



Brazilian Political Science Review

ISSN: 1981-3821

Associação Brasileira de Ciência Política

Blikstad, Karin Deleuse  
Strategies, Outcomes and the Potential for Civil Society in Democratizing Urban Development  
Brazilian Political Science Review, vol. 13, no. 2, e0008, 2019  
Associação Brasileira de Ciência Política

DOI: 10.1590/1981-3821201900020008

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=394362526009>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's webpage in redalyc.org

UNEM  
redalyc.org

Scientific Information System Redalyc  
Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America and the Caribbean, Spain and  
Portugal

Project academic non-profit, developed under the open access initiative

## BOOK REVIEW

## Strategies, Outcomes and the Potential for Civil Society in Democratizing Urban Development

By Karin Deleuse Blikstad

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4317-3820>

Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil

(DONAGHY, Maureen M.. *Democratizing Urban Development: Community Organizations for Housing across the United States and Brazil*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018)

To bring democracy to a city is to move toward the ideal of the inclusive city – a particular challenge in a world where housing costs and demand for housing are both on the rise, and both factors in the problems of housing affordability and displacement. The notion of an inclusive city entails not only housing interventions, but also the inclusion of civil society in official decision-making. 'Democratizing Urban Development: Community Organizations for Housing across the United States and Brazil' focuses on both issues by examining how community organizations seek to influence public decision-making on housing matters, as well as what impacts they have on housing policy in particular, and urban development in general. The book presents a holistic and dynamic framework that helps assess how civil society organizations (CSOs) – or, more specifically, community organizations – operate in order to influence official decision-making. With its comparative case study approach, the book leverages case study methodology to provide rich detail and competent analyses covering four selected cases.

The author, Maureen Donaghy, is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science and in the Department of Public Policy and Administration at Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey, USA. She is the author of 'Civil Society and Participatory Governance: Municipal Councils and Social Housing

---

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1981-3821201900020008>

This publication is registered under a CC-BY Licence.

Programs in Donaghy (2018) goes to great lengths to assess the extent to which CSOs play a transformational role in democratizing urban development. The traditional literature on urban politics, especially in the United States, has tended to argue that civil society has practically no impact on urban policy-making; recent studies indicate otherwise. How then to assess the impact of CSOs on urban politics? Donaghy has developed a study that retraces strategies and outcomes in order to shed light on how community organizations act to influence official decision-making, as well as to enumerate their achievements. In order to investigate outcomes, she looked at CSOs' "ability to overcome opposition to their claims in addition to the capacity of the government to respond favorably" (DONAGHY, 2018, p. 91). Her assumption is that "the strategies CSOs undertake, constrained by their own agency and the environment in which they operate, largely determine the extent to which their role is transformational in democratizing urban development" (DONAGHY, 2018, p. 02).

Donaghy (2018) developed an elaborate framework that brings together her findings on the three major questions set for her case studies in four Brazilian and US cities (Rio de Janeiro, Atlanta, São Paulo, and Washington DC): 01. What strategies did the organizations undertake in order to influence official decision making regarding housing policy? 02. Why did these organizations choose certain strategies and not others? 03. What outcomes did these strategies bring about in terms of housing policy and democratic governance?

These questions led the author into the hazardous business of drawing causal inferences on the effects of social movements (see KOLB, 2007), and saw her take on the challenge of sizing up the methodological tradeoffs that are part and parcel of case studies (GERRING, 2011).

Although case studies are stronger with respect to internal validity, the generation of hypotheses and the identification of causal pathways (or 'causal chains', to use Donaghy's term), it seems that Donaghy (2018) ascribes a relatively high external validity to her findings – not to mention the claims of hypothesis-testing and the implicit estimation of causal effects that put in appearances in the book.

The book comprises seven chapters and an introduction. The first chapter provides an overview of housing politics in Brazil and the United States, and of how

their various aspects affect community organizations in both countries. For example, informal housing is much more pervasive in Brazil than in the US, and the characteristics of this informality have tended to prompt communities in Brazil towards collective action, and increase the likelihood of organizations seeking redress in the judicial system in displacement cases – just to mention two of the many consequences of informality at the local level. The book contains a plethora of such interesting insights.

A theoretical framework is outlined in the second chapter. This begins with a typology of strategies based on the means by which CSOs seek to influence the decision-making process. If they act from within political institutions by exercising a greater voice in official decision-making (or if they act to assure such inclusion), it is understood that they seek direct influence, i.e. they are engaging in an 'inclusionary strategy'. If they resort to existing relationships and institutions to persuade decision-makers outside of institutional positions for direct influence, they are pursuing an 'indirect strategy'. If they resort to the electoral process to replace officials in office or reshape government institutions without changing how decisions are made within institutions, they are engaging in an 'overhaul strategy'. Finally, if they move away from local politics, and seek autonomous solutions, or seek influence in higher levels of government or among global actors, they are pursuing an 'exit strategy' (DONAGHY, 2018, pp. 46-48).

While the literature on social movements usually focuses on tactics, sometimes as synonyms for strategy, Donaghy (2018) makes a welcome move in the direction of strategy (comprising goals, targets, and tactics). With the data and analyses set forth in the empirical chapters, the benefits of this move become clear. The typology prevents us falling into an essentialized and dichotomous assessment of the organizations' actions: cooperation versus contention, insider versus outsider. From the strategic point of view, 'protests' and 'bilateral meetings' may both be characterized as part of an indirect strategy, since they have at least one goal and one target in common: to exercise persuasion on the public officials most directly responsible for the decisions at hand. That is not to say that every protest is intended to influence officials or open negotiations – as Donaghy points out (2018), her analysis is context-specific. However, it is true that street protests or occupations can be seen as a tactic to reinforce CSOs' positions in negotiations taking

place in bilateral meetings, as in the case of São Paulo, rather than as a form of exit from local politics. By looking at strategies, then, the book provides a broader and more dynamic view of CSOs' struggles and interactions.

Moreover, as the empirical cases show (chapters 03, 04, 05 and 06), CSOs usually engage not only in insider and outsider tactics – something the literature on social movements in Brazil has already pointed out (see ABERS, TATAGIBA, and SERAFIM, 2014) – but also in a mix of strategies. The specific mix has been important in advancing CSOs' claims, Donaghy argues. In São Paulo, for example, the organizations engaged in a mix of inclusionary and indirect strategies "to secure not only promises but also implementation" (DONAGHY, 2018, p. 154).

It is noteworthy, however, that this typology was developed to capture what organizations do when seeking to influence decision-making. This means that it appears to work best when the locus of decision-making is, to some extent, well defined. Moreover, any overlap between civil society and the state can present a challenge insofar as categorization by strategy is concerned. Institutional activists, for example, are hybrid actors that may play a strategic role in community organizations. Nonetheless, it would be difficult, using this typology, to categorize some parts of what institutional activists do within governmental institutions and their achievements. This is because they may seek to directly build State capacity from within instead of seeking to influence decision makers, operating an "artisanal [and, one might add, direct] effort" to promote change in rigid bureaucratic structures, a "daily effort at experimentation and problem solving, the results of which are not always immediately perceptible" (ABERS and TATAGIBA, 2015, p. 73).

What then shapes CSOs' strategies? By drawing on the works of Melucci; Banaszak; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly; and McCarty and Zald, Donaghy (2018) identifies four variables to explain CSOs' strategic choices: ideology, relationship with the State, political opportunities, and resources. In the empirical chapters, she provides detailed information associated with each one and analyzes their role in shaping strategies. She argues that the first two variables play a particularly crucial role in influencing the strategies taken by the organizations. The second part of her framework brings together ideology, relationship with the state, and strategies (see Table 01 below, extracted from the book).

**Table 01.** Interaction between ideology and relationship with the State: effect on strategies

		Ideology	
		Rights-based	Conservative
Relationship with the state	Strong	Direct [or inclusionary]	Indirect
	Weak	Exit	Overhaul

Source: Donaghy, 2018, p. 58.

Donaghy (2018) argues that each strategy has different instrumental goals and brings about different outcomes for democracy; this being the third part of her framework (see Table 02 below, extracted from the book). Each of the four selected cases represents one of the four possible combinations of the two crucial variables (ideology and the relationship with the State). This seems to have been a good methodological choice for the generation of hypotheses, and she manages to shed some light on the causal pathways for each of the four cases.

**Table 02.** Types of strategies: impact on outcomes

Type of strategy	Instrumental goals	Outcome for democracy
Inclusionary	Structural change, direct decision making	Transformational
Indirect	Additional resources, implementation of programs	Status quo
Overhaul	Allies in power	Political change
Exit	Outside influence, autonomy	Independence from local politics

Source: Donaghy, 2018, p. 64.

As can be seen, each type of strategy offers a different potential outcome in terms of democratizing urban development. The best scenario for the democratization of urban development is one in which CSOs exhibit a rights-based ideology and a close relationship to the State (and thus are inclined to engage in inclusionary strategies that could lead to transformation). Although Donaghy (2018) presents and analyzes the complexities of the real cases with competence, the normative assessment that derives from the causal investigation in some passages of the book may raise eyebrows among some readers.

Donaghy points (2018) out that an inclusionary strategy is not a "magic bullet" (DONAGHY, 2018, p. 179) toward inclusion, since other intervening variables were present in the case of São Paulo, such as financial capacity and political shifts. It is well known that official inclusion in decision-making is not equivalent to effective participation in deliberation, nor to any kind of guarantee of implementation (cf. PIRES, 2011). Her study showed that community organizations in all of the four cases engaged in an indirect strategy – in addition to other strategies – and that they "still lack significant control over public decision making" (DONAGHY, 2018, p. 178). Therefore, she argues, "the strategies of organizations need to move toward demanding greater voice from within the state (...)" (DONAGHY, 2018, p. 178). According to her framework, that move is more likely to happen among community organizations characterized by a rights-based ideology and a close relationship with the State.

That brings us to a difference between both countries that could have been more explicitly set out in the book. In neither Atlanta nor Washington D.C. did CSOs engage in an inclusionary strategy. This could be associated, according to Donaghy, with a "disposition presuming the centrality of representative democracy" (DONAGHY, 2018, p. 183) in the US. The leaders of the CSOs in São Paulo took part in a long political process toward inclusive governance dating to the beginning of the 1980s, which included labor unions, progressive elements within the Catholic Church, academics and left-wing political parties such as the Workers' Party (PT). This process generated a famously robust participatory architecture in Brazil. This difference seems important when assessing the possibilities of inclusive governance in both countries, and the book makes a brief mention of it at the beginning and the end.

Donaghy's book (2018) provides an important contribution to the study of Civil Society Organizations and their interactions with the state. Her shift from tactics alone toward strategies is insightful and proved to be a useful method of analysis to capture in a broad and dynamic way what CSOs do when they are seeking influence in public decision-making. She clearly advocates for inclusive governance and shows evidence to support her argument that an inclusionary strategy could be seen as necessary – but not sufficient – to generate significant changes in how urban development is defined and implemented. From her causal investigation, she

generated interesting hypotheses to be further tested regarding what underlies CSOs' strategic choices – with ideology at their heart – and the possibilities and limitations that each type of strategy bears for the democratization of urban development.

Revised by Fraser Robinson

## References

- ABERS, Rebecca Neaera and TATAGIBA, Luciana (2015), Institutional activism: mobilizing for women's health from inside the Brazilian bureaucracy. In: *Social movement dynamics: new perspectives on theory and research from Latin America*. Edited by ROSSI, Federico M. and VON BÜLOW, Marisa. Abigdon: Ashgate. p. 73-101.
- ABERS, Rebecca Neaera; SERAFIM, Lizandra, and TATAGIBA, Luciana (2014), Repertórios de interação estado-sociedade em um estado heterogêneo: a experiência na Era Lula. *Dados*. Vol. 57, Nº 02, pp. 325-357.
- GERRING, John (2011), The case study: what it is and what it does. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*. Edited by GOODIN, Robert E. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Available at <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604456.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199604456-e-051?print=pdf>. Accessed on April, 25, 2019.
- KOLB, Felix (2007), *Protest and opportunities: the political outcomes of social movements*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag. 341 pp..
- PIRES, Roberto Rocha C. (2011), *Efetividade das instituições participativas no Brasil: estratégias de avaliação*. Brasília: Ipea. 372 pp..
- REQUENA, Carolina (2018), Paradigma e mudança na mobilidade urbana. In: *As políticas do urbano em São Paulo*. Edited by MARQUES, Eduardo. São Paulo: Editora Unesp; Centro de Estudos da Metrópole. pp. 227-252.
- SARUE, Betina and PAGIN, Stefano (2018), Política de renovação urbana: conflitos, instrumentos e gradualismo. In: *As políticas do urbano em São Paulo*. Edited by MARQUES, Eduardo. São Paulo: Editora Unesp; Centro de Estudos da Metrópole. pp. 313-344.