



CIVIC DRIVEN CHANGE 2012

An Update on the Basics

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Setting the scene

How can the current wave of social protests be understood? Well, one thing that the Arab Spring, the London riots, the Chilean student revolt and the Occupy movement worldwide have in common is that they are not run by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or ‘aided’ civil society groups dedicated to justice for people and planet. Their driving force seems to originate from people’s energy and imagination of a different future that is not determined by ‘outsiders’. In spontaneous protest, people in all walks of life are acting as political players to shape the world they share with others. While results obviously take time to unfold, this way of changing society is very visible, exciting and risky. Less noticeable, but more pervasive, are the ways in which day in day out people are getting together to creatively improve the conditions in which they live, sometimes in wider collaboration, sometimes in conflict. This vital, quiet, slow and dense fabric of social and political life is often overlooked. Instead, attention is focused on social arrangements that can be labelled, registered, counted and ‘governed’ and on citizen action which attracts (brief) media attention.

This guide argues that adopting a ‘civic agency perspective on change’ can overcome limitations of the dominant, ‘excluding’ view and analysis of socio-political processes that rely on a ‘sector’ concept of (civil) society. After all, the impulsive, self-organised, and technology-enabled uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East and numerous food riots elsewhere were networked across many social groups and classes. Such processes cannot be adequately explained through customary civil society concepts of formal organisations and collective action. In other words, by the way change is brought about through efforts of community associations, groups, unions and mass movements, typically mobilized by charismatic leadership. Nor can these assertive acts of rebellion and protest be attributed to the effectiveness of NGOs. Such actor-centred approaches stand in the way of fully appreciating the complex processes taking place in a globalizing world order.

This booklet describes a novel lens and a comprehensive way of viewing what happens in the development of society as a political project. These ideas stem from discussions that started with a Think Tank process in 2008. On the basis of real life cases, participants were asked to describe how society is changed by the self-driven action of citizens rather than by states or markets. The result of their work was Civic Driven Change (CDC): a framework for socio-political analysis and action. In the past three years, CDC has been elaborated, challenged and refined. A set of technical publications listed at the end describe CDC in more detail.

The booklet is different from the technical papers. It updates the 2009 pamphlet *CDC A Guide to the Basics* by providing a guide to the substance and practical application of a CDC lens. We believe that this comprehensive way of viewing change in society can be of use to activists, strategists and policy makers in whatever they are doing in or outside of their working lives. Our personal task with CDC is to continue to foster and learn from ongoing debates about tackling complex (or ‘thick’) problems that societies face – from xenophobia to sustainability.

Understanding social change as a continuous political activity

This booklet is written for people interested in bringing about pro-social change. By this we mean action that seeks to make society work better for more people. The 'civic' dimension is that this type of action involves two core values: a concern for the whole – at whatever scale is appropriate – and respect for the many differences between people and groups that a society contains. Uncivil actions typically work against these principles. In this perspective, politics is about how power is held, distributed and applied to manage such contending forces towards an imagined future for society. In the case of the Arab Spring, towards images of 'my country' that will be more democratic and respectful of my dignity and rights as a citizen. And in the case of the Occupy Wall Street movement, towards a future without inequality in which it is imagined that 99 % of the population no longer has to pay for the crisis triggered by the powerful 1 %.

An innovation of CDC stemmed from overcoming the limitations and distortions of the two-dimensional way in which societies are generally pictured. This was often based on the notion that society was composed of three distinct 'sectors': the state, the market and a social sector that often is labelled as 'civil society'. They were 'separated' by their institutional logics: the first sector of government rests on regulation; the second sector's rationale is the creation of economic wealth; and third sector is the home of social and political expression. This conventional view of a modern society's institutional structure was argued to have emerged in response to the needs of capitalist accumulation. Hence, economics ended up dominating politics rather than the other way around. But politics is everywhere and all institutions - including those of the state itself - are political vehicles vying for attention and a privileged position. In addition, institutions are not static. They face internal and external pressures, and function in inter-dependent interaction, not in isolation. From a CDC perspective, no one 'sector' is inherently more or less civic than another. However, the logics of each contain different incentives to be so. For example, businesses may be more minded to form pricing cartels than would a non-profit agency providing volunteers for a hospice.

The CDC lens can be applied irrespective of the 'sector' of society a person belongs to or work in. First, wherever the source of livelihood, the world's population spends most hours outside of a work place. Be they commercial producers of goods and services, public servants, employers, employees, the young or the aged, consumers or voters, for good or ill citizens' continually influence how society functions and evolves. This 'power' operates 24/7.

Second, people can be civic or uncivil at home, at work or at play. The CDC perspective therefore concentrates on the why and the how of relationships between civic and uncivil action in processes which drive socio-political change, anywhere and at any scale.

For many types of societal analysis, a three sector story is still useful. But it is too coarse and lumpy to adequately comprehend and decide to act on the effects of globalization and technical advances that are being felt from billions of individual kitchen tables to the world's shared ecology. A more fine grained approach is required that reinstates politics as a prime mover. Civic driven change is one such possibility, described below.

Across sectors, beyond civil society

With an international group of thinkers and practitioners we have been exploring new avenues to look beyond the limiting focus on 'sectors'. We have done so by concentrating more on foundational features of the nation state, citizenship and the civic or non-civil agency it gives rise to. First, it was necessary to critically relook at the way 'civil society' and 'citizenship' were being used. Our conclusion was that, over the years, 'civil society' – commonly understood as all organised interests between the public (state) and the private (family, market) spheres - seemed to have lost its potentially powerful politically explanatory character. International study made clear that the composition of every civil society is unique and cannot be easily compared. Newly emerging powers - such as China and Brazil - show civil societies that are quite different from the 'autonomous' European pluralistic style on which much of political strategising is grounded. Understanding drivers of political change, called for adjustment to our perceptions of civil society.

A further problem is that civil society is often seen as naturally 'good' in the sense of seeking justice, fairness and some understanding of a collective good and collaborative problem solving that are all conducive to (re)establishing social order. The so called 'non-civil' part of civil society that also drives and acts as protagonists in socio-political processes – oligarchic elites, terrorisms, corporate and drug cartels, human traffickers, sects or groups pre-disposed to violence, xenophobia and so on – seem to be often ignored. Thirdly, civil society is often couched in a singular sense, such as in the phrase "civil society has decided to oppose the regime". The uprisings in Syria and Libya showed that there are multiple actors for and against the regime in power and that disagreement is inherent to socio-political relationships everywhere.

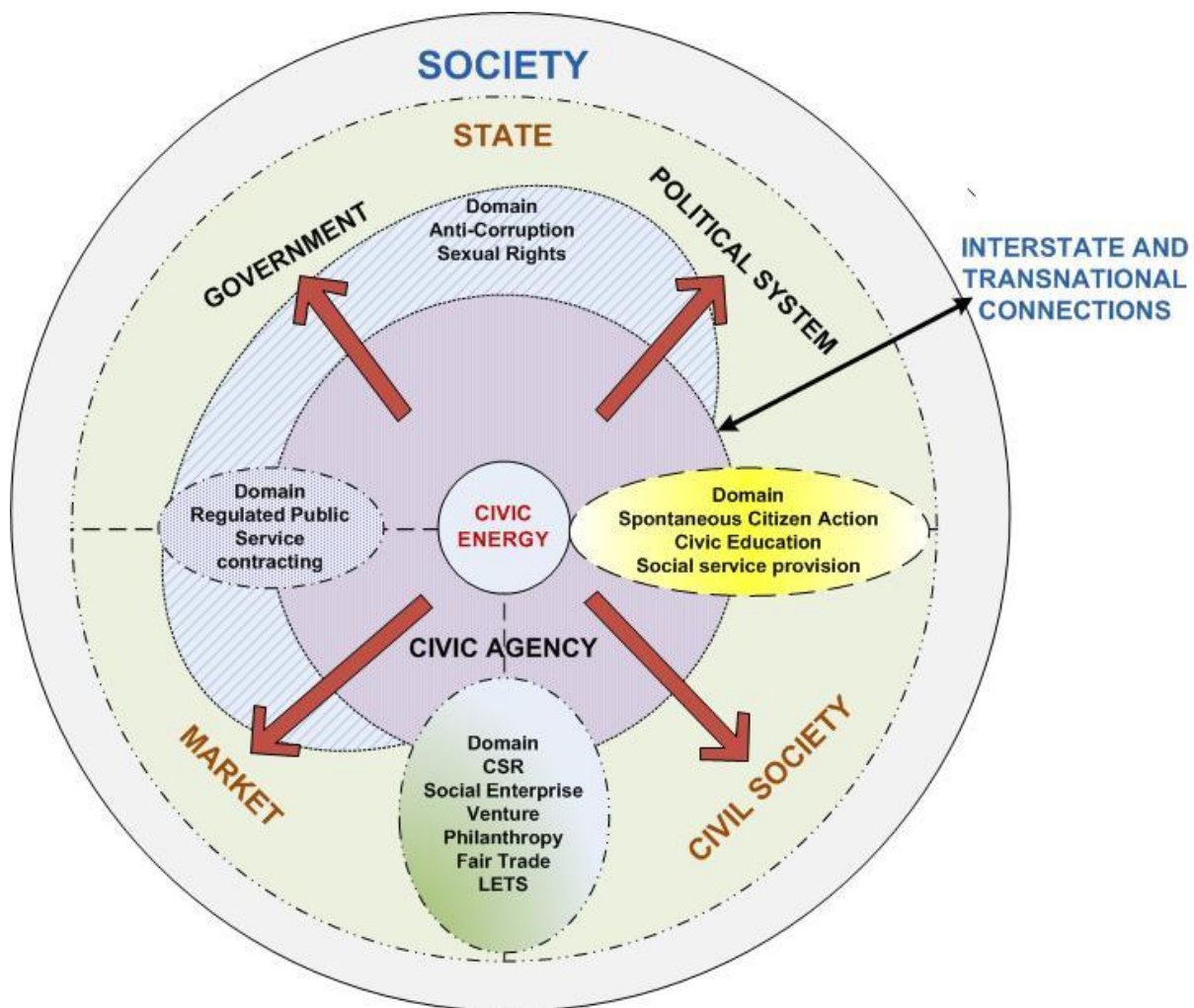
The often, for outsiders, invisible expressions of collective action is a fourth limitation on the 'civil society as sector' view. For example, the mainstream concept has proved to be too limited for grasping the fluid nature of transient forms of socio-political interaction made possible by rapid expansion and penetration of communication technologies. As sovereign borders lose meaning and multiple sites of governing emerge, the global inter-connectedness of citizens alters the fabric of socio-political relations that cannot be 'counted' as spatially located civil society organisations.

All in all, as currently pursued, civil society discourse is simply too 'plural' and its context-specific expressions often too diverse to offer an adequate understanding for how and why people's energy and innovation bring about social change. Another way of seeing is needed.

Domains for change

The CDC lens is a way to overcome the constraints of a three-sector approach. It does so by focusing wider than the potential beneficial features of only civil society as a location and/or trigger for pro-social change. CDC does so by looking at a more integrated form of society where all three sectors are interlinked by socio-political forces, processes and goals. By doing so (see Figure 1) we can see that much activity is happening in overlapping 'blend areas' both between and combining 'sectors'. A CDC issue is to understand if 'blending' is 'powered' towards pro-social outcomes. For example, the way that new rules are negotiated, standards set and compliance is enforced are CDC ways of observing how societal innovation reconfigures power relations in whose favour.

Figure 1 Society as sectors and domains of change



For example, Figure 1 illustrates how a domain perspective can span typical sector thinking where, for clarity, a distinction is made between government as public administration and politicised as system to subject to civic and uncivil forces and interests. Domains can arise from pressures and problem solving that can be initiated from within any sector and towards another. As a domain, anti-corruption spans all walks of life. No sector is immune from the problem, which can become deeply acculturated. Gender equity is a similar non-sector specific domains. Government can create a domain which seeks private sector provision of publically financed services. Here we find highly regulated private providers of infrastructures, particularly in rail transport, telecommunication and energy, previously the functions of state enterprises. A government guarantee to commercial banks for giving loans to students on concessionary terms is another example. Conversely, as markets move towards government, public private partnerships for investment and running of public services emerge, often with complex performance standards and allocations of risk. Combining market and civic values creates a domain expressed through corporate social responsibility (CSR) investments and social venture capitalism. Civil society movement towards markets is seen in fair trade initiatives and non-monetised local barter and economic trading systems (LETS) for people-to-people goods and services. It is seen in the non-proprietary open source principle for software development. It is seen in 'user generated content' of the web. Market logics are entering civil

society as a domain inhabited by social enterprises, hybrid NGOs, social venture capital and a reinvigoration of 'mutuals' in the *economie sociale*. Civil society is penetrating politics outside of party-political parties that cannot keep up with the complexities that societies face. The blending of civil society towards the state is a domain for highly subsidised social and cultural service-delivery organisations: hospitals, church-related services, etc. State movement towards civil society is seen in public financing of independent parent-owners schools and legally independent bodies to represent interest groups and minorities. These examples are only illustrative of where civic driven innovation is in play. They may not be exciting or very visible. But these are the tip of an iceberg in terms of shifting how a society functions for whose benefit.

If we recognise that these complex interactive and overlapping areas are more relevant than ever, it is a small step to discover that the trigger for change - of what we would call 'civic agency' - is located in areas that tend to lie within all three sectors. These complicated areas are what we call 'domains for change', which are defined by the socio-political outcomes that attract civic action. Often they are sites of innovation 'triggered' by friction of how society is not working well enough. Agency can be directed at long change process such as 'peace building', 'poverty reduction' or even 'development'. But domains of change can also point at more specific and shorter term outcomes such as 'recognition of sexual diversity rights' or 'improved community health through water and sanitation services'. One recently emerging domain for change is 'stopping privatization' which is triggered by popular action against provision of public services by firms. Anti-privatisation movements have their roots in all realms of society, that is, from people in every 'sector'. This agenda attracts the energy of consumers, students, nurses, teachers, slum dwellers, businessman and women, the unemployed, as well as small-scale agricultural producers, government officials and politicians.

A CDC perspective avoids a potential 'sector trap' by, for example, not assuming that all business owners automatically want their children to be kept healthy by a for-profit firm rather than by a government system. As opinion polls often show, a source of livelihood in a 'sector' is a risky proxy for anticipating people's position on any given issue.

A critical point is that some domains of change involve solving 'thick' problems. Examples are reducing inequality, unemployment and ending state fragility. How to tackle these types of dilemmas cannot be properly comprehended if actors and sectors are the way into the solution. It is more effective to start by the pinning down the processes and forces involved.

Civic energy and its values

A CDC question is why individual citizens would be willing to act or take risk in the interest of a larger social group? Here we assume that their political agency - that is, the ability to bring about change in power relations - is driven by so-called 'civic energy'. This is in fact energy that all citizens potentially possess to promote common interests as a member of a community or a social group while at the same time respecting differences within the community or group and towards others. This sense of 'civicness' is a central driver for civic energy, flowing outwards towards society, as opposed to inwardly directed energy that would sustain the group, but at the expense of relating to others. This 'civic energy' is by definition present in any community: it is the basic drive of people to work

together to achieve common goals that would not be achievable individually. It is partly prompted by instinct and tradition. But it also has a cognitive element: citizens have to be convinced of the importance of civiness, which is generated through experience and education.

In addition, we need to recognise CDC challenges and limits. The lens does not 'solve' critical dilemmas tied to collective action. For example, to indicate when it is appropriate to be uncivil – street blockades, public disorder, even violence against authorities - in order to make a society more civic. That is to be more 'inclusive' in its way of defining and getting to a new condition of society and who is at the table with what power when working out how to get there. A CDC approach offers a way of arriving at answers with critical attention to the time frames involved. As a rule of thumb, CDC looks at four (nested) times: the immediate/short term; political cycles of 4-7 years; processes of institutional change 7-15 years; and inter-generational perspectives of 15 – 30 years. So, for example, what is a reasonable period to reach a conclusion about a civic outcome from the 'disobedience' and violence of the Arab Spring? In sum, a CDC analysis does not resolve dilemmas and probably generates new ones. But it does offer spectacles to understand dilemmas better and therefore to increase knowledge and capabilities deal with them.

To date, there has been relatively little exploration of the notion and expression of civic energy. Yet, for example, volunteering for personal and/or public benefit relies on this force for engagement. It is pretty clear the further work on CDC will require greater attention to 'civiness'.

Civic Driven Change Update

The framework of civic-driven change (CDC) offers a lens - or maybe even a device with multiple lenses, such as a sort of kaleidoscope - to look at politics and political change from a citizens' perspective. The lens is composed of four major propositions and four constituent elements. Together they can systematically unpack and help to critically discern socio-political processes and the changes they bring about for good or ill. None of these parts of CDC is entirely new. But, with civic agency as the core link, their combination is novel and potentially powerful in its grounding and comprehensiveness for political analysis from below.

The following section summarizes what is currently understood as civic driven change in terms of its major themes, propositions and elements. For those that are interested, links to relevant theories can be found in the references. The process of elaborating CDC meanwhile has gone further and deeper with its alternative view. The result is four major propositions – that is positions on the life of citizens – which establish a frame to hold four elements that make up the composite lens of CDC.

The civic-driven change framework came from analysis of practical cases of civic agency from across the world. They brought out four critical perspectives on how society can be conceived and its trajectories understood. It does so within a political framework provided by a nation state and its foundation on the concepts of citizenship and rights – both of which should be problematized.

CDC's basic propositions

The first proposition underlying CDC is that societies are treated as '*political projects*' where all walks of life contain various types of power, political forces and players. Whatever citizens do, or not do,

with their lives they are, by definition, acting politically. Some way or another, people's decisions will have an effect in society occupied by others that add up to how the whole functions and moves. It is important to note this way of looking, since it implies that citizens and their collectivities continually make and act on choices about the society they want. In the words of the Foundation for Ecological Security in India: "Every Person has the Power to Make a Difference".

Second, being '*civic*' is understood to mean *pro-social behaviour* that respect differences (in opinion, life orientations and political choices) between citizens, whilst also showing concern for the whole of society and not just for one self. This is an old Confucian principle on which social order is built: a balanced choice and concern for the individual as well as for the other. Historically, countering non-civic behaviour – intolerance, discrimination, exploitation – is part of the long process in which societies have evolved (as it is the basis of all human civilization). It is therefore important to acknowledge that socio-political change in society is always driven by both civic and uncivil agency.

Thirdly, people living together inevitably generate dilemmas of collective action. Solutions rely on people imagining a resolved future situation which is strong enough to attract enough collective initiative, innovation, energy and agency for socio-political change. Today's 'big' guiding and mobilizing images are of a sustainable ecology and a world without hunger. Therefore, '*civic dreams*', or collective future visions, are understood as the unfulfilled imagination of a preferred situation that acts as an energiser and innovator.

The fourth proposition stresses that development and political change processes are highly complex and therefore inherently uncertain and hard to predict. Change processes often involve conflict, contention, disappointment, and struggle, as well as solidarity, collaboration and sharing without assured results. CDC therefore involves a *non-deterministic view* on how and why societies change.

Taken together, these propositions offer an analytical basis which translates into a set of four core features which characterises CDC, and which together 'define' what can be understood as a civic driven change 'perspective' or 'lens'.

Core features of a CDC lens

Adopting a CDC lens in a pair of spectacles bring sharper focus to four features of socio-political process that can drive change in pro-social directions.

The politics of belonging CDC is based on a rights-based understanding of political agency: *inclusive citizenship*. This individual as well as collective identity is the defining relationship between a state and its political community. Legitimacy of the former calls for active, informed involvement by all of the latter. Where citizenship is not in play and the right to have rights is not honoured by a state, this condition needs first to be fulfilled, which is slowly happening in Myanmar, but not in North Korea. In many parts of the world, rights are been granted in principle but not realised in practice. We have seen this with refugees on the Lao border. They have citizenship rights on paper, but are unable to exercise those without facing repression. That is also why a CDC lens takes as a maxim the requirement for *equity of political agency rather than equity of economic opportunity* that informs dominant sector-based theories of change. Equity of political agency exhibits strong gender

differences, seen for example in the need to 'reserve' a proportion of (local) government seats for women and their exclusion from political systems in some Arab states.

The politics of action A CDC lens focuses on *civic agency* for good or ill throughout all realms of society. A CDC perspective is therefore not institutionally 'located' – it is not 'owned' by civil society, as is often assumed with citizen's action. In whatever they do, people's agency contains 'political' choices which co-determine how a society thinks, functions and evolves. From this mass of choices, what becomes 'political' on the streets, in the media and in systems of governance emerges from how power has been gained, distributed and controlled in society. Consequently, civic agency means that CDC does not focus on the mechanics of politics, such as voting. Nor does it zoom in on institutions as such. Rather, it begins with identifying a domain of change where people decide to act to alter the society they live in and beyond to other locations. People's individual and collective decisions bring together past experience, an imagined future and a real-time assessment of the effort and risk involved in changing things. The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt did not emerge from a 'sector' but from millions of families that lived and coped somehow with the stress of unemployment, giving bribes to stay in business or out of jail, been compromised by security services to spy on neighbours, experienced denial as political opposition and so on. Many years of such wide-spread micro-political circumstances and processes combined into a 'tinder box' of accumulating frustration, (youth) radicalism and eventual mass public dissent with an unlikely trigger of self-immolation. Such drivers of civic agency are not confined to the poor, marginalised or to civil society as such, but belong to the political community at large. From a CDC point of view, this extreme example of civic agency is a source of innovation which impacts on the conventional three sector model in ways that needs more explicit attention.

The politics of scale Tahrir square and similar events illustrate another core feature of a CDC lens: *scalability*. A CDC framework of analysis is applicable at local, regional, national and global levels. This feature is particularly valuable when change processes span multiple horizontal (networked) and vertical (hierarchical) aggregations of civic agency, socio-political arrangements and the different types and sites of governance and authority. For example, the governance landscape is showing growth in self-regulation. This shift is intended to make organisations more accountable without the heavy hand of legislation. A CDC view would connect this innovation with other types and sites of public accountability to see how power is being redistributed to whose advantage. CDC view also orients to analysis which links local to global changes and back again. The UN Global Compact for Business and the impact of transnational citizen networks on multi-lateral institutions are examples of micro to macro scaling of civic agency, most acutely in responses to environmental concerns that were for example debated in December 2011 at COP 17 in Durban, South Africa. This feature of CDC ties to the proposition of imagined futures: such inspirations have no limit to their span in time or space, nor a theoretical limit to innovation. The 'blending' described above can be viewed in such an innovation light. This source of civic energy means that people can choose to think and act beyond their own small community or locality, for example to influence global policies and governance arrangements via environmental movements and/or stewardship councils for natural resources. .

The politics of knowledge and communication - A fourth core feature of the CDC lens is attention to the fact that civic agency is shaped by autonomy over power and knowledge. CDC recognises the multiple knowledges that inform agency. Even though learning is a complex process - since everyone knows mistakes are often repeated in the same way - it is important for civic actors to explore their own paths of change. Focussing on the ability of people to use their own knowledge and communication resources is therefore a crucial ingredient of applying a civic-driven change lens. The value of distributed knowledges increases when giving to and receiving from others. Ownership and control of mass media and blocking access to internet sites show that pathways for doing so are themselves part and parcel of power relationships. Observing what information is (not) being transmitted to whom and how is a CDC task. Finally, the international development industry still has a tendency to ignore the subtle power asymmetry of resource transfers, through which Western knowledge and values are imposed. Therefore, CDC distinguishes between aided and unaided change in society which heightens attention to the role and power of outsiders in influencing socio-political and other processes, including how risks are distributed.

Over the past few years, the initial ideas of a CDC framework have been presented at a range of seminars in many countries. Consequently, CDC has evolved by engaging in debate and taking on board many critical comments. While the basics elements still hold, the CDC perspective as described here has been revised, upgraded and theorized. But, to make the story more robust and compelling, much more real life examples and critical study are needed. This will feature in a new multi-year programme of work. For anyone wishing to add momentum in this direction, this booklet provides links to various CDC publications

Implications

There are many reasons for applying a CDC lens. Three are of particular concern if we are to be better equipped to deal with the multiple problems societies are dealing towards pro-social outcomes. One reason is to better inform citizen activism, in the sense of sharpening insights about what socio-political forces and processes are in play. Another is to improve the basis for the practical work organisations do and, hence, the effectiveness of how they do it. A third is to offer a way of increasing the likelihood that strategies and policies will be better founded for implementation, not just formulation. A task of this guide is therefore to engage with three groups of readers: activists, practitioners, and policy makers and strategists. For each group we would like to pose a question, or possibly a challenge. But first, we need to summarise what adopting a CDC lens would look like.

Applying a CDC Lens

There are some basis steps to wearing a CDC pair of spectacles. The steps are a bit like a ladder to take the user to a new vantage point. But the ladder and steps analogy does not mean a foregone conclusion in terms of getting a better understanding of civic agency and innovation. This outcome still depends on the willingness and ability of the wearer to set aside old glasses and the imprints that go with them. In other words, to adopt a different mindset that is not initially informed by social structures and actors.

Step 1. Work out as clearly as possible what domain of change you are interested in. What is it exactly you and/or your collective want to change? What imagined future does it imply?

Step 2. Identify the critical components of the socio-political processes that determine the current status of the domain. What forces and types of power are in play? Is change premised on consent or control?

Step 3. Apply CDC lenses to the processes found in step 2.

What issue of 'belonging' is involved? Will change be more inclusive and pro-social?

What is energising people's action / innovation? Who is involved in what ways?

How many levels and sites of governing are involved? How are they being connected and controlled?

Step 4. What do information flows and communications channels look like, what is influencing them, and who controls them?

Step 5. Depending on your particular interest, reflect on what type of useful insight emerges from a CDC analysis and understanding that should inform your own civic action at work, home and play.

Cases of civic innovation to be unpacked by a CDC approach are set to increase. They will likely lead to a set of worked examples to illustrate how a CDC lens works in practice. Readers are invited to get in touch about their experience of CDC as a way getting a better feel for what is going on in society and how to react. To help in this, we offer a number of challenges.

Challenges for readers

Activists: Does a CDC lens help you to understand better the dynamics of a protest movement with multiple levels (local and global), various tools of action (on the streets, but also on internet), and with multiple targets (governments, media, public opinion). What does your 'domain of change' look like? What in your view triggers 'civic energy' (or prevents it to develop)?

Practitioners: What do you grasp if you look beyond 'aided change' dynamics and try to understand the position in which and your organisation operates? How can a CDC lens be useful for your work as a practitioner? If you work, for example, as a professional in a donor agency, how does a CDC approach help to deepen your analysis of change processes?

Policy makers & strategists: What is the added value of looking with a CDC lens to for example development policies? What are the elements in a CDC approach that are helpful, and possibly less helpful in making policies and strategies?

Where next??

Establishing CDC as a 'normal' way of seeing and understanding why and how societies change is a long game plan. Reaching this point will require substantial evidence that CDC offers something of value in addition to existing ways of doing analysis and feeding into action. Opportunities to contribute in this way will be found on the ISS CDC website. You are welcome to join us.

References:

For those interested in the theories associated with CDC, see:

Fowler, A. and Biekart, K., 2011, "Citizenship and the Politics of Civic Driven Change", in Petty, D. and MacFarland, C. (eds), *Citizenship: Practices Types and Challenges*, Nova Publishers, New York. https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=27608

For those interested in a more elaborate discussion of CDC propositions, elements and domains, see:

<http://repub.eur.nl/res/pub/30559/>

For those interested in CDC applications, see:

Berkhout, et al., 2011, Civic Driven Change: synthesis implications for policy and practice, Context International Cooperation, Utrecht.

For those interested in the background documentation and the process of establishing CDC, see:

ISS web site http://www.iss.nl/research/research_programmes/civic_driven_change