

PHD RESEARCH

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Between participation and representation. Contextual and structural dimensions of the Flemish third World solidarity movement, 1955-2000

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This research on the origins and evolution of the third world solidarity movement in Flanders since the late 1950s does not essentially see NGOs for development cooperation as a means of transferring resources to the 'global South' ('third world') but as an exteriorization of a social movement. Our assumption is that NGOs, as social movement organizations, prefigure a societal alternative with ideological, praxeological and organizational implications. The focus in this research is on the organizational aspect. The central question is whether and how NGOs for development cooperation remain a social movement that brings into the practice the principles of participative democracy.

Based on the available literature in the social sciences this research develops the central assumption that democratic governance of NGOs is determined by both contextual and structural dimensions. Contextual dimensions refer to the socio-political structures and actors outside the organization that give them a certain legitimacy, while structural dimensions refer to the relations between different actors inside the organization.

This research, based on seven carefully

selected NGOs (*Broederlijk Delen*, NCOS-11.11.11, *Wereldsolidariteit*, *fos*, *Oxfam-Wereldwinkels*, *Vredeseilanden* and *Coopibo*), demonstrates that NGOs for development cooperation do not mechanically adopt the most rational organizational forms. NGOs developed defensive mechanisms that protected them from an exclusivist rational-bureaucratic logic. The success of those mechanisms depends on the ways in which NGOs are able to realize an equilibrium between their participative (i.e. members and constituency) and representative (in regard to their surrounding socio-politic structures) functions. Moreover this research reveals a number of factors that co-determine this equilibrium : a broad, but purposeful and selective, relation with the constituency and general public, a co-operative, but complementary, relation with the government and the channeling of the internal organisational conflict in the function of the 'genetic code' of the organization.