



## Chapter 19

# The OW and Civil Society Organizations in Brazil

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### Introduction

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The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the contribution of the 'Organizational Workshops' (OWs) to the development of the *Membership Organization Movement* in Brazil, beginning in the rural areas, and expanding from there, at a later stage, to the urban areas, as well to describe a mould-breaking innovatory experience which, by its ability to generate employment and income, inextricably links the fate of the countryside to that of the town. It is just not possible to do justice to the full potential and impact of this method in Brazil, due to its massive scope. For reasons of lack of space and also because of the logistical problems involved in obtaining all the necessary Brazilian data from our Mexican location at the moment of writing, it is the least of our intentions to want to exhaust the matter here and now. Our aim is more modest: draw attention to the phenomenon of the 'Organization Workshops'(OWs) in Brazil, and make an analysis of the potential of this '*Large Group Capacitation*' approach for the organization of Civil Society. Or more precisely: the capacitation of both rural and urban communities called '*excluded*', to use a term which is becoming increasingly fashionable, and by which we mean the 'rejects' of the capitalist system.

We will start with some comments on the climate for the development of Membership Associations and Cooperatives which prevailed in Brazil at the end of the eighties, i.e., when the first experiments with the Organizational Workshops were introduced after a 25 year hiatus, when, in 1964, Clodomir was imprisoned and subsequently sent in exile by a Brazilian dictatorship which displayed an intense dislike, for reasons best known to themselves, for Citizens' Organizations in general and mass movements in particular. In exile with its originator went the theories and practice of the Organizational Workshop. Having set the OW in its historical context in Brazil, we will propose the Organization Workshop as a wholly novel approach in the long tradition of Associativism and Cooperativism. The OW opens up new avenues and ways for thinking about cooperatives-as-we-know-them. For example, on the way these are promoted and implemented by the National Extension Service and by NGOs of Government all kinds. Consolidating its successes in the rural areas, the OWs then spread out to the built-up areas of Brazil, where they became an important instrument, in both the megatowns such as São Paulo as well as in smaller localities, in the fight against unemployment. To stem the urban and rural Unemployment tide, a System of 'Job and Income Generation' (SIPGEI) was developed. The PROGER (Job and Income Generating Project), on the other hand, integrates town and countryside in a common search for the solution, on a

massive scale, of the equally massive problem of unemployment.

We will conclude with a balance sheet of the achievements and the difficulties encountered with the implementation of the Organizational Workshop so as to provide a stimulus for those committed to the advance of knowledge about the method and to fostering further research, which, apart from being intellectually exciting, is also urgent in a world climate dominated by the total market which, invariably, militates against the interests of the already least well off, the excluded from the system.

### **Membership Associations of the Excluded in late eighties Brazil**

In Santos de Morais book '*Notes on a Theory of Organization*'<sup>2</sup>, a classification can be found of the different forms of Organization in the rural areas of Central America, which, we think, is still perfectly applicable to the analysis of present civil society initiatives by the excluded and while at the same time not exhausting the subject. According to de Morais, rural organizations can be divided into two types: *Organizations of Struggle* and *Organizations for Social Stability*. Militant Organizations struggle for the transformation of prevailing structures which, as a natural byproduct of capitalism, they understand to be at the root of problems of poverty, oppression etc. This struggle is carried out either by force of arms or by peacefully, by reclaiming rights through political channels.

The name '*Organizations for Social Stability*', on the other hand, is self-explanatory. Brazil, especially in the wake of the so-called 'New Republic' in the eighties, saw a flowering of Organizations of either type. Under the latter we can, for example, list the 21,000 'Comunidades Eclesias de Base' (Christian '*Base*' Communities) which emerged in the wake of 'Liberation Theology' movement in the Catholic Church, or rather that (post Vatican II) tendency of the Church which had opted for positive action '*on the side*' of the oppressed and those excluded. Action which can be described as 'prayer in practice' - judged to be more effective in terms of testimonial power, than contemplative prayer which, if anything, had left the broad layers of the

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<sup>2</sup> Santos de Morais, Clodomir "*Elementos sobre Teoría de Organización*" MST Publications, Sao Paulo, 1986. An English translation prepared by Ian Cherrett is in existence: "*Notes on a Theory of Organization*" 1987

population to their own devices and alienated. Liberation Theology, which has achieved so much for the sake of popular conscientization, was spearheaded by important thinkers such as Fr Carlo Alberto Betto and Fr Leonardo Boff, not to forget and not least, of course, the great christian socialist thinker Paulo Freire whose talents as conscientizer were so much greater than those of literacy worker ('*alfabetizador*'). His followers during the years of his absence from Brazil - because he too, as is well known, was exiled -, and notwithstanding the prevailing culture of repression during these years, never stopped their work. Often secret and clandestine, they were very influential in the fostering of a popular culture built on *critical consciousness*. This critical consciousness, for example, was the moving force behind the '*Movement of the Landless Workers*' (MST), which, alongside other sister movements, such as the 'Human Settlement Programme - '*Moradía*'- of the State of Sao Paulo', were the practical outcome of the awareness fostered in the preceding years by the Catholic Church and by political activists of the Left.

In the nineties, the combination of those forces gave birth to the Brazilian "*Workers' Party*" (PT) whose militants in the subsequent years founded the Workers' Central Unit (CUT), an important Organization of Social struggle. Among those organizations (too numerous to mention in this space) we also count the CONAN (National Federation of Human Settlement Associations), headquartered in the federal capital Brasilia, whose 23,000 associated branches are fighting for a solution to the problems afflicting, in particular, the poorest slums in the towns; there is also the CONTAG (National Confederation of Agricultural Workers), successor of the ULTAB (Brazilian Workers and Peasant Union), which used to be associated with the Brazilian communist movement.

By *Organizations of Social Stability* we understand the traditional Cooperatives and Mutuels. The NGO's and Rural Extension Agencies have played an important role in their establishment as well as in that of the Small Rural Producers Organizations (SRPO's) who, for example, go into the pooling of marketing and small machinery use, generally in exchange for votes in the countryside where the mode of small family production still prevails or, alternatively, in the interest of the diffusion of a particular technology promoted by one or the other multinational. Rural Extension since the mid-eighties has made great strides in taking options '*on the side*' of the peasants and against officialdom's dreadful agricultural policies of which small peasants always are

the main victims. This deserves a special mention here. The Organization for Rural Cooperatives (OCB) has played an important role in matters relating to agricultural production. Until 1988, however, the law forbade urban Cooperatives, a measure which very much restricted the activities of the OCB in the field of social stabilization, especially in the latter years of the dictatorship. But for these legal strictures, a lot could have been realized, if only their understanding of cooperativism had not been so traditional. We can thus see, in a quick sketch, how the eighties have been a very 'special' decade for Brazil, especially towards the end of the dictatorship, when there was a gradual transition to a civilian government, even though the first democratic elections only took place in the beginning of the nineties. This gradual change of climate favourable to democracy also gradually brought back those formerly exiled by the military dictatorship. This brought to the country a rekindling of new hope for national reconciliation and a new process of healing and rediscovery of ideals which favour the poorest.

In the years following the '*lost eighties*' we see the building up of a 'critical mass' around the need for popular organization and the coming to fruition of the seeds sown, long ago, by those who were exiled for their beliefs and by those who remained behind in Brazil and continued to resist the forces of dictatorship with all their might. Whether dedicated to *Struggle* or to *Social Stabilization*, these organizations have in the meantime, gone through grave crises mainly because of their inadequate organization skills. The much talked about 'empowerment' rarely went beyond the *Popular Education*<sup>3</sup> paradigm, which, at best, was able to raise people's critical consciousness, but when it came to equipping the learners with organizational invariably fell short of providing useable models. That is the main reason for the lamentable record of lack of success of the Organizations of Struggle, i.e. consistently failing to achieve group autonomy and, instead, making those groups ever more dependent on what amounts to personal, charismatic leadership. The *Popular Education* movement was forever in danger of being pushed into a corner: whenever reactionary forces decided to put a stop to a Popular Movement or an Organization for Struggle, it was enough to throw the leader in prison and so demoralize the band of followers, The problems faced by the Organizations for *Social Stability* were no less and no fewer: they had to contend, in both

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<sup>3</sup> About the fundamental distinction between 'education' and 'capacitation', see, for example Correia, Jacinta, CN '*Communication and Capacitation*' IATTERMUND Brasilia, 1995, as well as elsewhere (esp chapter 3)

countryside and urban areas, with the obdurate problem of 'boss-ism' or the personalized artisan leader<sup>4</sup> leaving the road wide open to clientelism and all kinds of manipulation.

### **The OW as an unfolding form of Associationism and Cooperativism in Brazil**

The OW starts from the concepts first mooted by Hegel and Marx, namely that it is '*the conditions of life which are generative of social consciousness (culture)*'<sup>5</sup>. This means that, by changing people's conditions of life, their social consciousness will also change. Nothing new up to this point. However, while it is clear *what* needs to be done, knowledge about the '*how to*', - in the case of peasants peasants, for example, with thousands of years of doing things in a certain way, the only option, so far, has been mass emigration to the town. Whenever a peasant or a small producer is in at the deep end of a complex organizational set-up, the 'bad habits' of the artisan culture will inhibit their proper functioning in this context and, because of this, will gradually lead to a crisis or the demise of this organization. As apparently there is no option for the peasant or artisan to change their conditions of life, they are caught up in a vicious circle from which there is no escape. Unless, that is, the principles proposed by Clodomir Santos de Morais are called to the rescue: the OW is a way by which to transform, mediated by an artificial ('experimental'), but at the same time, 'real-life' and intensive process (ie: the workshop) their conditions of life, whether their background be urban or rural.

The Organizational Workshops are theoretico-practical 'experiments' ('*essays*', or 'attempts') in which *large* groups of people are going to learn how to organize by the very act of getting organized. The capacitating learning event lasts

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<sup>4</sup> Clodomir Santos de Morais, in op. cit. (also mentioned in Sobrado, Ch 2) provides an analysis of the behavior of the artisan confronted with forms of complex organization. This behaviour is referred to by de Morais as 'a set of bad habits' (ie habits which are dysfunctional and destructive in a complex organization). For the sake of the successful establishment of the latter, these 'bad habits' need, therefore, to be combated in a large, cooperative organization. This is done by means of friendly reminders and criticisms, and through continued vigilance. Those habits exist, indeed, at the level of the unconscious and it is also the collective group, understanding what its fundamental organizational tasks are, which can stamp them out.

<sup>5</sup> On the theoretical foundations of the OW, see Clodomir Santos de Morais' doctoral thesis, defended in Rostock, Germany "*The subjective and objective conditions underpinning the transformation rural life in Central America*" Rostock, 1985

between 30 and 40 days and starts from the certain knowledge that it is only by dint of getting involved in action which is truly capacitating entrepreneurial literacy can be achieved. *Using the bicycle metaphor, it is not possible to learn how to ride a bike if there is no bicycle to ride on.* In the same way, it is not possible to learn 'another' way of organizing except inside a real enterprise which needs real organizational and real management structures. No amount of 'Group Dynamics' (with *small* groups, that is), for example, will be able to achieve this. Only the fact of getting to grips, in actual practice, with the reality of a complex organization will allow the participants to learn how to solve the problems inherent in a complex enterprise. And it is only an inside understanding of 'how' it works that it will be possible to mount such an enterprise and set it on a successful course. The problems which arise in the course trying to set up and run such an enterprise become the very pedagogical learning tools in this methodology. Thus, the saying: "*The more problems the better*" is pedagogically true in this case. By getting to grips and solving those problems one by one, the learners evolve a new frame of values, i.e., the values prevailing in the complex enterprise. They also learn how those new values and principles are in sharp contrast with the values which prevailed in anything thus far experienced, i.e. their artisan/small producer form of organization which does not need the assistance or cooperation of anyone. The whole process, from beginning to end, is run by one and the same person (or by the same small group of associates, such as family members).

In the new enterprise the possibility for which is opened up by the OW learning experience, the 'need' for a strict discipline and a division of labour will become manifest in a very practical way. The OW takes great care that, while the participants are thus engaged in a very practical discovery process, their theoretical understanding is able to keep pace all the time. This is achieved by means of a concurrent lecture series on the theory of organization to which the participants are invited. Practice combined with theory allows the consciousness of reasons for their actions to become ever more explicit. As the process unfolds, the group of participants becomes ever more '*capacitated*' inside the very practice of which they all partake. The deeper they get involved in the activities of the workshop, the more they will be capacitated, the more their organizational consciousness also will develop.

The binding and motivating agent of the enterprise<sup>6</sup> is, normally, the lecture series which is offered in a central location to which all - (without discrimination of age, sex, colour, religion, or whatever) - are invited. The community, in this preparatory stage, are at liberty to express whatever kind of courses they would like to get involved in, where they want them to take place, who they think would like to participate, and at what times of the day they would like them to be run. This is called the '*Primary Structure*' of the event (or the '*Organization of the Organizers*' - Labra). Facilitators and specialists, together with the inventory put at the disposal of the workshop, are all part of this primary structure. As it is not possible to know, beforehand, what tools, machinery or other implements will be required in the course of the Workshop, the inventory is supplied as soon as the Community has given to the Director of the OW the list of courses they would want to be taught. The same goes for the type of facilitators and specialists who will be needed for any particular workshop. This is in stark contrast with what usually tends to happen in the relationship between projects ('owners of knowledge' the '*who-knows*') and the community (those 'deprived of knowledge' - the '*don't-knows*'). Those relationships are dialogical and democratic.

To sum up: it is inside the organized activities (OW) that the radically different conditions of life that the group of participants genuinely acquires the '*capacity to organize*' and '*the capacity to manage*'. On the basis of this powerful capacitating instrument, it becomes genuinely possible for the community to confront their problems and to actually 'do' something about them, as they now the '*how*' and the '*what*' to do be it in Organizations of Struggle or Organizations for Social Stabilization.

## **Types of OW**

There are four basic types of Organizational Workshop:

- 'Center' workshops (Center OW)
- 'Course' workshops (Course OW)
- 'Field' workshops (FOW)
- 'Enterprise' workshops (EOW)

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<sup>6</sup> 'Enterprise' is understood here in the sociological sense as defined by de Morais, ie 'a number of persons who organize themselves for the attainment of a certain goal'.

Each of these different types corresponds to the particular needs for organizational learning and the formation of cadres. For example:

- A 'Center' workshop capacitates a *cadre* of leaders of membership organizations, of cooperatives or agricultural enterprises;
- A 'Course' workshop will be more indicated in the case of *Organizers of Systems of Mass(ive) capacitation* for whatever purpose(s).
- A 'Field' workshop is the type which applies in the case of *communities* and their leaders who have put in a request for their community to be capacitated.
- An 'Enterprise' workshop is run in the case of an *already existing enterprise*, which has landed in a situation of crisis. In Brazil, three of these four types of OW have been tried out. The most commonly applied type, however, is the Field Workshop, alongside the Course and Centre workshops. In these workshops around 60,000 people spread over 100 workshop events, were capacitated in Brazil from 1989 till 1998.

Drawing up a factually correct balance sheet on the exact number of events which took place, and the number of enterprises which actually sprung up as a result of those workshops is nigh to impossible, as this supposes the possibility to quantify what people have learned and how they subsequently make use of what they learned. We will venture, however, to offer a conservative estimate of the effects of those workshop events, based on the pilot research projects we have run already. From these data we can extrapolate that (to keep on the conservative side) 15% of OW participants subsequently set up shop (ie start an enterprise of one sort or the other). We end up with a (conservative) total of 9,000 enterprises - of the family and non-family type - set up in Brazil alone by former OW graduates. This represents an acceptable number of enterprises of different types which were created as a direct result of the OW's. To this we have to add an approximate 30% of OW participants who subsequently found work or some form of income generation by which they have been able to raise their living standards, as a direct result of participation in the workshops. Translated in numbers, this means that about 8,000 persons, overall found employment or income to which they had no access before. When we add to this the family members of those involved in the new enterprises - and not even taking in account the indirect beneficiaries (who have to be multiplied by a

factor of 5) we arrive at a total of 27,000 persons who have drawn some economic benefit from those events, at an estimated unit cost of a mere \$16/person.

Up till now we have talked about economic benefits only. The social benefits are equally impressive, as the community, once organized, becomes habilitated to solve, no, not the problems which are strictly the province of the Government, but, yes, to set up (their own) projects, autonomously and run, by them, economically, viably and sustainably. The first Organization Workshop run in an urban area of Brazil was in the Barrio of Tancredo in Porto Velho, capital city of the State of Rondônia, in the Amazonian region is just one example among many: one of the principal problems in this barrio was the lack of a sewerage system which was extremely taxing the public health of that one area. Since an OW was run there, the Project Commission, which is still in existence until the present day, elaborated, with the voluntary assistance of a number of engineers, an alternative project to the one proposed by the City Council (which would have taken decades to complete, let alone to reach the outskirts of this godforsaken barrio). The Project Commission renegotiated the plans with the City council and in consultation with the Canadian Embassy who were prepared to put up the necessary funds for the project. Subsequently, the project has not only managed to solve the problem, but has also provided a classical school example of how it is possible to build, in an alternative way, an urban sewage system. Moreover, thanks to the money drawn in by the project, the community had generated a local source of income.

In the same way, a number of OWs were run in the town of São Paulo. A number of cooperatives materialised out of these events, where before there was nothing, or, perhaps, land invasions or traditional self-help types of work especially in the area of house building. Only by having gone through the OW event did they learn that even when you have a house, but no income, the house will eventually have to be sold just to eat and stay alive, or to pay medical expenses. The City Council of São Paulo, firmly set in their paternalistic ways even under Labour Party government, instead of helping the bairros to organize themselves so that they would be in a position to escape perpetual dependency on food-aid distributed at the '*Mutirao*' -- (vacant plot of land where the voluntary house building was taking place) --, gave preference to a housing policy which, even after having housed them, left people in the same condition of poverty as before, and dependent on public handouts. The Movement of the

Landless Workers (MST) had to cope with similar problems. No sooner had they managed to invade and occupy a piece of land, settling a maximum of 30 or 50 families on it, at the cost of enormous struggle and heartache, then they saw those same people back, landless, in the very places where from which they originally hailed, namely the barrios in town. What happened was that the new settlers had sold their land or passed on the land rights to others. The whole process having come full circle, the end result was that the lands returned to the big landowners, who were the owners all along . . .

In 1988 a first Organization Workshop was held in Rio Grande do Sul where the first cadres of the MST (Movement of Landless Labourers) were capacitated. One of the first results of this experience was that the Movement's slogan was changed from "*Invade and Resist!*" to "*Invade, Resist and Produce!*". Another change could be seen in the sheer numbers of people involved in land invasions: up to 1,000 families or more. Those 'With Land', who, before, fell completely outside the concerns of the movement which was, after all, for the 'Landless', now became a real concern, too -- (be it only to prevent them from joining the masses of the Landless) -- but, moreover, they also became a valuable resource for the budding new settlements. The first Cooperative for those 'With Land' (*Con Terra*) was formed in the beginning of the nineties. From this basis the CONCRAB Terra'(Confederation of the Land Reform Cooperatives) was set up. The great difference between these 'Workshop' cooperatives and those with more traditional origins, is that the former will avoid to employ salaried labour, ie people who are non-members, thus avoiding the otherwise almost inevitable exploitation of paid labour. What they do instead, whenever the coop members are not in sufficient numbers or cannot do the work for whatever reason, is that they will set up a sister cooperative, or a 'service' cooperative which then covers the temporary needs of the mother cooperative. The combination of those cooperatives is known as an '*Enterprise Association*'.

The agglomeration of a number of small (micro) enterprises into one big Enterprise Association, or 'Second-level Enterprises' has meant a saving grace for the otherwise disastrous '*Micro Enterprise*' approach which according to the reports published by SEBRAE (Brazilian Service for Support to Micro Enterprises) has chalked up a 'mortality rate' of up to 90% (i.e. Micro Enterprises surviving the first year after they were set up). That is another important distinguishing factor: the Workshops always point in the direction of the formation of large(r) Enterprises in the mould of what was directly

experienced during the capacitation events. The other major differentiating factor between the OW approach and other events which may look similar in appearance, is the *organizational discipline* the participants impose on themselves. It is either a case of self-management, or nothing. All decisions are taken in common and are subject to at least 48 hours of scrutiny before they are taken. The decisions of each commission are then proposed to the General Assembly guaranteeing full participation throughout, from beginning to end, from top to bottom.

## **Conclusion**

While, on the one hand, it might appear that we have been viewing things through pink glasses, and to have been intent on demonstrating only the successes, problems with the Workshops are nevertheless legion. The same is true when trying to apply the OW method on a massive scale, as is desirable and necessary, taking into account the massive numbers of those excluded. The principal problem derives from funding Agencies who fail to understand the absolute need to 'let go', to hand over, lock, stock and barrel, the management of resources and personnel to a Collective. Their teachers, facilitators and experts are more part of the problem than of the solution: there is an extreme reluctance, to subordinate themselves to the judgment of a group of people who have inferior levels of education, or worse, no education at all ('illiterate'), and On the other hand, they tend to (con)fuse their personal experience, based eg on traditional '*small* group dynamics' with the OW processes, which use principles of *Large* group Social Psychology methods with persons predominantly with Lower Levels of Education. Such an unfortunate mix of two approaches, -- conceded with each with their logic and validity of their own and applied separately --, results in mutually antagonistic efforts which cancel each other out. The whole process gets deflated and in the end no-one knows any more where they are or what they are at.

Funding Agencies also like to decide themselves the desirability or not of an OW event, often based on a strict cost-benefit analysis. Even though, as we have already pointed out, the cost per person of a Workshop is in the region of \$16.00 per person, -- derisory as far as development projects go -- the total sum needed may still seem large, due to the fact that up to 500 people may participate, which needs considerable start-up funds. This notwithstanding. The sums involved in Donor Agencies' own projects may look small(er), but so is

invariably the tiny number of people who eventually benefit. It is indeed very difficult to break old habits and set a new course as this requires a putting into question of fundamental paradigms and the substitution with new ones, which not end up keeping people dependent. When everything is said and done, it is not possible to come to terms with a problem as large as that those mass poverty as long as the organizations trying to tackle it continue to behave in purely interventionist or assistentialist ways, in other words, organizations which 'need' the people's continued dependence on them for the sake of their own survival, thus, in the end, providing nourishment to that old familiar and sinister enemy: *assistentialism*

*Reminder:*

4 types of O.W.

- 1. THE FIELD O.W.**
- 2. The CENTRE O.W.**
- 3. 3. The COURSE O.W.**
- 4. The ENTERPRISE O.W.**

# The OW

A real, practical exercise  
To facilitate the development of  
***organisational consciousness***  
In a social group that needs to  
act as an enterprise (in an  
organised manner).

(C. Santos de Moraes, Theory of Organization)

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## How it works

- ◆ First: The organisation of the "Facilitators' Enterprise"
- ◆ The "design" of the OW: What activities will take place during the OW?
- ◆ What do we need to perform these activities?

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# The components of the Organisation Workshop

- ◆ **The People.**
- ◆ **The means of Production.**
- ◆ **The Lectures on Theory of Organisation**
- ◆ **The activities.**
- ◆ **The capacitation package.**