

## **Can there be a developmental state in Morocco? Finding the right balance between autonomy and embeddedness**

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### **Abstract**

This paper draws on Peter Evans' approach to the developmental state and applies it to examine the scope for state-society synergy at the local level in Morocco. In doing so, it highlights the usefulness of Evans' concept of 'embedded autonomy' for theorizing about the developmental state. The paper studies the internal and interactive capacities of local government and local civil society organizations in Morocco. It argues that there are certain pre-conditions with regard to state capacity which enable complementarity and embeddedness to emerge. The main finding of the paper though (drawing on my extensive fieldwork in two rural municipalities in Morocco) is the high degree of political instrumentalisation that characterizes the relationships between local government and local civil society. The paper therefore aims to enrich the debate on the developmental state by emphasizing the importance of finding the right balance between autonomy and embeddedness if networks that cross the public-private divide are to lead to developmentally valuable outcomes.

## 1. Introduction

The premise that the state should be seen as an organization maintaining a special, autonomous status from society has remained a powerful part of social and political theories right up to the present. It was expressed in a.o. statism, structuralism, rational choice theories, and neo-realism. According to Migdal (2001: 7-17), the influential volume entitled Bringing the State Back In (edited by Evans et al. 1985) was part of the new statist literature that emerged as a response to social systems models and Marxist theories, which it criticized for their inability to distinguish analytically between the state and other sectors of society. State-oriented scholars drew heavily on Max Weber, and especially on that part of his writings that stressed the conceptualization of the state as an autonomous organization with extraordinary means to dominate. However, those acted upon, the objects of control, played little role in the theories and were conceived of as passive recipients of others' rules. Migdal (2001: 15) argues that 'the assumption that only the state does, or should, create rules and that only it does, or should, maintain the violent means to bend people to obey those rules minimizes and trivializes the rich negotiation, interaction, and resistance that occur in every human society among multiple systems of rules.'

Evans (1995), writing from a comparative institutionalist perspective, develops the notion of the developmental state to give a more nuanced view of state autonomy.<sup>1</sup> He suggests that although the characteristic features of the Weberian bureaucracy (highly selective meritocratic recruitment and long-term career rewards, creating commitment and a sense of corporate coherence) mean that these apparatuses have a certain kind of "autonomy", they are not insulated from society as Weber suggested they should be. In Evan's words (1995: 12),

'To the contrary, they are embedded in a concrete set of social ties that binds the state to society and provide institutionalized channels for the continual negotiation and re-negotiation of goals and policies. Either side of the combination by itself would not work. A state that was only autonomous would lack both sources of intelligence and the ability to rely on decentralized private implementation. Dense connecting networks without a robust internal structure would leave the state incapable of resolving "collective action" problems, of transcending the individual interests of its private counterparts. Only when embeddedness and autonomy are joined together can a state be called developmental.'

This apparently contradictory combination of corporate coherence and connectedness, which Evans calls "embedded autonomy", provides the underlying structural basis for successful state involvement in industrial transformation.

Evans' subsequent work (1996) extends this framework to state involvement with society more broadly, and distinguishes between "complementarity" and

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<sup>1</sup> See Fritz and Rochal Menocal (2007) for a comparison of the concept of the developmental state and the principles of "good governance."

“embeddedness”<sup>2</sup> as elements of state-society synergy. The term “synergies” refers to ‘mutually reinforcing relations between governments and groups of engaged citizens’ (Evans 1996: 1119). The core of my D.Phil. thesis - on which this paper is based - studies the internal and interactive capacities of both local government and village associations (or Community-based Organisations, CBOs) along administrative, fiscal, and political dimensions as pre-conditions for state-society synergies to emerge. The principal research question thus relates to whether the main local actors, i.e. local government and local “civil society” actors, have the capacity and incentives to engage in developmentally valuable relations based on complementarity and embeddedness (as used by Evans 1995 and 1996). These relationships can take the form of formal and informal co-production arrangements (i.e. partnerships for service delivery), or more political co-governance mechanisms.

The paper argues that there is currently limited scope for state-society synergies in the case of rural Morocco. Instead, aided by the overriding concern for regime maintenance on the part of the *makhzen*<sup>3</sup>, the boundaries between political and civil societies, and between public and private spheres, have become very much blurred. This situation further encourages elite capture and the expansion of clientelist practices, all of which stands in sharp contrast to the characteristics of the developmental state and state-society synergy.

The empirical findings presented here are based on field research in two rural communes (municipalities) in Al Haouz province South of Marrakech that took place during 13 months over the period September 2004 to March 2006.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section sets out the conceptual framework. The third section provides a brief background on state-society relations at the national level in Morocco. The two subsequent sections present a summary of the empirical findings on the capacities of local governments and local associations to engage in partnerships, respectively. The sixth section discusses the actual record of such partnerships, and elaborates on the main argument of the paper. The final section concludes.

## 2. The conceptual framework

Relatively few studies have considered the pre-conditions (in terms of local governance arrangements, and actors’ autonomy and capacities) for local partnerships or synergies to actually materialize. As argued above, a return to theories on the developmental state and the concept of “embedded autonomy” is very helpful in order to start filling this gap. Evans (1996: 1119ff.) distinguishes between two elements that constitute synergy: complementarity and embeddedness.<sup>4</sup> Complementarity suggests a clear division of labour, based on the contrasting properties (comparative advantages)

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<sup>2</sup> See Woolcock (1998: 162ff.) for a discussion of the origin of the concept of “embedded autonomy” (esp. Polanyi and Granovetter).

<sup>3</sup> This Arabic term nowadays refers to the power structures surrounding the monarchy.

<sup>4</sup> This discussion is linked to the literature on partnership (see Brinkerhoff 2002 for a review). Here, the concept of mutuality seems to lie somewhere in between complementarity and embeddedness (Brinkerhoff 2002: 22-23). The partnership literature also uses terminology that comes close to the concept of co-production, such as contracting (ibid. 2002: 25).

of public and private institutions. Putting the two kinds of inputs together results in greater output than either public or private sectors could deliver on their own. For example, the state delivers rule-governed environments (“the rule of law”), which strengthen and increase the efficiency of local organizations and institutions (Evans 1996: 1120 citing Nugent 1993; see also Tandler 1997). A more tangible example is state provision of big infrastructure and citizen’s contribution of local knowledge and experience that would be too costly for outsiders to acquire. These examples still fit nicely within existing paradigms in public administration and do not force any rethinking of the public-private divide. However, complementarity can also promote social capital formation in civil society. In the irrigation sector for example, efficient (public) provision of the tangible facilities may have the intangible consequence of making it more worthwhile for farmers to organize themselves. In such cases, complementarity also supports day-to-day interaction between public officials and communities. Indeed, further evidence (e.g. Tandler 1997; Das Gupta et al 2004) suggests that the permeability of public-private boundaries must be acknowledged as an inescapable part of many developmentally successful programs (including the East Asian economic miracle).

Evans (1996) calls such ties that connect citizens and public officials across the public private divide “embeddedness”. He argues that synergy is based on both complementarity and on embeddedness, which are mutually supportive. These ideas can easily be applied to the co-production model as proposed by Ostrom (1996) and others. “Co-production” refers to the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not “in” the same organization. It implies that with encouragement from public officials, citizens can play an active role in producing public goods and services (Ostrom 1996: 1073-1074; see also McLean et al 2005: 2, Footnote 1). In Evans’ view, complementarity creates a basis for productive interaction, but without embeddedness the potential for mutual gain is hard to realize. In other words, complementarities create the potential for synergy but do not provide an institutional basis for realizing it. Evans cites examples where embeddedness in the form of direct involvement of public officials was a key component in getting citizen efforts organized and sustaining citizen involvement, for example in monitoring and maintenance of sanitation and irrigation infrastructure.

Evans’ analytical distinction reminds us to look for both elements of complementarity and embeddedness when examining synergy. The key question here is whether networks that cross the public-private divide can be repositories of developmentally valuable social ties and networks based on trust rather than instruments of corruption or rent-seeking. In other words, when analyzing relationships between local government and CBOs, the focus should be on the potential for complementarity and embeddedness that has positive, rather than negative, development outcomes.

There are various possible types of state-society synergies that lie on a continuum of increasingly blurred state-society boundaries, starting with complementarity and ending in embeddedness. At the practical level, it could be argued that this continuum is framed by co-production models and co-governance mechanisms on either end. Co-production should be an entry-point for citizens to influence the overall practices of local governments and other service delivery actors, through a general opening up of decision making processes. Far too often however, accountability remains restricted to the specific subset of activities being jointly produced, which is treated as distinct

from the overall budget (McLean et al 2005: 18; see also Krishna 2004; Uphoff and Krishna 2004; World Bank 2004). Hence, co-production arrangements tend to promote depoliticized forms of participation.

In contrast, the more advanced types of state-society relations take the form of co-governance (also called “participatory local governance”), e.g. the participatory budgeting experience in Porto Alegre, Brazil (see Gaventa 2004, and the contributions in Cornwall and Coelho [eds.] 2007).<sup>5</sup> Such mechanisms explicitly violate the public-private, or state-society boundary (Ackerman 2004: 450). These approaches are part of a broader notion of democracy than that implied by traditional electoral and deliberative mechanisms.<sup>6</sup> They promote capacity building of local civil society and processes that increase consultation of citizens (including marginalized groups) by local government officials. They thus link civil society to local government decision-making (including policy setting and resource allocation) through processes that increase information-flow (transparency), and ultimately aim to strengthen accountability and local government responsiveness (Helling et al 2005: 34, 68). Such co-governance mechanisms are thus the most advanced type of local government-CBO interactions.

In order to assess the scope for state-society synergies at the local level, this study analyzes the internal as well as interactive capacities of both local governments and local CBOs along the fiscal, administrative, and political dimensions. Following Morgan (2006: 6-7) capacity is an emergent property. It comes out of the dynamics involving a complex combination of attitudes, resources, strategies and skills, both tangible and intangible. There is a strong relationship between capacity and performance. Capacity is essentially a potential state, whereas performance can be seen as the result of the application or use of capacity. Lastly, capacity is about the creation of public value, i.e. the ability of a group or system to make a positive (rather than negative) contribution to public life. As for interactive capacity, it is defined here as the capacity to relate to other persons, groups, or organizations.<sup>7</sup>

I must acknowledge though that the issue of capacity for and through local partnerships is a type of ‘chicken-and-egg’ problem: is a minimum level of capacity needed to engage in partnership, or does it only follow as a result of having engaged in partnerships? While it is easy to agree with Fiszbein (2000: 171-172) that partnerships often do contribute to ‘individual strengthening’ of the partners, this paper argues that certain minimum capacities are needed to engage in partnerships in the first place. It also argues that closer attention needs to be paid to the political identities, affiliations, and conflicts of and among local actors, as they can have considerable influence on the overall environment for partnerships.

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<sup>5</sup> Another term for similar examples of “deliberative decision-making” is “empowered participatory governance” (see Fung and Wright 2003; cited in Gaventa 2006).

<sup>6</sup> See Tadesse et al (2006: 7) for a useful discussion of how participatory governance can address the limitations of representative democracy.

<sup>7</sup> This use is similar to that of Morgan’s “capability to relate” (2006: 13).

### 3. State-society synergies in Morocco

Before examining the scope for the state-society synergies at the local level, it is necessary to analyze the national policy and institutional environment governing state-society relations. There is no space here to give a thorough historical examination of the legal and policy frameworks governing state-civil society relations (including municipal charters, laws governing associations, the role of political parties, rural development strategies, and recent changes in the framework for partnerships between government and civil society). Suffice it to say that while these laws and policies have gradually been relaxed and allow for more interaction between the population, civil society, and government administrations, they do not yet permit the emergence of synergies in Evans sense.

The main underlying reason for this is the role and policies pursued by the monarchy and the *makhzen*. Rather than representing a transformative political agenda, decentralization in Morocco was driven by the monarchy's strategy to shore up its own legitimacy, and not primarily by a desire to increase citizens' political participation or government accountability. Similarly, with regard to its position towards civil society and political parties, the monarchy pursued a policy of "divide and rule" and co-optation so as to prevent the emergence of any potentially destabilizing force. With regard to both local government and local civil society, the agents of the Ministry of the Interior retain important powers of *tutelle* (i.e. tutelage, guardianship or supervision) and control. Finally, in the area of agriculture, the partial land reform (and the continued promise of completing it) was used by the monarchy to establish its clientelist system and contain the threat of rural uprisings.

At present, the monarchy seems to be oscillating between old forms of authoritarianism and experiments at political opening. For example, shortly after his accession to the throne in 1999, King Mohamed VI introduced the new concept of authority (*le nouveau concept de l'autorité*). It has been argued that this new concept of authority amounts to a new culture of public service based on the respect for decentralized institutions and local liberties (Harsi and El Yaagoubi 2006: 191-192). It certainly implies increased administrative and financial autonomy for local authorities.

Most importantly, a new Municipal Charter was issued in October 2002 and entered into force the following year, replacing the Charter of 1976. It enlarges the responsibilities of the councils, establishes a legal status for the councillors, and gives a special status to the big urban areas. It also for the first time contains provisions related to the commune's role in reducing poverty and exclusion. In fact, it could be argued that this charter considers the communes as a framework for holistic development (El Yaagoubi 2004: 60). Similarly, the current Charter for the first time includes the possibility to create partnerships with non-governmental organizations. The commune council can enter into partnership agreements with local associations, although the Ministry of the Interior's exercises a *tutelle* on such partnership agreements.

However, even if the royal discourse now sometimes seems to be ahead of the reality on the ground, deep-seated top-down modes of operation and attitudes towards the population and civil society within the government bureaucracy still present a

considerable obstacle to any radical transformation. While networks that blur the boundaries between state and society do exist in Morocco, they are mainly of a clientelist nature, rather than promoting complementarity and embeddedness that could constitute synergy.

These findings at the systemic level are born out at the local level, to which the remainder of this paper now turns.

#### **4. Local government administrative, fiscal and political autonomy and capacity**

In order to assess the two communes' administrative autonomy and capacity, the field research collected data on eight main variables: the communes' human resource base, the extent of independence from the Department of Local Authorities (the *tutelle* authority at the province level), the degree of the councillors' and staff awareness about the provisions in the new Municipal Charter, the extent of the Ministry of the Interior local representative's (*caïd*) influence over council affairs, the application of the new concept of authority, the nature of local development priorities, the quality of the local planning process, and the character of relations with other government administrations.

The empirical findings point to serious constraints in local government administrative autonomy and capacity. In terms of human resources, between half and two-thirds of the councillors are illiterate, and many are often absent from the communes. They represent a mostly traditional local elite based on private wealth, although an alternative and more outwardly open elite is emerging through better education, temporary urban or international migration, and the increasing need for development brokers. As for the civil servants, only a limited number is working directly on socio-economic development, and they do not have much incentive nor opportunity to develop their skills. Their motivation is generally low due to tensions with the councillors.

The *tutelle* exercised by the Ministry of the Interior is mostly of a strictly legal nature, but the councillors themselves seem to be uncomfortable to use the full room for manoeuvre to take decisions. Given the limited staff competences at the local level, a stronger *tutelle* in terms of ensuring technical quality standards might in fact be needed. I further found that the implementation of the new Municipal Charter is severely constrained by the councillors' limited knowledge of its provisions, due mainly to insufficient training and information campaigns on the part of the Ministry of the Interior. This risks opening the door to continued conflicts of interests and the pursuit of personal gain, compounded by the increased concentration of power in the office of the council president. On the other hand, the limited knowledge of the Charter also means that the councillors will most probably never even try to push for the transfer of additional responsibilities and funding from central government that the Charter allows for. Indeed, even if the councillors were well informed, it seems that as long as the current system allows them to pursue their own vested interests without any significant interference from the population at large, there are no incentives for them to demand further decentralization of administrative powers.

As for the influence of the local representative of the Ministry of the Interior over council affairs, it appears to be substantial. This is mainly due to his ability to mobilize the local population (through his network of subordinates in every village), although the discourses around human rights and the new concept of authority are gradually eroding his traditional influence that was based on fear and repressive measures. It seems that the *caïd's* persuasive influence on the councillors depends to a great extent on his personality and intellectual capacity vis-à-vis the council president. In addition, any informal, mutual accommodations and bargains that might have been concluded between the *caïd* and the councillors (especially those in the political majority) determine the nature of their relationships. Such accommodations are difficult to discern for an outsider. It is also difficult to generalize these findings, given that they are bound to differ from commune to commune.

Finally, the case study communes' administrative and interactive capacity is further constrained by the councillors' narrowly conceived development priorities. They are very much focused on basic infrastructure provision in their constituent villages, rather than developing a commune-wide vision for economic growth, e.g. by attracting private investment, which would in turn increase local tax revenues and ability to provide public services. National infrastructure programs and "participatory" rural development programs do not encourage the development of their own priorities, mainly due to the lack of consultation (which is however legally obligatory). The councillors also did not use the opportunity for bottom-up planning in the context of the recent national 2000-2004 Five-year Plan. This Plan received scant attention in the communes, mainly because it would have interfered with tacit and politicized agreements between the councillors aimed at maintaining the council majority and their personal clientelist networks. A more longer-term planning approach is emerging, at least among certain councillors, though the promotion of multiple local development plans by various other government and donor agencies might not facilitate this.

These findings stand in contrast to "best practice" identified in the literature on public sector capacity. Based on six country case studies, Grindle and Hilderbrand (1995: 444, 455-460) stress the importance of organizational culture over structures for remuneration and control to explain effective public sector performance. Such organizational culture emphasizes flexibility, problem-solving, participation, teamwork, shared professional norms and a strong sense of mission. Successful human resources management also includes their effective utilization, i.e. ensuring that staff feel they are using their talents to accomplish meaningful tasks, with adequate equipments, and with the prospect of having their good performance recognized in some way. These features thus go beyond those identified in the ideal Weberian bureaucracy model, which stresses meritocratic recruitment, good salaries, sharp sanctions against violations of organizational norms, and solid rewards for career-long performance, although these are crucial preconditions for achieving the 'embedded autonomy' that characterizes the developmental states according to Evans (Evans 1996: 1126, see also Evans 1995, Rauch and Evans 2000).

Based on the Moroccan case studies, I would argue that tensions between commune staff and the councillors (in particular the council president), the role played by the *tutelle* authorities and the *caïd* in determining local decision-making processes, the dependence on other ministerial departments for project planning and funding, and the



ad hoc and untransparent nature of the local planning process, have, at least until recently, stifled the emergence of such an organizational culture in the rural communes. Together with the findings on local government financial and political capacities, this constitutes a serious obstacle for local synergies with CBOs based on complementarity and embeddedness.

The degree of local government fiscal autonomy is measured by the share of transfers from central government compared to local tax revenues in total local government revenue. This is a relevant indicator since a local revenue base contributes to a greater sense of ownership among people; their contribution through taxes and fees to the costs of local infrastructure and services strengthens both citizen demand and the accountability of public officials. The greater degree of local discretion associated with own-source revenues enhances decision-makers' capacity for responsiveness (Helling et al 2005: 24). By contrast, the more dependent a local government is on transfers from the centre, the more likely it is to focus its accountability upwards (McLean et al 2005: 24). Analysing the share of recurrent to capital expenditures helps us to assess local government's capacity to interact with other local actors. If recurrent expenditures consume all funds, there is limited scope for partnership with local civil society organizations (McLean et al 2005: 4, 24).

The detailed analysis of the communes' revenues and expenditures leads me to conclude that their fiscal autonomy remains limited, due mainly to the high dependency on VAT transfers from central government (up to 86 percent of total revenues on average in recent years). Increasing local tax and public service revenues depends on finding solutions to several legal and political enforcement problems. The rise in recurrent expenditures as a share of total expenditures (especially the wage bill) is a further constraint on local government to engage in partnerships with local civil society. Capital expenditures are dominated by basic infrastructure (roads, water, and electricity) whose developmental impact is limited as long as certain complementary activities are lacking (such as affordable public transport, and help with access to financial services, production inputs, and output markets). Considerable end-of-year surpluses do exist which could be used for such investments. However, they remain unspent due to expenditure delays, poor or politically motivated planning, and the use of these surpluses to cover the national budget deficit. The main constraint on using local resources productively and in innovative ways – for example in co-production arrangements with civil society organizations – seems to be the lack of visionary leadership, and the predominant concern on the part of the councillors to satisfy clientelist demands.

The findings on the political dimension of decentralization help to explain this situation. The population has few incentives to participate in commune affairs, and only very limited means of holding their councillors accountable. Indeed, even the councillors in the political opposition in the council cannot do so as they have very limited access to information. The role of the political parties is also very weak. This is illustrated by the fact that several councillors were unable to recall the name of their political party, and several long-time councillors had changed parties with each new election. The main value of political parties in the eyes of the councillors seems to be their ability to distribute material benefits to them, rather than providing a framework for formulating measurable public policy programs and plans. These findings are surprising given that one of the two communes is among the most politicized

communes in Al Haouz province. It has a history of trade unionism, as a left-leaning working class formed based on mining and transport of manganese (though this stopped in 1969 with the decline of this industry). I would thus concur with Ferrié (1999: 83) in arguing that public municipal space does in fact not exist in Morocco, or at least is not fully formed yet, given that politics - if defined as the expression of conflict in impersonal, antagonistic terms - is not actually taking place.

The field research also examined the two “participatory” rural development projects being implemented in the case study communes from the perspective of their potential contribution to strengthening political capabilities. However, although both the World Bank and IFAD projects present multiple opportunities to hone negotiation and planning skills – at least in theory -, their impact in this area is likely to be minimal. This is because the projects are prone to elite capture, and the overall structural power imbalance is in favour of the government administration. For example, the Village Development Plans that were agreed upon in annual work contracts between the Provincial Delegation of the Agriculture Ministry (DPA) and the village associations under the IFAD project are drawn up by the project staff at the DPA, and the representatives of the associations only come to sign them. Moreover, the contracts place a heavy burden on the associations. In addition to committing considerable financial resources and free manual labour, they stipulate that the associations are solely responsible for the operation and maintenance of the equipments, and the resulting operating costs (such as drinking water). They do not include any mechanism for the population to hold the government administration to account or to force it to fulfil its obligations under the contract.

The superficial way in which “participation” is solicited in these projects, and the erosion of trust resulting from government not keeping its end of the bargain, actually puts state-society relations at a considerable risk in the longer term.

Returning to the main theme of local government capacity to engage in local partnerships, the findings point to two main implications. First, the low share of local taxes in total local government revenues, and the current legal provisions mean that there is little incentive to enter into reciprocal arrangements with citizens with the aim of a responsive provision of services and greater accountability. Second, the organizational culture and visionary leadership is missing that could change the prevailing mindset and push for a local governance model based on complementarity and embeddedness with other local actors such as CBOs.

The next section now assesses the capacity of local village associations in the two case study communes, and examines whether they have the potential to engage in developmentally valuable interactions with local governments.

## **5. Local village associations’ readiness for partnerships**

The internal and interactive capacities of the 50 local village associations in the study sample were examined along administrative, financial, and political dimensions. These associations work in basic infrastructure and services (mainly drinking water, irrigation networks, environmental conservation), the social services (health and schooling, adult literacy, and cultural activities), and in a range of income-generating

projects (such as female cooperatives for embroidery and weaving, planting of fruit trees, bee-keeping, and tourism – most of which however suffer from instances of fraud, deception, and mistrust among members that lead to a halt in activities). The overwhelming priority given to basic infrastructure and service provision indicates that local governments are not able to fulfil their mandates for basic service provision under the Municipal Charter. There is thus considerable scope for synergies with local associations in the form of co-production and other public-community partnerships. However, the empirical findings indicate that the associations' capacities are limited to engage in such partnerships.

With regard to their administrative capacity, the associations' record of implementing projects shows that a considerable proportion of associations are not active, and only exist on paper. It seems that this finding can be generalized for the whole province, if not most rural areas in Morocco.<sup>8</sup> According to the former president of the Provincial *Espace Associatif* (a structure that aims to federate all the associations in the province – see below), it seems likely that only two or three associations in each of the 39 communes in Al Haouz province are active in a continuous fashion, and therefore sustainable in the long-term (out of an official 1,400 associations in Al Haouz province, which counts less than 500,000 inhabitants). In particular, those associations that were “imposed” by outside projects are generally seen as inactive and not sustainable.

This state of affairs is partly due to the weak human resource profile of most of the associations (58 percent of the association committee members interviewed did not receive any formal education). This also explains their limited ability to make links with intermediary NGOs at the provincial level as well as to negotiate effectively with government administrations in the context of rural development programs. These programs also do not place very much emphasis on training the associations, even though the latter are in many cases expected to manage and maintain vital basic infrastructure such as drinking water. Similarly, most associations have limited financial resources in the form of incomes from membership fees, although some are receiving revenues from drinking water provision (61 percent of 46 associations in the sample dispose of no funds or less than 100 Euros). An underlying reason here is that the concept of “membership” in an association is not well-anchored in local practice – almost 40 percent of the associations in the sample do not have any ordinary members, and women are absent almost completely both as committee and ordinary members. A strategic approach to fund-raising would also require a certain level of education and training.

The most important factor in explaining the low level of activity is the fact that many leaders of local associations are in fact using them as a base to build popular support for getting (re-)elected as local councillor. Indeed, as Bourjeois and El Kam (2000: 13) put it, ‘creating an association is a means to buy (political) “virginity” for oneself, and to conquer the political field.’ This practice has contributed to discrediting the

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<sup>8</sup> This finding corresponds to the field observations of several other researchers who note that there are many associations on paper but very few that are active (other than participating in cultural activities such as festivals or national holidays). See Damamme (2005: 163 footnote); Abbadi (2003: 53); Chadli (2001: 63); RTI (2002: 4); Ibourek and Sahli (2003: 266ff.); Gebrati (2004).

concept of “associations” in the eyes of the population, but several associations in the fieldwork area are now raising awareness to rehabilitate it.

I also found serious shortcomings with regard to the internal governance mechanisms in many associations, such as the holding of regular annual meetings and leadership renewal, and keeping records. The monopolization of information by the president further constrains a wider participation in associative activities. In terms of the possibilities for co-governance with the communes, this raises the question of how the associations would be motivated to ask for more accountability from the commune if they themselves are not accountable to their members and donors. Given that many associations have evolved from the traditional village councils, the *jema'a*, it will take time to formalize management procedures and making them transparent to the communities at large. This should however take place in a way that preserves the positive aspects of the organizational fluidity that characterizes the *jema'a*, and most importantly, does not undermine traditional forms of intra-village solidarity (as is now happening in several villages).

In terms of the implications for the study of “civil society”, the evidence presented here shows that it is not possible to speak of mass-based “social movements” in rural Morocco, although the Berber (*Amazigh*) associations may constitute the basis for such movements in the future (see Kratochwil 2002). Rather, most associations studied here are inward-looking and very much concerned with developing their own village, rather than forming alliances with each other or other NGOs. This trend is reinforced by “participatory” rural development projects that focus on developing separate Village Development Plans. The underlying reason though is the history of social organization and decentralization in Morocco, and in particular the swift and harsh repression of any local protest by the Ministry of the Interior and its local representatives, at least until recently.

The decentralization process and the establishment of local councils have also meant that a new type of “political society” emerged in the form of councillors and political party members.<sup>9</sup> I suggest that this “political society” dominates and in many cases mixes with “civil society”. This has important implications for the possibilities for synergies between associations and local governments, which I turn to in the next section.

## **6. Relations between local governments and village associations: limited embeddedness and political instrumentalization**

The preceding sections discussed the weaknesses in the internal and interactive capacities of local governments and associations to engage in co-production. It is therefore not surprising that the actual record of local partnerships in the case study communes is very limited. Most association members stated that they had no cooperation with the commune even though several of them had made requests for

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<sup>9</sup> “Political society” is understood here as ‘that loose community of recognized political parties and their operatives, local political brokers and councillors, and perhaps even lower-level public servants who depend upon the grace and favour of politicians’ (Corbridge et al 2005: 189).

help. In some cases, the commune contributed with materials for small-scale basic infrastructure projects, for example pipes for drinking water networks or the cement for the drinking water tank. In road construction, the commune provided the heavy trucks, or the money for petrol. It was sometimes difficult to know whether these projects were really projects that were conceived and implemented by the village association. It seems more likely that in many cases they took the form of informal agreements between the *jema 'a* of the village and the commune, with the *jema 'a* using *twiza* (a mostly Berber tradition of mutual help and solidarity, especially for farming-related tasks) to provide the necessary manual labour for free. The association would then only provide minimal input such as meals for the workers. These limited types of partnerships amount thus at best to what Evans calls complementarity, based on a clear division of labour between the commune and the village communities.

I found only very few cases that could be said to constitute examples of partial embeddedness in the form of direct involvement of public officials to get citizen efforts organized and sustain citizen involvement (Evans 1996: 1123). In one case, the commune technician helped an association with the technical plans for building the association's venue. Two other association members said the commune technicians had helped them with a technical study, but in their personal capacities. One commune staff claimed to have giving trainings to associations on the rules governing the creation of associations and constitution of the committee, but in a strictly personal and volunteer capacity. These examples point to sporadic instances of embeddedness, rather than any serious long-term engagement.

This situation is partly due to the lack of local government subsidies to CBOs for service provision (impeded by legal and administrative problems), which hinders the development of their capacity to implement projects and mobilize collective action. A related constraint is the difficulty for the communes to establish and apply fair and transparent partnership (and eligibility) criteria.

The more substantial and formal partnership agreements that have been concluded in Al Haouz province (concerning drinking water provision, the management of boarding facilities for pupils, and the upgrading of school buildings) were all "imposed" in the context of donor-funded projects or at the request of the provincial authorities, and did not evolve out of any local initiative.

The reasons for the limited evidence of local partnerships are mostly technical in nature and could arguably easily be resolved, e.g. by devolving more funds earmarked for partnerships to the local governments (accompanied by clear rules on how they are to be disbursed, and regular audits), and informing the associations on funding criteria and procedures by issuing calls for project proposals.

Given that financial, administrative and technical obstacles to partnerships should be relatively easy to overcome, is there a more structural underlying reason for this limited evidence of positive local government- CBO interactions? The answer lays in the politicized nature of local government – CBO relations, which blur the public-private divide in a developmentally detrimental way.

As noted earlier, several associations were created for purely political purposes, rather than developmental ones. This explains the low levels of CBO activity (almost half of all CBOs in the sample are inactive), and some of the existing mistrust between the *jema'a*, the population and the CBO members. The empirical data shows that the boundary between membership in the commune council and CBOs is very much blurred. On average, only one fourth of the 46 associations for which data is available do not have any connections with party members, councillors or civil servants. In other words, the vast majority of associations are run by politicians and civil servants. This high level of CBO political affiliation was confirmed in the interviews with the councillors.

Interestingly, only very few councillors openly acknowledged that wearing the two “hats” simultaneously (association member and councillor) creates a conflict of interest, which can only be resolved by putting one of them down. As one councillor explained: ‘I was VP in an association but given that there are two lines of work: politics and associative work, I committed to take just the political line so as not to confound it with the associative work; it’s like I tried to draw up a line of neutrality. [...] That’s what pushed me to tell the citizens that are affiliated with the association that I’m in the commune and I’ll stay there and I won’t confound the two lines. [*So last year you decided to step down because you saw that there are problems if you confuse the two?*] The only problem is that you cannot keep your neutrality; the principle of an association is not to do politics; and I would certainly find myself doing politics inside the association, if you understand what I mean.’

Similarly, a councillor and president of an inactive association argued that ‘in my opinion if you find the president of the commune also as president of the association it’s just to make [the population] vote in the next election. I think that if someone is in the association he should not be allowed to be councillor. Then you will know if he really wants to work [for the public interest] or just to defend his personal interests.’

The association members are aware of this high degree of politicization. One of them argued that the number of associations increased due to the state’s failure to develop the area, and that the state directed the population towards the associations to take charge of development in its place. In his words, ‘when the authorities felt that the people lost trust in them, they tried to get the associations to work. [...] But then] the political parties and authorities felt they could not control what is happening on the ground, so they interfered and supervised the associations. [...] If an association wants to work well and independently without being of one political party or another it won’t get any financing.’ He concluded that ‘there is no civil society.’

To sum up, there are very few (formal) partnerships between communes and associations, and the financial amounts involved are negligible. I have argued that the main obstacle is the political instrumentalization of the associations by the local councillors. It seems that some groundwork needs to be done first. I would agree with this councillor, who suggested that ‘what is needed is that the associations understand their role; why do they exist? Is it really to participate in local development or is it for other reasons? If it’s for other reasons, why then have partnerships? So first we need a sort of self-critique; also on the part of the commune; the commune needs to understand that to let the associations participate can only be beneficial. [...] There are associations and they need to be given responsibilities. They are there and have a

legal status. We talk about participation and integrated, sustainable development; we need to give them responsibilities, give them a minimum of tasks and take the necessary time for that. So the two parties are responsible for seeing the point in and need for cooperation.’ It is clear that against this backdrop, the scope for co-governance mechanisms is very limited.<sup>10</sup>

My findings confirm those of other studies. Ben Ali (2005: 4-5) suggests that local development associations are generally seen by the elected councillors as instruments for political competition. This means they try to co-opt them (by presiding over them themselves or reducing them to the appendix of a party), or marginalize them. A roundtable discussion among civil society actors (Espace Associatif 2003: 57) established that most often, local authorities and political parties give funds to associations for electoral ends or to hide suspicious activities from public view.<sup>11</sup>

## 7. Conclusions

I return now to the concepts of complementarity and embeddedness that constitute state-society synergy in Evans’ framework. Such synergy always involves the blurring of public-private boundaries, but the key question is whether networks that cross this divide can be developmentally valuable repositories of trust rather than instruments of corruption or rent-seeking. Here, the idea of “embedded autonomy” is crucial. Evans (1995) introduces it in his explanation for the differential performance of India, Korea and Brazil in the high technology sector. This is an autonomy embedded in a concrete set of social ties that bind the state to society and provide institutionalized channels for the continual negotiation and renegotiation of goals and policies (Evans 1995: 59). This means that the kind of coherent, cohesive bureaucracy that is postulated in the Weberian hypothesis must have a certain degree of autonomy vis-à-vis society. With regard to networks that cross the “public-private” divide, Evans’ concept draws attention to the fine line between those that are developmentally valuable repositories of trust, and those that are transformed into instruments of corruption or rent-seeking. I would argue that this aspect of “autonomy” is missing in the Moroccan context, given the difficulty to distinguish between local actors’ “public” and “private” identities (or their membership in “political” and “civil” societies).

Similar arguments can be found in the “state-in-society” perspective (Migdal 1994 and 2001) and the “polity approach” (Houtzager 2005), which emphasize that state and society are not self-contained spheres but must be understood in relational terms through the concrete links that exist between civil society actors, political society and state institutions (Mohan and Stokke 2007 forthcoming: 28). Indeed, the boundaries of the spheres themselves are characterized by relative fluidity (Mitlin et al 2007: 1702). This study complemented these theoretical approaches by highlighting certain practical pre-conditions – in terms of various forms of capacity- that are needed for state-society synergies to emerge.

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<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately there is no space here to discuss the findings from two recent experiments in the area of local co-governance mechanisms in Al Haouz province.

<sup>11</sup> See also Chaker (2004) and PCM (2005: 31ff.).

The agenda for future research in this area could include following Leftwich's (2007: 28) suggestion and examine whether 'the alleged tension between the informal institutions of patronage and patrimonialism on the one hand and Weberian meritocratic principles always constrain development and growth'. In other words, 'can the informal political institutions of patronage sometimes contribute positively? Might there be good (developmentally) patrons and is there any way, politically, that they can be used to promote pro-poor growth?' Such research would distance itself from the assumption that the presence of political society is always a negative one; but instead conceive of local political society as a set of institutions, actors and cultural norms that is often constructively engaged in providing links between "government" and "the public", as well as in brokering deals and forming patterns of authority that hold these deals in place (Corbridge et al 2005: 190-191).



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