unique aspect of CIL is its use of confrontation tactics to push for its objectives. Amy Ramm, an American citizen who has volunteered for CIL in Sofia says the organization is not afraid of becoming politicized.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

This organization [CIL] has been viewed as a threat to the government – by ministry types, by bureaucrats. It’s less about party structure than it is about place in the hierarchy. An NGO is not supposed to make noise.²⁵⁸

CIL’s most aggressive tactics are its lawsuits and street politics. CIL has for instance taken the government to court for agencies that inappropriately declared when disabled persons could or could not work.²⁵⁹ CIL won these cases and as Panayotova said “made a lot of noise in the media.”²⁶⁰ Panayotova suspects that a recent round of legislation proposed by the Cabinet of Ministers, that makes it difficult for the disabled to work, is a response by the government. She calls the trial direct action. This is the first time this term has been raised. Direct action for CIL also means taking to the streets.

CIL is one of the very few NGOs that will take its membership into the streets in front of the parliament building to push an issue onto the public agenda. David Krushe says “they mobilize *large* numbers of people with disabilities to make a statement.”²⁶¹ Amy Ramm says that “it is not a common way to be heard in Bulgaria.”²⁶² These are the sort of street tactics that Petras is looking for but which are absent in most of the donor built civil society arena.

In CIL one finds at long last a within group model that mixes bottom-up and top-down characteristics of the civil society building continuum. Donors and NGOs will exert top-down influence when given an opportunity but in this case CIL places demands on them and does not allow them to take any other stance except that which Mitlin would have them take in the end; subordination to the more bottom-up group. But the way of getting there is different from the one Mitlin outlines. The membership organization in this case behaves like a professional organizational. It rallies the resources internally or exogenously necessary to pursue its objectives. When it lacks the professional staff

²⁵⁸ Amy Ramm. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (1:00am), on the premises of the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Sofia, Bulgaria.

²⁵⁹ Kapka Panayotova. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (1:00am), on the premises of the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Sofia, Bulgaria.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

necessary to pursue goals it hires them for specific needs and then discontinues them. Rather than accumulating professionals it accumulates skills.

The most significant aspect of CIL for the purposes of this paper is the clear mixing of top-down and bottom-up aspects. It shows the possibility of breaking down the conceptual wall that has been erected between the professional and amateur in civil society. To return to the question at the top of the chapter, CIL shows that there is not only negotiation between top-down and bottom-up occurring within donors, but there can be a very rich negotiation inside the funded groups themselves. In the case of CIL this negotiation resulted in a strong bottom-up component which has then attracted a strong top-down component to it. Whether the aspects based on bottom-up membership can retain control as they appear to be doing now, and continue to spawn popularly accountable projects and initiatives is open to question. None the less, Petras is at least on shakier grounds when donor money can be taken by a group such as CIL and turned into a program that mixes different aspects along the continuum. One even finds organic leadership as in the case of the shared risk Kapka takes on different fronts including street protests.

Conclusion:

As in the previous chapter, this one has shown a gradient of negotiation between the bottom-up and top-down starting with USAID and then returning to a NOVIB partner. It is significant that NOVIB's involvement with CIL is of less importance than it was with CEGA. CIL certainly appears to be able to maintain its autonomy no matter who the donor is. Alternatively, USAID has a fairly distinct downward flow that is broken up more under the Europeans but is still mainly of a downward thrust. Similarly OSF-Sofia seems to continue many of the aspects of the downward flow though allowing for more of the amateur upward flow. In CIL one perceives a severe disruption of the pattern. Here the power clearly shows dramatic upward thrust. The professional is captured by the amateur and turned toward its need. The line between the top-down and bottom-up of the continuum and the accompanying dynamics are severely questioned by CIL.

It may be that the usefulness of the scholar's portraits is based on a hard walled approach to groups where they are internally homogenous in approach and exert influence on other groups and donors in a unified manner. CIL breaks the monolithic impression of the groups and opens internal space for the internal negotiation of top-down and bottom-up and develops a new model capable of bending exogenous power flows as well as the internal ones.

Chapter Five:
Conclusion

Introduction:

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize what was attempted in this paper and what the evidence has suggested. Following this I will examine what further hypotheses could be drawn from the case studies. Finally I will suggest where research needs to go from here. This paper has taken on two projects. First, I have explored the question of whether or not there is evidence to support the argument, put forth by some scholars, that there is a fundamental dichotomy between professional NGOs and grassroots development organizations? Second, I have investigated the ways in which the picture is more complicated. This led me to questions like how might one conceptualize the interaction between bottom-up and top-down groups such as Mitlin would suggest, and is it possible for bottom-up top-down aspects to be housed and negotiate within a single group? Finally, what patterns can one hypothesize might exist in these interactions based on the cases examined.

What has been attempted:

The fundamental proposition under investigation here is that civil society organs at work in the field, built upon, or built by external donors, exist on two poles and can be conceptualized as ideal types. The bottom-up ideal type and its pole features problem solving through collective action, organization through volunteerism, staffing of organs by amateurs and an overall impression of bottom-up activity. The top-down ideal type and its pole is typified by problem solving through administration, organization through bureaucracy, staffing of organs by professionals, and an overall impression of top-down activity. The alternative probed here is that there can be interaction between elements at the poles between organizations, as Mitlin proposes, and that there can be interaction between them within a single organization, which none of the scholars examined deals with.

If evidence can be found that the poles might mix within organs, it defeats the idea of civil society groups as ideal types. It raises the question of whether scholarly treatment of

civil society groups as ideal types is warranted or productive. One doubts that the scholars in question believe that groups behave as ideal types. However, their silence on this restricts inquiry into a broad range of potential behaviors among civil society groups.

What the evidence has suggested:

First I will deal with the issue of donor frames. This paper has investigated the central proposition and the potential for alternatives by looking at the operations of USAID, Phare, the European Fund for Freedom of Expression, the Open Society Network, NOVIB and the groups effected by them and who, in some cases, act as their surrogates. The first chapter looked at the frames deployed by donors and their surrogates in Bulgaria. It revealed the semblance of an unarticulated continuum of frames running between a top-down end and bottom-up end.

USAID largely confirmed the scholars arguments that donor built civil society has fundamentally top-down characteristics. The frames deployed by USAID ultimately focused on professionals and the passive participation of citizens as individuals as opposed to organized groups. Ultimately this fell under a master frame of security and stability which sought to retain the power and unchallenged legitimacy of Bulgarian governmental institutions by channeling citizens into a process of passive participation without the ability to fundamentally disrupt institutions. Popular and social movements, and organizations who had the potential for autonomy seemed to be consciously avoided in the provision of aid.

The European Union donor, Phare, focused on a master frame of formal democracy construction which shared the common prerequisite of stability with the security frame of USAID. Here the focus was on bringing Bulgarian societal standards into compliance with those of the EU. The frames used to articulate this were similar to USAID's though they seemed to possess more room for popular movements and a greater degree of informal autonomy on the part of citizen groups.

The master frame of the Open Society Network and its Bulgarian chapter, OSF – Sofia, was that of an open market of ideas. It allowed for a greater flexibility of frames. Frames could be identified with both top-down and bottom-up characteristics. This led to a certain amount of confusion about the direction and place of Open Society work between the two poles. But, this demonstrates fragility in the simplistic belief that the two poles are mutually exclusive.²⁶³

NOVIB, on the other hand, emphasized a place on the bottom-up side of the continuum. Theirs' were frames of partnership and explicitly a master frame of community development. Their language spoke largely of bottom-up movement and grassroots action. To a certain extent they saw themselves and their partner organizations potentially in opposition to core countries. This was expressed in the perceived need for a better distribution of prosperity.

At least in rhetoric there seems to be a spread here between the top-down and bottom-up poles. This on its own directs our attention to the possibility of a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Of course Petras would argue that populist rhetoric is of little consequence. He would rather examine the structure, leadership and tactics utilized by the built civil society.

Next I will deal with the issue of donor practice. To pursue this line, the same general set of actors were examined again. I specifically looked at how they dealt with the key negotiation between bottom-up and top-down building of civil society. A number of approaches were followed to discern how these negotiations occurred. Perhaps the reader found the variety of inroads a little disconcerting. However, each approach was deemed to be the best for each organization. It should also be noted that this paper is not a systematic scientific experiment but rather an exploration that will generate the sort of propositions that can be tested later.

²⁶³ This is chiefly a threat to Petras's black and white perspective. The remaining scholars, especially Carothers, endorse the possibility of some heterogeneity, especially in Open Society.

For USAID I investigated their attempt at local municipal reform. My determination was that these reforms were largely targeted at professionals and building civil society mechanisms that favored the professional NGO. This is a trend that might be traced back to USAID's favoring of highly bureaucratized American contractors. The highly professionalized and expert status of these groups could have a professionalizing trickle down effect. The solutions arrived at in Bulgaria occasionally have slight bottom-up elements to them, but by and large, amateur civil society is not strongly encouraged. It should be cautioned that I have focused on one project in USAID's civil society repertoire. Local government reform seemed central to the civil society building objective. It might be that other projects have a stronger bottom-up element, but this could not be seen from my evidence.

The European Fund for Freedom of Expression has a similar program, but allows for greater citizen activism and setting of the agenda. However, the stability frame carries forward as it did with USAID. Volunteeristic and community based groups emerged but do not seem to be allowed to stray too far from existing governmental institutions. An examination of the budgetary documents of Phare's Bulgarian surrogate also reinforces a tendency for a high degree of professionalism and Weberian bureaucracy. This undoubtedly results in a highly efficient dissemination of resources but it also seems to avoid bottom-up aspects of civil society.

Investigation of Open Society Foundation - Sofia's evaluation mechanisms demonstrated a permissive attitude toward a variety of civil society groups. This corresponds well with their open market of ideas master frame. However, like a market they also tended to skim off only those capable to meet their needs without perhaps the regard for lesser equipped organizations that may be of great virtue. In other words, professionals who could navigate the OSF – Sofia mechanisms and who could absorb the funds stood at an advantage next to amateur staffed bottom-up groups.

The final organization delivers the best blow to the idea of a fundamental, ideal type, dichotomy. The Center for Independent Living houses both bottom-up and top-down

tendencies and also shows the capacity to absorb donor funds without becoming subjugated to a professional template as all of the scholars suggest occurs. In order to establish this I examined the frames deployed by CIL, and looked at their governance structure. Both of these spoke of a strongly bottom-up organization. However, an examination of the projects they have taken on also shows the professional skills and personnel of a top-down organization. They also demonstrate a capability of fundamentally reversing the top-down power flow apparent in the donor-civil society relations found in the rest of the case studies.

Conclusions:

What does this say about the proposition and its alternatives? The case studies appear to validate the existence of a dichotomy, or at least the existence of poles regardless of what takes place between them. One finds a donor environment that is characterized by a high degree of top-down preference and activity. However, the image of an ideal type organization is seriously compromised by evidence of interaction between professional and amateur organs. More to the point, there is evidence that an organization with heavy amateur tendencies such as CIL can take an aggressive position in this relationship. Also, civil society groups are not necessarily exclusively top-down or bottom-up as CIL and other groups indicate. While the scholars' arguments appear to have a foundation of validity, they also appear to be overstated.

To push the point further, evidence suggests that rather than a static dichotomy existing, top-down and bottom-up mix all of the time, even in the most top-down or bottom-up organization. Bottom-up groups cannot long endure without professionals or some sort of bureaucracy and top-down groups have to have some sort of contact with target populations or donors will shed them. So there really are no top-down or bottom-up groups but rather groups that tend to one end or another. It is rare, however, to find a group like CIL which does it to such a prolific extent. The point here is that the continuum both of organizations and within organizations is the rule and the dichotomy is shaky at best.

Further hypotheses for the future:

What hypotheses can be extracted from what has been found? What insights can be given into potential patterns existing in the relations between the bottom-up and top-down sides of the continuum? I offer three insights. One, is that scholars may be placing too high of an expectation on donors if they expect them to subordinate themselves to bottom-up civil society groups as Mitlin does. There may be alternatives as the CIL case study suggests. Two, the relationship between top-down and bottom-up elements within civil society groups may be more of a key to interactions between donors and civil society than the exogenous relation between the two. In other words, what occurs within recipients may be more important than what occurs between donors and recipients. Three, the fact that more CIL-like hybridization does not occur in this paper²⁶⁴ may have founding in what Abramson has told about resource rich organizations descending into poor environments.

An over emphasis on donor-end solutions:

The examination of CIL indicates that a within group model organization with bottom-up tendencies can maintain this orientation in the face of just about any top-down donor. Therefore, the literature's emphasis on donor practices may be less fruitful than an examination of recipient practices. Diana Mitlin offered a case study where a professional NGO subordinated itself to the needs of a social movement. It appears that NOVIB and CEGA attempt to do this, at least this is what a lot of their rhetoric, unlike that of other donors and surrogates, says. However, this is not the only way that one can break down professional donors' tendency to favor more top-down groups. CIL, through its international conference and attempt to educate donors shows another route. Within group organizations need not wait for donors to kneel to serve them. They can actively promote their own, potentially bottom-up, priorities every time they interact with donors.

²⁶⁴ Kapka Panayotova. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (1:00pm), on the premises of the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Sofia, Bulgaria. Panayotova says "What I can say is that we are not a typical Bulgarian NGO although based in Bulgaria."

CIL shows that this can succeed through the fact that they have run projects for a variety of donors from USAID to OSF – Sofia. This means that the focus on donors may be wrong. Donors may inevitably have a tendency to foster top-down civil society. If this is to be reversed, as the scholars I have surveyed suggest, less attention could be paid to donors and more to how civil society groups behave toward them. Therefore, CIL offers the hypothesis that largely amateur organizations can reverse power flows that appear to move down.

Within groups rather than between them:

My second set of insights follows directly out of the first and replicates some of its arguments. Perhaps one should not only move away from looking at donors but also move away from looking at the relationship between donors and recipients as a key phenomena. CIL indicates that what is most important is not the relationship dynamics but how the internal structure of a recipient can influence those dynamics.

Since CIL does appear to be an exception one should ask why. This is why I examined the internal structure of CIL, to find the reason for its street tactics and aggressive behavior toward donors. One finds within it a power relation between professionals and amateurs where amateurs can rein in or direct the operations of professionals without compromising the efficiency of the bureaucratic, specialized elements.

I have also seen in other civil society organs the incorporation of amateur elements, but not with this highly developed degree of control. In those cases one sees the amateur merely as a passive participant. This, it can be argued, results in a leadership that is not abundantly secure in its legitimacy within the target community. If donor funds erode, will the target community rise to support the organization? Very likely they will not or cannot. Therefore the organization becomes dependent on donor funds and donor agendas.

CIL is firmly enmeshed in the community and is of that community. CIL leadership feels comfortable, it can be argued, that it can lay claims on donors. Its comfort lies in the knowledge that if the donors should fail to be swayed and do not fund the organization, the organization can fall back on the community whose interests it organically rises out of. It has also been shown by CIL that donors respond positively to these aggressive tactics, which then draws in to question the scholars' trend of laying blame at the feet of donors.

Those who find the CIL method more favorable may investigate more groups such as it where a strong amateur element has been melded with the professional and see what leads to this process. I might hazard that those who speak most about bottom-up civil society in Bulgaria are those like the leaders of CIL and CEGA, who have taken part in community organizing in inner cities in the United States or other places where such grassroots movements exist.²⁶⁵ This is opposed to those who have been trained by non-profit management "experts" that pour out of American and European business and public affairs schools.²⁶⁶

This of course brings up the question of whether, in the personalistic field of NGOs in Bulgaria and other newly democratized countries, structure really matters at all. It could all have to do with who is at the helm guiding the organization. Ultimately, however, guiding means imposing a structure and so structure matters after all. What is interesting though, it how well does the structure stand up after people like Kapka Panayotova and Mariana Milosheva depart their respective organizations?

²⁶⁵ Kapka Panayotova. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (1:00pm), on the premises of the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Sofia, Bulgaria.
Milosheva, Mariana. Personal interview. July 27, 2000, on the premises of the Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives (CEGA) in Sofia, Bulgaria.
Both women spent time in the US working with grassroots community organizers in American inner cities.

²⁶⁶ Ramm, Amy. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (1:00pm), on the premises of the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Sofia, Bulgaria. Ramm says that the trainers often put forward by donors have management degrees as opposed to organizing experience which makes the difference.

The central point is that the investigation of the internal structure of recipient organizations may prove more powerful than the resulting interactions between donors and recipients. The relationship between the organizations may only be a symptom of the recipient structure. Some might argue that the internal structure of recipients is of less importance than norms of interaction that become established and can mold the two parties. These two possibilities deserve further investigation.

Poverty in target countries as a key variable:

This brings me to my final insight. It may be that funding civil society building in a poverty stricken environment cannot help but turn into just another top-down industry that exists more for profit than communal virtue. The lonely bottom-up aspect of CIL bolsters this idea. If one seeks to understand why top-down civil society seems to inevitably come from donors one should look at the economic environment as a key variable.

In Abramson's characterization of built civil society organs in Uzbekistan, he explains that the organs that are attracted to donor's funds and activities are the former professional elite of the previous regime. The same can potentially be said for Bulgaria. Many NGO leaders are former government bureaucrats, party leaders, members of a cut down academia and new, aspiring young professionals coming out of school.²⁶⁷ These people are attempting to either replicate a previous elite professional lifestyle or earn one in a society whose limited resources will not support such jobs in the private economy. They rush to the development funds offered and attempt to mold pseudo-government, business offices out of them as well as the prestige and social class that go along with that.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Based on characterizations of the population by interviewees and my own observation while in Bulgaria.

²⁶⁸ Dimitrov, Plamen and Galya, Dimitrova-Zdravkova. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) in Sofia, Bulgaria. Dimitrov says that the communist legacy has moved with some of the founders that have taken up positions in NGOs. He especially points out that the lack of attention to the people that one is to represent, stakeholders he calls them, is a legacy from communist administrative practices. Dimitrova-Zdravkova mentions that many of the NGOs were founded by those recently unemployed from state positions after the fall of communism.

One can see this in the training of NGO personnel that is aimed at making their organizations sustainable. Sustainability is interpreted to mean financial security through grantsmanship. It means learning to align the mission and objectives of an organization with donor interests and donor funds.²⁶⁹ A certain “mission drift” by Bulgarian NGOs may lead one to ask if they are becoming players in a new Bulgarian industry.

It could be hypothesized that natural resources and cheap labor fail to attract the sort of investment capable of sustaining a stable private economy. Perhaps the one resource that Bulgaria and other countries have in large supply, economic and social crisis, can be marketed. Ultimately, if one follows this hypothesis to its logical conclusion, one simply needs to find the sort of crisis that attracts investors,²⁷⁰ package it in the form of a self-help initiative and sell it to potential buyers.²⁷¹

Certainly Petras sees this occurring and believes it to erode the potential of groups such as CIL.²⁷² The flourishing of CIL calls this last idea into question but on the other hand it is difficult to see too many organizations like CIL. Petras’s disgust for this privatization of misery may also be unwarranted. Perhaps giving the aspiring intelligentsia something to do until the economy can provide them with jobs is a legitimate pursuit.

Either way, the role of the economy in target countries needs to be investigated. Does a poverty stricken environment push money laden civil society projects toward a private business model? If one does see this as negative how can one combat it? If one accepts

²⁶⁹ This was the definition of sustainability given to me by all NGOs interviewed in Bulgaria and is almost universally the meaning of the term in all of their literature. The only exceptions are CEGA and the Center for Independent Living which I have already pointed out are exceptions.

²⁷⁰ Usually one that ignores class; Dimitrova-Zdravkova, Galya. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) in Sofia, Bulgaria. Dimitrova-Zdravkova says that USAID and ISC indicated that funds could not be provided to labor unions because they are too politicized. This matches well with rhetoric that stigmatizes left leaning behavior in the United States.

²⁷¹ Williams-Grube, Jane. Personal interview. August 1, 2000 (11:30am), on the premises of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) in Sofia, Bulgaria. Williams-Grube says that this often leads to forms of patronage where NGOs will pursue certain projects explicitly to attract a program related job for a friend.

²⁷² Though of course CIL is not class based which Petras would prefer.

this outcome, is one representing what is actually occurring in civil society development accurately?

Future Research:

What future lines of inquiry are suggested by this paper, its conclusions, and the set of arguments it examined? Obviously a more systematic investigation of civil society building operations by donors is advised. Hopefully more attention will be paid to the internal play of bottom-up and top-down tendencies within organizations. The tendency toward viewing civil society groups as monolithic in regard to their place on the spectrum should be further and more rigorously tested. A systematic survey of the governance structures of civil society groups could reveal the interplay that can exist between these sides. There are a multitude of vectors along which research can proceed and hopefully will. The central point is that there are substantive questions brought to light by this paper and they warrant further investigation of a systematic nature.

Conclusion:

The question of a continuum of civil society building and the balances of power that can exist between the top-down model and bottom-up one ultimately need to be the topic of further scholarly endeavor of a more rigorous nature than what is offered here. The concept of a continuum can potentially offer solutions to the problems raised by scholars who are critical of how civil society development is done today and its top-down nature. With such inquiry, one can hope to see a more effective building and reinforcing not only of civil society in the countries that are considered less developed or in transition, one can also promote it in places like the United States, where it seems to be in decline.²⁷³

²⁷³ Putnam, Robert. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York; Simon and Schuster.

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