

CIVIL SOCIETY AND NGOS ON DIGITAL ERA IN TURKEY

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This study aims at analyzing the civil society and NGOs on digital era, in Turkey. In the process of globalization, civil society has become one of the most important actors in social, economic and political areas. Civil society is a part of the decision making process, provides solutions to social problems. Non-governmental organizations are the main part of civil society as well as other associations. In Turkey, the development of civil society is regarded as an important issue by national and international institutions. There are several projects to develop civil society in Turkey. In respect to the development of civil society in Turkey there is a lack of information about the civil society presence on digital era. The presence on digital era means the Internet use of NGOs. In consideration to this gap, this study focuses on the NGOs' presence on digital era. The approaches of network society and information society provide perspectives to explain the importance of the Internet use of NGOs in their activities.

Keywords: NGOs, ICTs, Network Society, Information Society, Democracy.

Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have functions which can be used in the different areas of the social, economic and political processes. In politics, ICTs are regarded as alternative communication and interaction channels. These channels can be used by different actors. Non-governmental Organizations is one of them. NGOs are important in the development process of civil society. In terms of the information society and network society approaches ICTs can positively affect to the development of NGOs. In the frame of this study, these perspectives are used to understand the opportunities of Internet usage for NGOs. In the method of this study, online databases of NGOs, NGOs' internet pages, their Facebook accounts and online networks are researched. The analyses include questions about the comprehensiveness of NGOs databases, the presence of NGOs' web pages, online networks, and social media sites. This research provides information and data about the current situation of NGOs on digital era. National and international organizations can consider this information and data to contribute to the development of civil society in Turkey.

1. Civil Society and NGOs in the Globalization Process

Civil society is a collection of social relations which consists of networked organizations relating with social, political and economic issues of social life. It means that the main components of the

civil society are civil society organizations, and social networks which are constituted by volunteers. These organizations do not aim at making profit so they are not business. The main aim of these organizations is help to people depending on the various problems in social, economic and political life. Edwards (2009:20), explains these organizations as “formally registered NGOs of many different kinds, labor unions, political parties, churches and other religious groups, professional and business associations, community and self-help groups, social movements and independent media.” In terms of politics, civil society has been regarded as an organized society to control decides and the policies of political power. However, now it can be said that civil society organizations are more active actors in political, social or economic life.

NGOs are one of the important parts of civil society. NGOs provide social relations and networks for individuals and organizations. They provide information and consciousness for their members in specific issues. These organizations provide civil skills for citizens (Verba, 1995). NGOs have become powerful actors during the process of globalization. Since, they are sometimes more effective solving problem rather than nation-states. The number of NGOs increased rapidly in this process (Edwards, 2009:21). They are not only actors of in nation-states, but they are also the producers of policies and they act in local, regional, national and global levels. NGOs focus on the issues of woman rights, environment, human rights, aids, security, economic development and struggle against poverty (Methews, 2004: 270; Wapner, 2004: 377; Boli et al., 2004: 264; Falk, 2001). Their functions in social and political life can be summarized as mediating between citizens and government, controlling political authority, creating networks between citizens, providing the mobilization of the citizens around a specific issue, affecting public opinion, making opposition to government about unrequired decisions, strengthening the relations and providing trust among the members of society. Also, they encourage the specialization in a society, and help to the development of social and economic conditions in a society (Fisher, 1998).

1.2. NGOs in Turkey

Turkey has not a developed civil society but it is still developing. In the development process, there are some significant events contributed to the development of civil society in Turkey. The first is Habitat Forum which was hold in 1996 (CIVICUS, 2005). Habitat Forum was an international meeting and it encouraged the hundreds of NGOs to take action about civil issues. The second is Marmara Earthquake in 1999. After this disaster, people regarded the importance of civil society organizations to help social problems. The third is the acceptance of Copenhagen Criteria, in 2001. These criteria provide legal assurance to citizens to use their freedoms and rights. The last is the candidacy process to the European Union (EU) which has been affected on the development of civil society. Since, the process requires some criteria that Turkish government has to fulfill these criteria by means of reforms in political, economic and social areas. These criteria have affected the democratization of Turkey through the processes that the weakening of central authority, economic liberalization, the adoption of the principles of good governance. Although all of these processes have supported to the development of civil society in Turkey there are some main problems. These problems can be summarized as the limited level of citizens' participation, limited financial capacity, the problems about accountability and the efficient management of resources, the low number of donators, the limited number of volunteers, the limited number of NGOs' professionals, the gap of legal protection on the development of NGOs (Alemdar ve Birden, 2011; İçduygu vd. 2011).

1.3. NGOs and Internet

The approaches of information society and network society provide perspectives for researches to evaluate the relationship between ICTs and NGOs in the process of globalization. The term of information society insists upon the influence of information and knowledge in the organization of social and economic structures as a result of the spread of electronic information and communication technologies (Castells, 2004). Castells (2004:63) emphasizes that the specificity of networks embedded on this structure. Thus, he explains the development of society as an interactive process between technology and society more than technological determinism. So, the use of information and communication technologies gains importance to create local and global networks for organizations, business or individuals.

According to the network theory by Manuel Castells (2011:776) network is closely related to power in the new social structures. He explains this power in terms of two main mechanisms: first is “the ability to constitute network(s) and to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network” second is “the ability to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation.” Networks are important for NGOs like other organizations. Castells (2011) explains this importance in terms of the NGOs new position in the process of globalization. He suggests that today, NGOs have global aims and activities in related to global problems. The spreading of the networks of NGOs into global area is important to NGOs to increase their power so to reach their goals. In this process information and communication technologies are important to create networks.

ICTs include all of the electronic information and communication tools such as satellite dishes, fiber optics, micro electronics, computers, telephones, e-mail, Internet etc. (Morales-Gómez & Melesse, 1998). Internet is the powerful technology in the organization of society. Today, besides individuals, organizations use it to develop civil society. The effects of internet on the development of civil society are explained by Nugroho (2010:102) in terms of the connection and collaboration between local and global organizations. Nugroho (2010) emphasized that, for NGOs, Internet provides networks, information channels and platforms which are essential in their social and political activities; also, it provides places to organizations in the area of global civil society.

Internet contributes to the development of NGOs beyond to providing networks. Vaccaro and Madsen (2009) expressed that ICTs contribute to the NGOs’ transparency and accountability that are important to develop the relation between society and organizations. Vaccaro and Madsen (2009) suggest that interaction to society using web tools such as giving information and publishing document about their activities have positive effects on the accountability of NGOs. Internet can also provide additional opportunities for NGOs. For example, it can provide financial resources. It is an instrument to increase the number of donators, and to increase citizens’ participation to organizations. Moreover, it can help to decrease the costs of communication between the members of organizations. For example, Rogers and Marres (2000) claims that “NGOs on the web issue calls for action and participation in causes. Greenpeace, for example, incites visitors to ‘become a cyber-activist’ which is effectuated by subscribing to a Greenpeace mailing list.”

2. Method and Data

In this study, the analyses include questions about the comprehensiveness of NGOs databases, the presence of NGOs' web pages, online networks, and social media sites. In the frame, firstly, I determined the online databases of NGOs, and analyzed these databases in terms of the questions of this study. All of the NGOs in these databases are ordered in a list. The number of NGOs in this list is determined as the population of the study that is 8105. The sample is selected by using simple random sampling technique over the population constituted. The amount of allowed error for estimates, namely the tolerance value, is determined to be 0.1; and hence, a sample of size 471 selected by using simple random sampling. Secondly, I searched the web pages of the NGOs on Google search engine. Being on the web is too important to use ICTs opportunities. Thirdly, I evaluated the network capacities of NGOs by means of the number of external (or outgoing) links on the web pages of NGOs. I used a link analyzer tool on the link <http://smallseotools.com/website-link-analyzer-tool/>. This tool finds the number of external links on a web-site. Fourthly, I studied the NGOs presence on the Facebook. I searched the names of NGOs in Facebook search engine.

3. Findings

3.1. NGOs' Databases

Why a database is important for the development of civil society? It is one of important questions in this study to understand why we should look at the presence of NGOs on Internet. A database contains important information about NGOs. It can provide easy access to the information about the NGOs in a country. A database should be comprehensive. The number of NGOs in a database is important to access to the most of them. It should provide interactive options to its users. For example it should give information about the activities of NGOs, financial conditions, networks, institutional capacities. These options are beneficial to the development of civil society and NGOs. They contribute to create networks, to follow NGOs' development in a time period, to keep data about NGOs, to access to NGOs easily, to increase participation and to audit their accounts and operations. In this context, there are seven NGOs' databases on digital era in Turkey. These databases are not so comprehensive and have not interactive options. Even, some of them are not more than a list of NGOs in Turkey. But, it is good to say that, some of them can be improved to create more comprehensive and interactive databases. I explained each of these databases in the following paragraphs.

3.1.1 *www.e-devlet.com*

There are 182 NGOs on the following link created by the name of the site "e-devlet.com" (e-government.com) http://www.edevlet.com/sivil_toplum_kuruluslari/default.asp. Although the site name is 'e-government' it has not any relation to the government. This site is not seen as a database. However, it contains a list of NGOs and provides links to them. This site does not provide any interactive option. It seems that it is created by citizens. The list of NGOs is classified according to the types of organizations as associations, foundations and unions. The comprehensiveness level of the site is very low.

3.1.2. www.stgm.org.tr

The site on the following link <http://www.stgm.org.tr/tr/stoveritabani> is a NGOs database. It is designed by Center of Civil Society Development (CCSD) to contribute to the development of civil society in Turkey. This web-site is supported by the European Union in terms of the project of Civil Society Development for Active Participation. In this database, NGOs are classified as 46 different categories in direction to their activity fields such as environment, democracy, children rights, family, solidarity etc. In addition to this categorization, NGOs are also classified as the cities and the regions of the country. I listed all the NGOs and I found the total number of NGOs in this database. The total number of NGOs is 9311. In terms of comprehensiveness, this database is the best among seven databases. Although, this database is the best among the others, it has some problems. The classification in this database is so limited and disordered. For example, the office of Turkish Crescent in Eskişehir is classified as operated in the field of food. In fact, this association is an aid organization. Another example is that although Alzheimer Association operates in the field of health, in this database, the office of this association in Denizli is classified as in the field of family, and the office in İzmir is classified as in the field of “Other” although it is not an activity category.

Another problem in this database is caused by the organizations’ institutional deficits. The organizations are seen as operating in various activity fields. One of the reasons of this problem is that they do not professionalize on a specific field of activity. This problem affects to the classification in database. For example, the association of “City and Civilization” is seen as in the fields of “family”, “children”, “solidarity”, “education”, “youth”, “woman”, “culture”, “arts”, “sport” and “open society”. Of course, a civil society organization can contribute to the development of society being in a various fields of activity. However, NGOs are specific and professional organizations. They have to determine their areas more specifically. The determination of activity fields specifically is important to a good classification of NGOs in a database. Therefore, categories should be ordered more professionally. For example, the association of “City and Civilization” has activities in the various fields of the development of city and society. These activities can be categorized as “sustainable development”. However, there is not such a category in the database of CCSD.

The database of CCSD has three important problems. These problems can be mentioned as recounting the offices of NGOs in the database, the classification of NGOs and disorder in the selection of main category to classify the NGOs. First problem is the re-counting the offices of NGOs. It causes to rise in the total number of NGOs in database. In this counting, the offices of the NGOs in other cities are regarded as independent organizations from their main body. Second problem is about the classification of NGOs. NGOs are seen as in the different activity fields. For example, the activity fields of the organization of “Freedom for World” are shown as environment, food, local agenda and right of elderly. But its goals express that its main activity field is the field of environment. The specialization of NGOs and the definition of their fields are important to create an explicit, comprehensive and functional database. Third problem is also related to the classification. The classification of activity fields consists of NGOs activity areas. However, this classification overlaps with the classification of type of NGOs. I observed that NGOs are categorized under “the field of activity” as trade association or cooperative associations. This situation causes to disorder in the classification of organizations in database.

In this study, I tried to count the total number of NGOs in this database. Therefore, I excluded the offices and the repeated registrations of associations in database. After this process,

the total number of NGOs decreased to the 7168 from 9311. This gap indicates the problem of classification in this database too.

The database is the most comprehensive but it is not enough when the total number of NGOs is considered. According to the 2011 report of Third Sector Foundation of Turkey the total number of NGOs in Turkey is 153.604. The number of associations is 86.031 and the number of cooperative associations is 58.090. The number of associations is 96.824 in the 2013 reports of Government Office of Associations. When these numbers are considered the database of CCSD include small parts of the NGOs in Turkey.

The database of CCSD is still the most comprehensive online database in digital era even if it has problems. This database provides some interactive opportunities. Organizations can register to this database using information management system, and they can organize or update their profiles using this system. This database provides quick information about organizations, and the users of this database can find the links of the web sites of NGOs. As result, CCSD's database is the most comprehensive digital database in Turkey, but it has some limitations about classification and comprehensiveness.

3.1.3. www.sosyalinovasyonmerkezi.com.tr

The site on the link <http://www.sosyalinovasyonmerkezi.com.tr/> provides a small database of NGOs. This database is created by Social Innovation Center. It provides access to the number of 166 NGOs. The activities of this center aims at improving civil society and social entrepreneurship in Turkey. The main goal of the center is presented as producing projects and finding solutions to the social, economic and ecologic problems. The number of the NGOs in this site is very low.

3.1.4. www.kurumsalsosyal.com

The site on the link <http://www.kurumsalsosyal.com/tr-TR/sivil-toplum-kuruluslari/39.aspx> is a database. The number of NGOs is 157 in this database. This database provides information about the contact addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses of NGOs. It also gives information about the institutional structure, projects and activities of NGOs. There are links to the web sites of NGOs. This database has interactive channels. For example, the visitors of this database can share their opinions about the NGOs. This database has also links to the social media. Although it has good potential as digital database, it is not comprehensive because it contains a limited number of NGOs.

3.1.5. www.siviltoplumakademisi.org.tr

There are 253 NGOs in the database on the web site of Civil Society Academy on the link http://www.siviltoplumakademisi.org.tr/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&id=10&Itemid=134. These NGOs are classified as associations, unions and trade organizations. Also, there is a different database for disabled people. This database provides NGOs names on a list, and links to their web sites.

3.1.6. *www.aile.gov.tr*

The number of NGOs is 105 in the database on the web site of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies on the link <http://www.aile.gov.tr/tr/STKVeritabani/akreditasyon/arama/1>. These NGOs are classified as association, foundations, trade organizations and cooperative associations. The aim of this institution is expressed as producing social policies to develop society. The database provides “information management system” to NGOs for updating their information and profiles. There is information about NGOs’ institutional structure, activities and projects, contact information and the fields of activity. Although it provides interactive opportunities, its comprehensiveness is so low.

3.1.7. *www.dernekler.gov.tr*

The web site of the Ministry of Interior Department of Associations on the following link <http://www.dernekler.gov.tr/> gives information about the associations in Turkey. According to this site, the number of associations in Turkey is 96824. This web site categorize the number of 994 associations according to their legal status. This site is not a database, but it is important because it presents the organizations in Turkey according to their legal status. For example, it presents the list of organizations that they work for public good, so they have some privileges.

3.1.2. The Evaluation of Findings about the Databases

This analysis on the digital databases of the NGOs presents that there are several number of NGOs’ databases in Turkey. These databases have important problems and limits. These problems can be summarized in an order. First problem is comprehensiveness that is an important limit for all of the databases on Internet. The most comprehensive database has 7168 NGOs while the number of NGOs in Turkey is more than 150.000. The number NGOs are not more than 1000 in other 6 databases. Second problem is the classification of NGOs in these databases. In some databases, organizations are classified according to their types or activity fields. But some of the NGOs used these two different classifications together that creates a complexity. These organizations should be classified as firstly according to their type and secondly according to their fields of activity. Also, in the classification, the legal statuses of NGOs should be evaluated separately. For example, a category can be created as “foundations working for public good on the field of environment”, and another category can be created as “associations operating in the field of environment”. In the classification of NGOs it is seen that the databases have information pollution. Third problem is that databases do not use enough interactive tools which are provided by Internet such as information management systems, networks systems, and social media sites. Fourth problem is that databases do not provide enough information about organizations in terms of their activities and projects, their national and international networks, and financial situations. Fifth problem is that these databases have not a digital archive to keep the information about the activities and situation of NGOs. It is important to watch the development process of NGOs through the time.

In order to solve these problems, I can suggest two solutions. First is that a new database can be designed. And second is an existing database that is the better than other databases can be developed in terms of the requirements that comprehensiveness, good categorization and the use of interactive tools. Such a database with these functions will contribute to the development of

civil society in terms of constituting networks among NGOs, watching the development process of NGOs, keeping the data about NGOs, and accessing to NGOs.

3.2. The Presence of NGOs on the Web and Social Media

Researches and projects emphasize that the World-Wide-Web (Web) is an important channel to the activities of various organizations in the processes of interaction and communication (Rogers and Marres, 2000). In order to access to NGOs on digital era, NGOs need to have a web domain or an account on social media. Having a web site or an account in the Facebook is important to be accessible for organizations. NGOs can use these online instruments to create new networks and resources, or to realize activity. In this study, the results of the search of the NGOs' web pages show that 46,92 % of the organizations have a page on the web. This means that there is an important gap for NGOs in terms of the usage of opportunities having a web site. When it is looked at NGOs' presence on social media in terms of Facebook which is a social network site and it provides important opportunities for communication and interaction among various actors. This study shows that only 23,35% of the NGOs have a Facebook account. It is less than the presence of NGOs on the web. It presents that although NGOs' presence on the web is better than social media, in general NGOs being on digital era and the usage of information and communication technologies are so limited in Turkey.

3.3. The Link Analysis of NGOs

Internet provides networks for NGOs. NGOs use these networks to connect and communicate with other civil actors on the world. In order to forecast the network capacities of NGOs, I tried to find external links on the web sites of NGOs. Park and Thelwall (2003) suggest that hyperlinks are like the fingerprints of social relations. They link to websites to each other. The Oxford Internet Institute (2013) emphasizes the importance of links as "all interaction and content on the web are links." And it explains its importance as "Hyperlinks connect web pages and web sites, the links connect users of Twitter and other social media sites, and links connect users with corporations, organizations, and government entities." Links on the web pages of organizations provide opportunities to access other actors, and it is useful to collaboration among NGOs. Links give information about the position of organizations on the web (Rogers and Marres, 2000). Therefore, the link analyze is important to understand the NGOs' network capacity and their presence on internet.

In this study, I analyzed the links on the web sites of NGOs. The link analyze shows that the 33,54 % of the NGOs have a link to an external web site. Table 1 presents the density of external links on the web sites according to the number of external links.

Table 1

Range for the Number of External Links	The Percentage of the NGOs Having External Links
0-9	23,99%
10-19	6,15%
20-29	1,06%
30-39	1,27%
40-49	0,42%
50-59	0,21%
60-69	0,21%
70-79	0,21%

This result shows that NGOs in Turkey are far from the use of web pages to create links to other organizations or the social groups. Corporations in a network are useful in order to realize the goals of NGOs, and to support the development of civil society.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that, one of the important problems for NGOs in Turkey is the lack of presence in digital era besides the problems of participation and the limited financial capacities. The use of Internet can be positively affected to increase citizen participation, to find new resources, to cooperate with other social actors to reach the aims. But their presence on digital era is so limited. The presence on digital era should be an important factor to evaluate the development of NGOs. Any contribution to the development of civil society in Turkey should regard that the designing a comprehensive NGOs' database is an essential to the development of civil society. Also, constituting a well designed web site, and networking and communicating using social media and other tools are important components to contribute the development. This study contributes to efforts to the enforcement of civil society in Turkey. ICTs' usage of NGOs and their presence on digital era are important in the development process of civil society.

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