Abstract
This article contains an approach to the dynamics of the relationship between civil society and the decentralized state within Venezuelan federal entities and municipalities. The central hypothesis maintains that from the onset of the decentralization process in 1990 there has been a proliferation of civil groups that are organized around public concerns such as health, housing, education and neighborhood social programs, and that are associated with the increasing competency exercised by city councils and state governments; and, secondly, that the relationship established with these territorial government structures is still precarious, since their performance depends more upon the initiative shown by governments than by the degree of autonomy contained within the mechanisms promoting civil participation. This paper emphasizes the importance of this recent reality bound by tendencies towards a greater complexity of the social processes and towards a growing functional differentiation that demands the existence of public spheres, far beyond the State. From this outlook, the processes of decentralization provide fertile ground for expanding the mechanisms for civil participation, provided that they can dim the marked mobilizing and clientele signs of the patrimonialist state, and give way to the growing institutionalization of civil group actions within the territories.