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VIETNAM IN THE ERA OF *DOI MOI*

Issue-Oriented Organizations and Their Relationship to the Government

Joerg Wischermann

Abstract

In spring 2000, our research team identified 322 issue-oriented organizations in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, i.e., non-state, voluntary, non-profit-oriented organizations actively working on social, educational, environmental, community, and other issues. We interviewed 136 representatives of these organizations. This article presents selected findings and a theoretical analysis of the data.

Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) are the focus of much interest in the scientific community, as well as among practitioners in the field of development cooperation. This interest correlates with the roles such organizations play, or are at least intended to play. These include:

• supporting those who have been left out by both the market and the state by utilizing their so-called comparative advantages in the "development" of "underdeveloped" countries. Comparative advantages are those aspects of NGOs (manageable size, proximity to target group, ability to involve target group in the planning and implementation of projects, etc.) said to make NGOs better able to respond effectively and swiftly to the needs of the poor than governmental organizations;

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• acting as bulwarks against various forms of dictatorship and performing as "schools of democracy" during the processes of democratization and consolidation of democracy; and

• acting as countervailing forces to the expanding influence of markets and the declining authority of states in the field of international relations, thereby achieving "globalization from below."

For most Southeast Asian countries, there is empirical evidence for the existence of such societal organizations and their activities, the existence or absence of their so-called comparative advantages, the various roles they play in the particular establishment and consolidation of democracy, and for the varying degrees to which they are or were able to perform as "schools of democracy," and their real or putative contribution to a national, regional, or global "civil society."

Vietnam seems to be a deviant case. For many years it was quite common for analysts of the Vietnamese political system to use Rigby's concept of "mono-organizational socialism." "Mono-organizational socialism" precludes the possibility of organizations which have voluntary membership and are able to make and carry out decisions more or less independently of the government to exist in such an authoritarian system. But by the end of the 1980s, many scholars focusing on Vietnam had begun questioning the usefulness of a mono-organizational mode as a viable model for the analysis of state-society relations. Social research on Vietnam indicates that manifold social changes were and are underway. Furthermore, in the mid-1990s, the first empirical evidence for the existence of new types of what I call "civic organizations" was presented.[1]

I would like to offer some empirical evidence for the thesis that a remarkable diversification of social, political, and economic practices has taken place in Vietnam during the last 17 years, leading to an impressive variety of types of civic organizations. In spring 2000, our research team identified more than 700 civic organizations in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, among them 322 issue-oriented organizations, i.e., non-state, voluntary, non-profit-oriented organizations actively working on social, educational, environmental, human rights, economic, community, and other issues. All of them enjoyed

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1. See, for example, Carole Beaulieu, *Is It an NGO? Is It a Civil Society? Is It Pluralism Wriggling Along? Report CB-26 to the Institute of Current World Affairs*, October 1994. A copy of this report can be found at <http://www.un.org.vn/donor/civil/BeaulieuNGOreport.pdf>, accessed July 15, 2003. See also Mark Sidel, "The Emergence of a Nonprofit Sector and Philanthrophy in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," in *Emerging Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Community*, ed. Takeshi Yamamoto (Singapore and Tokyo: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, and Japan Center for International Exchange, Tokyo, 1995), pp. 293–304; Michael Gray, "Creating Civil Society? The Emergence of NGOs in Vietnam," in *Development and Change* 30:4 (October 1999), pp. 693–713.

at least some maneuvering room in pursuing their respective activities. Most of the issue-oriented organizations came into existence in the 1990s. Since these new social actors can be seen as the protagonists of processes of societal and political change, their emergence and development, as well as the different forms of relationship between them and governmental organizations, might indicate changes in the patterns of state-society relationships in the era of *doi moi* (policy of renovation). There are quite remarkable differences with respect to the kinds of activities and approaches of issue-oriented organizations in Hanoi, as opposed to those in Ho Chi Minh City. These differences are linked to differences in economic, political, and cultural conditions and sociocultural traditions prevailing in the two cities.

This article is based on my empirical research on civic organizations in Vietnam, which began in the early 1990s. In 1999, this developed into a German-Vietnamese cooperation project entitled "The Relationship between 'Civic Organizations' and 'Governmental Organizations' in the Vietnamese Transition Period," funded by the German Volkswagen Foundation. On this project, I served as the main German researcher. Leading the project were Prof. Dr. Juergen Rueland (University of Freiburg, Germany) and Dr. Werner Pfennig (Free University Berlin, Germany). The Vietnamese partners were Prof. Dr. Bui The Cuong (National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities, Institute of Sociology, Hanoi) and Prof. Dr. Nguyen Quang Vinh (then head of the Center for Sociology and Development at the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities, Institute of Social Sciences, in Ho Chi Minh City).

The empirical stage of this project was organized into two phases. In the first phase, 706 civic organizations were identified and, under the guidance of the Vietnamese partners, two teams of Vietnamese interviewers and I carried out standardized interviews with 257 representatives of different sorts of civic organizations in Hanoi (133 organizations) and Ho Chi Minh City (124 organizations) between June and August 2000. In the second phase, in-depth interviews with 50 representatives of selected civic organizations and governmental organizations were carried out between April and June 2001.[2] This project ended in March 2002 with two workshops, which were held in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

In this article I will draw on this survey and some of its results. The analysis of the findings and the theoretical interpretation of the data were conducted by the author, and express his view only. They are not intended to reflect the views of the research team as a whole.

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2. Due to a lack of space, I leave out a description of the theoretical framework of the survey.

What Are Civic Organizations and Issue-Oriented Organizations?

Up to this point, neither political nor scholarly discourse has been able to come up with any viable term for the sort of societal organizations I call civic organizations. The term NGO is frequently used for these, as well as for other groups. I have therefore chosen not to use it, as it has become a kind of catch-all term. I use the label "civic organizations" as a general term for a heterogeneous group of (in the broadest sense) non-state, voluntary, non-profit-oriented societal organizations. These organizations are "civic" in the sense that they articulate interests and affect policy.[3] But they are not necessarily "civic" in the way Putnam puts it.[4] Within the set of civic organizations, I differentiate between mass organizations, professional associations, issue-oriented organizations, and associations of businessmen/women.[5] I include even such organizations that many scholars call government-run-and-inspired nongovernmental organizations (GRINGOS), and also those that are hybrid organizations, that function in a dual mode, and are thus "amphibious," to use Ding's term.[6] All of them enjoy at least some maneuvering room in pursuing their respective activities. I do not conjecture any specific relationship between civic organizations and governmental organizations but leave this issue open for discovery in the process of our empirical research. My understanding and classification of civic organizations in Vietnam are based on a taxonomy derived by empirical and inductive methods, with attention given to the results of my own research.

Issue-oriented organizations are defined as a specific subtype of civic organizations. Issue-oriented organizations are active, on different political-administrative levels, in the following areas:

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3. Compare Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 265.

4. For Putnam, the key is whether or not associational life is structured horizontally so as to generate trust. According to Putnam, only horizontally structured organizations are civic organizations. See Robert D. Putnam with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 167, 173. We could not presuppose this characteristic, neither in the definition nor at the outset of our survey. Therefore, we may have included organizations which tend to feature internal structures of a hierarchical nature.

5. There are a couple of good reasons to include mass organizations in the ensemble of civic organizations: first, although most mass organizations have been established, financed, and guided by the state and the ruling Vietnamese Communist Party, the crucial point is that these organizations have no administrative power. They can therefore be seen as societal organizations rather than organizations of the state. They function as societal actors and not as administrative units of the state. Although they are "managed" by state agencies, they are treated as societal organizations and not as governmental units.

6. In the survey, we intended to focus on groups with some organizational structure, that is, at least by-laws. Informal organizations were thus excluded.

- cultural affairs (religious and other associations which defend collective rights, values, beliefs, and symbols);
- education and information (devoted to producing and/or disseminating ideas, news, and information);
- social welfare, charity work, and counseling (providing support to those who are vulnerable in a society undergoing "modernization" at a rapid pace and who lack access to basic social services. Most vulnerable are children, street children, orphans, the elderly, disabled persons, invalids, poor women, and others);
- applied research (e.g., concerning rural and urban development);
- training and consulting;
- community development (pooling individual resources and talents to improve the infrastructure, institutions, and quality of life);
- environmental protection;
- consumer protection;
- human rights; and
- improving the political system and making it more accountable and democratic.[7]

In Hanoi, we classified as issue-oriented organizations various centers such as the Rural Development Services Center, Center for Education Promotion and Empowerment of Women, Center for Progress in Rural Areas, Center for Research on Energy and Environment, and Center for the Fight against AIDS. In Ho Chi Minh City, most of the issue-oriented organizations are active in the field of social work, such as the Social Development and Research Consultancy, the Center for the Practice of Social Work, the Center for Social Work with Kids, The Club for the Saigon Train Station Kids, the Thao Dan Street Children Care Program, and Buddhist temple associations such as the Bo De Free Kitchen of the Buddhists or the Nghia Nhuan Temple Association.

The Sample

As mentioned above, the research teams identified 706 civic organizations in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in spring 2000. From the 322 organizations we classified as being issue-oriented organizations (185 in Hanoi and 137 in Ho Chi Minh City), 56 in Hanoi and 70 in Ho Chi Minh City were randomly selected for standardized interviews, i.e., the first stage of our survey. The number of interviewed representatives of these organizations (in this stage of the survey) was 46 in Hanoi and 70 in Ho Chi Minh City. All interviewed representatives were presidents, directors, chairpersons, or at least deputies of the chief members. In the second stage of our survey we carried out in-depth

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7. This definition borrows heavily from Diamond's definition of societal organizations, which, in his understanding, constitute "civil society" (see Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, p. 222). I would like to point out that I do not require civic organizations or subtypes of such organizations to be organizations forming a civil society.

interviews with randomly chosen representatives from 20 of these organizations (12 in Hanoi and 8 in Ho Chi Minh City).

Time of Foundation, Reasons, and Motivations for Establishing Issue-Oriented Organizations

The time of and reasons given for the foundation of issue-oriented organizations reflect not only the political situation after reunification in 1975 and Vietnam's sociopolitical development in general, but also some major sociopolitical issues that developed after the start of the policy of renovation in 1986 in both cities. The founders of these organizations had political and professional interests, but also some very personal reasons for starting them. Upon analysis of the particular motivations, some initial essential differences between issue-oriented organizations based in the North and the South became apparent.

With respect to the *time* when such organizations came into being, one striking fact is that after the beginning of the reform policy in 1986, Hanoi lagged behind Ho Chi Minh City in the establishment of issue-oriented organizations, with a delay of at least two to three years. In Ho Chi Minh City, the issue-oriented organizations came into existence only after mass organizations and many professional organizations had been founded. Until *doi moi* became the official policy of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), very few issue-oriented organizations were existent in the South. Only seven out of 70 (i.e., 10%) of those organizations we interviewed in the first stage of our survey were founded before 1986. The founders of these organizations obviously reacted slowly to the proclamation of the new policy. The "boom" in newly founded issue-oriented organizations took place between 1990 and 2000. After a cautious beginning between 1985 and 1990, 50 new organizations sprang up in the 1990s, more in the first half of the decade than in the second half.

Not a single issue-oriented organization, literally, existed in Hanoi until 1986.[8] As in Ho Chi Minh City, the founders of the issue-oriented organizations waited until the beginning of the 1990s before they cautiously began to establish new groups. But even then, the pace in Hanoi was slower than that in Ho Chi Minh City. Most of the issue-oriented organizations were founded after 1995.

Particularly interesting, with respect to the importance of political conditions, is the fact that only one-third of the representatives of issue-oriented organizations in Hanoi, and less than one-fifth of the representatives of such

8. Documentation of all issue-oriented organizations reveals that at least two such organizations in Hanoi were founded before 1975; however, neither of these were in our sample.

organizations in Ho Chi Minh City, regard the economic, political, and cultural conditions to have been favorable for the establishment of these groups and their aims. How can we account for this widespread denial of a favorable political situation by representatives (especially in the South) of issue-oriented organizations established mainly in the years of the *doi moi* policy?

One reason might derive from the premise that until the mid-1990s, many of these organizations, especially those working on extremely sensitive political issues, e.g., fighting HIV/AIDS, faced much opposition from the authorities and therefore had to spend a lot of time and effort in convincing them to abandon antiquated ideas and support their endeavors. In general, it was not until the mid-1990s that the situation for issue-oriented organizations significantly improved, and this process came about slowly.

A second explanation could be found in the counter-assumption that "favorable conditions" were not decisive for up to 77.6% of the founders of issue-oriented organizations. Here I am thinking of many of the Southern small-sized, social welfare-oriented organizations, established by strongly motivated, energetic and determined persons—determined to establish such an organization no matter whether political circumstances are favorable or not, how long it may take, or how complicated the procedures may be. Other issue-oriented organizations, especially those in the field of research and consulting based in Hanoi, are obviously more dependent on favorable conditions, and/or they react more strongly to encouraging "signals" from the state. I will return to this point in my conclusion.

As regards the reasons and motivations for establishing issue-oriented organizations, in Hanoi as well as in Ho Chi Minh City, representatives point to their wish to "participate in solving urgent social problems" (in Hanoi, 73.9%, in Ho Chi Minh City, 72.9%). The second important reason is (in both cities) to "assist those who need help." This reason seem to be a bit more important to the Southern issue-oriented organizations, with 68.6% in Ho Chi Minh City, and 47.8% in Hanoi. Beyond this common ground, differences prevail. A distinguishing feature is the following: it seems that the founders in Hanoi are more interested in influencing policies, and in this respect it could be said that they are more politically motivated than their counterparts in the South.

This conclusion can be drawn from the following facts: taking into consideration the results of the standardized interviews, for the Northern issue-oriented organizations, the intention to "offer alternatives in our field of activities" ranks third, whereas for their Southern counterparts, this ranks fifth. In the South, "instant action" required to tackle "urgent problems" and the "improvement of the cooperation between governmental and societal organizations" are more important.

In the case of the Hanoi-based issue-oriented organizations, the differentiation into various "generations" of such organizations reveals that those founded after 1995 put much more emphasis on the political intention ("to offer alternatives") than did the representatives of organizations established in the first half of the 1990s. That is, the founders of 1995 and beyond seem to be even more politically motivated (in the above sense) than their predecessors.[9]

In additional in-depth interviews with representatives of such organizations in the South, founders often refer to very personal reasons, rather than political ones, for establishing an issue-oriented organization (for example, the experience of a difficult childhood). In sharp contrast, founders of such organizations in Hanoi point to policy interests (for example, the implementation of an energy-saving policy by installing wind-energy plants), and professional interests (persons seeking to continue specific professional activities after retirement). The intention of contributing something useful to society as a whole or to a particular group tends to be subordinated to other intentions.

Activities

Content analysis of the social actors' description of the three most important ongoing activities (answers given to an "open question" in the questionnaire used in the first stage of the survey) indicates that there are further remarkable differences between Northern and Southern issue-oriented organizations with respect to their activities, which issues they consider the "most urgent social problems" and their understanding of the causes, how they react to and tackle such problems, and the roles of politics and policies.

For the Southern issue-oriented organizations, concrete and instant action to solve social problems is at the center of their activities. They work directly with those who need help, and many of these organizations apply social work practices (see Table 1). Hanoi-based issue-oriented organizations are much more focused on research (especially in the field of applied natural science, but also in the humanities), the gathering and dissemination of information, and the offering of various services (see Table 2).[10] What conclusions can be

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9. The expression "generation" is used here in a very general and loosely defined sense. The survey offered for the most part a snapshot of the situation in summer 2000 and spring 2001 (as a result of the methods we applied). Foundation years are divided into three groups: 1985–90, 1990–95, and 1995–2000. These periods of time also correspond to meaningful stages of the unfolding policy of *doi moi*. The search for differences between organizations founded at different periods of time may help elucidate a development-bound perspective.

10. There is another remarkable difference between the Hanoi-based issue-oriented organizations and those working in Ho Chi Minh City. This divergence concerns the conjunction between the reported activities on the one hand, and the indication of a target group, an issue, and/ or an area the respective organization is working in, on the other hand. In the North, it is only about half the indicated activities that are enumerated together with the indication of a target

TABLE 1 *Activities of Issue-Oriented Organizations in Ho Chi Minh City*

Ranking	Most Important On-going Activities	Target Group, Issue and/or Area of Activity
1	"Education, vocational, cultural training"[1]	Street children (poor) children, handicapped, orphans, poor women
2	"Organizing support" and "protection"	Children, street children, children who are about to quit schooling, delinquent juveniles, poor people, elderly people, handicapped
3	"Research"	Environmental protection, AIDS/HIV, educational issues, social issues, psychology of children, malnutrition, early intervention strategies
4	"Feeding"/"providing food" (free of charge)	Poor patients, old people, handicapped children, street children, orphans, poor people
	"Take care of"	Children, orphans, "unhappy children," handicapped, old people, poor patients, drug addicts, old women and directly supporting sexually abused children; applying "early intervention strategies" in cases of hearing- and/or vision-impaired children as well as in cases of precocious children
5	"Providing shelter"	Street children, children, poor people, elderly
6	"Providing medical and other help"	Children, old people, drug addicts, poor patients, handicapped
	"Training courses"	Social workers, teachers in "Open Houses," civil servants and "cadres working with children," teachers, psychologists, educators[2]
7	"Counseling"	Drug addicts, parents, elderly, parents of handicapped children, families, families whose children have left home
8	"Create jobs" and apply different "income generating measures" (credit circles; loans)	Poor people, poor women, households
9	Editing and disseminating documents, information	Health issues, esp. AIDS/HIV, drug abuse, community development, consumer's rights from which women, consumers, children, youth and others should benefit

[1] Here and further below I use the English translation of the Vietnamese terms that the interviewed representatives used in their answers.

[2] "Open Houses" offer shelter for street children, poor people, old people, etc. Additionally some "Open Houses" offer "education, vocational and cultural training" and health-related and other services.

group; these activities are aimed at an issue and/or at least an area where the activity takes place. In the South, two-thirds of the indicated activities are named together with a target group, an issue and/or an area. In most descriptions, the activities are directly linked to the activity (mostly indicated in one sentence) and the target group is described in a clear-cut fashion. This finding could be understood as the first empirical evidence for the thesis that most Ho Chi Minh City-based issue-oriented organizations work at "grassroots level" and are closely connected to the poor and other people who are left out by both the state and the market. More than half of the Hanoi-based issue-oriented organizations whose representatives we interviewed seem to be less in touch with their target groups and/or those who suffer most from the processes of rapid social change. The further substantiation of this thesis is beyond the scope of this article.

TABLE 2 *Activities of Issue-Oriented Organizations in Hanoi*

Ranking	Most Important On-going Activities	Target Group, Issue and/or Area of Activity
1	"Research"	Environmental protection, energy policy, urban development, science and technology, nutrition problems, gender-issues, social and economic situations in specific areas
2	"Consulting" and other "services"	Agricultural development, community development, science and technology, environmental protection, legal issues, health issues (offering medical examinations)
3	"Editing and disseminating information"	Health issues for schools and societal organizations; on legal issues
	"Education and teaching"	Development of projects for AIDS/HIV prevention at schools; offering classes on health care, "opening classes free of charge"; teaching handicapped children
4	"Vocational" and other "training"	Female workers, for disseminators and "cadres" who are working in secondary education, the field of AIDS/HIV prevention or the health sector; management practices and business administration
5	"Support for the business sector"	No further indication given
6	"Counseling"	Parents, children, teachers on issues concerning education and training, handicapped children
	"Poverty alleviation"	No further indication given
7	"Take care of"	Old and lonely people
	"Establishing development projects"	(Important aspects of these projects are the use of wind energy, use of bio gas, income generation, poverty alleviation) and ecological projects featuring "sustainable development"
	"Community development"	No further indication given

drawn from these findings with respect to the motivation and the approach applied?

The social actors seem to have divergent views on identifying which problems are urgent, what their causes are, and which persons need assistance. The Hanoi-based organizations, for example, consider as urgent the general lack of information, as well as a lack of applied research in the natural sciences and (to a much lesser degree) in the humanities. The questions as to who suffers most from "modernization" and privatization processes, and who should receive assistance, seem to be less clear and/or less important to these actors than to those in the South. For the issue-oriented organizations in Ho Chi Minh City, the term "urgent problems" means the concrete plight of those persons who are left out by state and market: who suffer from difficult living conditions, have insufficient education or none at all, or have no access to health-related services, etc.

Based on such divergent views on urgent problems, it should not be a surprise that approaches to dealing with the problems diverge: the Southerners tend to tackle social problems straight away and lean toward action-oriented approaches. A thorough analysis of these problems, the application of scientific knowledge to their solution, and the approach itself is not without relevance for them, but the theoretical work is mostly integrated into and aimed at concrete action. In contrast, the Hanoi-based organizations seem to prioritize the theoretical and conceptual work on such problems or on their solution, giving high priority to the development of methods to deal systematically with the problems. Such approaches do not exclude various forms of action-oriented operation or cooperation with target groups; thus, a couple of the Hanoi-based issue-oriented organizations are involved in projects aiming at poverty alleviation, rural development, and environmental protection in different provinces. But the Northern organizations are clearly less involved in direct intervention and other practices of social work.[11] Policy formulation and implementation seem to be very important to Hanoi-based issue-oriented organizations, whereas their Southern counterparts seem to be more interested in solving social problems in a practical fashion.

The gap between these different ways of understanding and of reacting to social problems is closing only slowly, and with respect to specific problems such as AIDS/HIV. The use of social work practices which are practically oriented, as well as knowledge-based, is enabling this to happen. Such practices are now seeping into the North, whereas in the South these already appear widely as part of a distinct "issue tradition" (see below).

It is reasonable to understand these differences in a "culturalistic" way, i.e., by presupposing different sociocultural conditions and their impact on these issues. I will return to this interpretation in my conclusion.[12]

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11. Only nine (out of 46 interviewed) issue-oriented organizations in the North are involved in social work and related practices, whereas in Ho Chi Minh City, the respective number is 26 (out of 67). These data refer to the first stage of our survey.

12. In neither stage of the survey were the interviewees asked about their perception of differences between North and South Vietnam. Interpretations and conclusions concerning such differences are based on the collected empirical data concerning quite different topics which, for the purpose of analysis, were grouped along a North-South scheme. Of course I cannot and do not rule out that the interviewed representatives referred implicitly and (un-)consciously to specific cultural traditions and identities. Nevertheless, I would claim that the interpretations and conclusions referring to differences and similarities between issue-oriented organizations based in Hanoi and in Ho Chi Minh City presented in this article reflect solely my view on this topic.

Organizational Structure and
Funding Sources

There may be a large number of issue-oriented organizations in Ho Chi Minh City, but they are small in size. On average, the Southern organizations have nine staff members, whereas those in the North have 15 members.

In Hanoi 77.7% of the staff of issue-oriented organizations are full-time, 12.3% are part-time, and 10% are volunteers. Ho Chi Minh City-based issue-oriented organizations are less "professionalized," relying heavily on the work of volunteers: only 55.6% of the staff are full-time, and 14.4% are part-time, but 30% are volunteers.

As regards the social background of staff members in Hanoi, many come from the state apparatus (the mean is 5.3 staff members). They are academics/scholars (the mean for those who indicate that they hold a university or other degree in the humanities is 5.2, and 2.7 for those with a science degree; physicians (the mean is 2.9); or teachers (the respective mean is 2.0).

In Ho Chi Minh City, the social workers (professionals or semi-professionals) play a more important role as staff members than is the case in Hanoi (the mean is 2.9). Others are teachers (mean 2.70) or members of the state apparatus. That means that many staffers, in both cities, belong to what was formerly called the intelligentsia.

As regards the question of gender of the staff members, the figures show that women play an important role: female staff members are the majority in the issue-oriented organizations in Hanoi (62.5%) as well as in Ho Chi Minh City (57.3%).

Whereas in Hanoi, only 16.7% of the issue-oriented organizations accept anyone as a registered member, in Ho Chi Minh City 48.1% of issue-oriented organizations do so.[13] This phenomenon may reflect a certain open-mindedness of the people leading these organizations in Ho Chi Minh City, as well as their participatory approach with respect to the broader public, as well as to the target groups. Such an approach is conducive to tackling the difficult problems in the fields of social work and charity work.

Funding and maintaining an annual budget is very important, not only for the operation and development of civic organizations, but also for the consolidation of their independence and their potential for exerting power as social actors. Findings show that an overwhelming majority of issue-oriented organizations have their own annual budget, collected from a variety of sources. In Hanoi, 73.9% of issue-oriented organizations, and in Ho Chi Minh City, 90.9%, claim they have their own budgets.

A very interesting difference between the issue-oriented organizations in the North and the South can be observed in analyzing the responses to the

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13. This question was answered by only 12 out of 46 organizations in Hanoi.

question of which funding resources for these organizations are most important: in Hanoi, these organizations indicate that their most important resources are "fees for services provided" (54.3%), "funding from foreign partners" (26.1%), "sponsorships from governmental agencies" (8.7%), "membership fees" (6.5%), and "donations from (private) domestic sources" (2.2%). The clearcut priorities seem to indicate a certain dependence on fees for services provided. Although there is a certain danger of commercialization here, according to our in-depth interviews, this danger has not manifested itself.

Issue-oriented organizations in Ho Chi Minh City have a more diversified pattern with respect to the funding structure of their activities: their most important sources are "funding from foreign sources" (24.6%), "donations from (private) domestic sources" (22.7%), "fees for services provided" (17.4%), and "sponsorships from governmental agencies" (14.5%). All in all, one might assume that the funding structure of the Vietnamese issue-oriented organizations may be seen as a first step towards a sustainable financing strategy, which should give such organizations greater autonomy in running their programs.

Assessing the Relationship between Issue-Oriented and Governmental Organizations

One of the most striking facts of the survey is that (in general) there are more problems in the relationship between issue-oriented organizations and governmental organizations in Hanoi than is the case in Ho Chi Minh City: only 37% of the issue-oriented organizations in Hanoi, but 60.0% of the Ho Chi Minh City-based groups, indicate that it is "easy" to work with governmental organizations. A total of 35.7% of the issue-oriented organizations in Ho Chi Minh City and 52.2% in Hanoi indicate that "sometimes there are problems" in the relationship. At first glance this is an astonishing fact, if one works on the assumption that the Southern organizations are more strongly engaged in politically sensitive fields than their Northern counterparts, for example, the fight against "social vices."

"Problems" in the relationship to governmental organizations seem to be more pronounced for those Hanoi-based issue-oriented organizations established between 1995 and 2000. Whereas 38.9% of the representatives of organizations founded between 1990 and 1995 point to "problems" within the respective relationship, 61.5% of the representatives whose organizations were established between 1995 and 2000 claim only that, "from time to time there are problems." "Easy" relationships are described by 50% of the representatives of the 1990–95 generation, and 30.8% of those in the 1995–2000 generation.

With respect to Southern organizations, the findings are different: more than two-thirds of the representatives of organizations established between 1985 and 1990 and two-thirds of those whose organizations were founded between 1995 and 2000 point to "easy" relationships with governmental organizations, and only about one-third indicate that "from time to time there are problems." For those organizations founded in the first half of the 1990s, relationships to governmental agencies are a bit more strained: nearly 50% of the interviewed representatives indicate there are "problems," while nearly 50% describe the relationship as "easy."

There are multiple reasons for the emergence of problems as well as for the absence of trouble. Interestingly enough, it appears that working within a politically sensitive field, for example, prostitution, gambling, drug addiction, domestic violence, etc., does not lead to a problem-burdened relationship. In our research, we found no empirical evidence for the assumption that the specific sub-subgroup of issue-oriented organizations working to counter "social vices" have dramatically more, or more frequent, problems with governmental organizations (41.4%). Nor do our findings indicate easy relationships with these organizations to a significantly lesser extent (58.6%).

In Hanoi, it is the sub-subgroup of issue-oriented organizations that offer a whole variety of services, that indicate relatively increased trouble: 57% of these organizations indicate problems in their relationships with governmental organizations. There must be other factors than that of working in a politically sensitive field that could help to explain the high degree of problems in these relationships, especially in Hanoi. I will return to this question below.

Major Modes of the Relationships between Issue-Oriented and Governmental Organizations

Issue-oriented organizations enjoy a certain degree of independence: 52.2% of the interviewed representatives (of the first stage of the survey) in Hanoi and 62.9% of their counterparts in Ho Chi Minh City indicate: "We can work independently." But there are also representatives of these organizations in both cities who claim that there is a high degree of control and guidance, and even direct intervention, in some of their activities. This is the case with respect to organizations fighting against social vices in Ho Chi Minh City and with respect to service-oriented issue-oriented organizations in Hanoi. The former indicate more "control and guidance" (27.6%) than other issue-oriented organizations (all Ho Chi Minh City-based issue-oriented organizations: 18.6%). The service-oriented issue-oriented organizations in Hanoi claim less "independence" for their work (47.8%) (all Hanoi-based issue-oriented organizations: 52.2%) and a higher degree of "there is no pattern in the mode of relationships" (26.1%) (all Hanoi-based issue-oriented organiza-

tions: 21.7%). The degree of control and guidance in the relationship may be different for the various "generations" of such organizations, but there is more control and guidance, and less independence, in both cities indicated by organizations founded at different times.

If I compare the indications provided by the interviewed representatives (first stage of our survey) of the three generations of issue-oriented organizations in the South, the data unveil a constant decrease in those who claim "we can work independently"; an increase in those who indicate "the governmental organizations control and guide our work directly"; an increase in those who claim "there is no pattern in the mode of this relationship"; and an increase in those who indicate "governmental organizations don't support certain plans of our organization."

In the North, the percentage of those who indicate "we can work independently" remains the same with respect to the two generations of issue-oriented organizations (1990–95 and 1995–2000), and the number of those who indicate "the governmental organizations control and guide our work directly" even decreases. But the percentage of those who state "they do not support certain plans" and "there is no pattern in the mode of this relationship" increases sharply. The increase with respect to the statement "they do not support certain plans" clearly indicates less independence with respect to their working conditions for those issue-oriented organizations founded after 1995, since this is only an indirect way of stating "governmental organizations prohibit certain of our activities." The remarkably high proportion of "no pattern in the mode of relationships" for the second generation could be understood as an indicator for "less independence" if one works with the following assumption: if the representatives of such organizations cannot detect a clear pattern in the (re-)action of the authorities, they may tend to refrain (at least temporarily) from certain activities. Insofar as a (self-induced) restriction with respect to certain activities takes place, the organizations may actually enjoy (at least temporarily) "less independence" than other organizations of the same type.

Issue-oriented organizations in both cities seem to attract the attention of governmental organizations to a particularly high degree. More attention is given in both cities with respect to those organizations founded between 1995 and 2000. But the consequences of such "control and guidance" for the actors seem to be different: for the Southerners, the state's "control and guidance" of their activities obviously does not seem to disturb an overall positive assessment of their relationship to governmental organizations. On the contrary: those organizations founded after 1995 and facing more "control and guidance" even indicate an overall better relationship to governmen-

tal organizations ("easy" relations are indicated by 70.8%).[14] For issue-oriented organizations in Hanoi, the extent of control, guidance, and other mechanisms to keep their activities closely regulated seems to adversely affect their overall assessment of their relationship to governmental organizations: 61.5% of those organizations founded after 1995 indicate that "from time to time there are problems" in the respective relationship, whereas only 38.5% of organizations founded between 1990 and 1995 point to trouble-burdened relations with state agencies.

Explanations for such differences in assessments of relationships could be found in assumptions based on psychological, social psychological, and culturalistic postulations. In addition, one might assume that the practices undertaken by governmental agencies to keep social activities under their control are more strictly enforced and more harshly applied in the North than in the South. The reason for such differences may lie in their distinct "state traditions" (see below).

Factors Impacting the Relationship between Issue-Oriented and Governmental Organizations

After statistical and content analysis on the material we gathered in the research project, I have identified eight factors: "objectives," "activities," "key persons," "political connections," "resources," "issue-culture," "negotiations with governmental agencies at local level," and "state traditions," which have an impact on the relationships between issue-oriented and governmental organizations. The factors are not listed in ranking order. Five factors (objectives, activities, key persons, political connections, and resources) are derived by statistical analysis of the data of the standardized interviews. The other three factors (issue-culture, negotiations with local governmental agencies, and state traditions) can be found in the answers of those interviewed for the second phase, in which we asked about the nature of the relationship between their organization and government organizations. The results of both analyses complement each other. Each of these two groups of factors will now be discussed in detail.

Factors Derived by Statistical Analysis of Standardized Interview Data

In general, from the actors' perspective, objectives and activities on the one hand, and key persons and political connections on the other hand, have the strongest, most decisive impact on the state and development of the relation-

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14. Only 46.2% of those organizations founded in 1990–95 indicate having "easy" relations with state agencies.

ship between their organization and governmental organizations. This view highlights four very important factors, the impact of which can be imagined. But with respect to the question, which type of relationship between these organizations is correlated with which factor? at least from a statistician's point of view, the picture remains rather unclear (only in Ho Chi Minh City are the factors, activities and objectives, correlated with easy relationships). Therefore additional and more sophisticated analysis of the data was necessary.

Despite the actors' claim that resources have no significant direct impact on the relationships with governmental organizations, I would argue that the availability of different resources has an influence on the different roles taken by issue-oriented and governmental organizations in relation to each other, and also on the modes which arise out of these relationships. In this respect, resources have an impact on the relationships, even if it is indirect.

That resources have an indirect impact can be drawn from a comprehensive statistical analysis of the data gained in the first stage of the survey. In this analysis, cross-tabulations have been carried out between the resource structure (which resources are the "most important resources" relied on by the issue-oriented organizations); the potentially most conflictive political role such organizations play, namely being an "intermediary" *or* an "advocate" (referred to as "medium profile") or being an "intermediary" *and* an "advocate" (referred to as "high political profile"); and what kinds of relationships result from interaction of such issue-oriented organizations with governmental organizations. The result can be summarized as follows: In Hanoi, "funding from foreign partners" and a medium or high political profile are correlated with problem-burdened relationships with governmental organizations.[15] Other resources, especially "fees for services provided" and a high or a medium political profile, do not correlate inevitably with problem-burdened relations.

In Ho Chi Minh City, "donations from domestic sources" and a medium political profile (here: playing the role of an "intermediary") correlate with "problems" within the relationships between issue-oriented organizations and governmental organizations. This finding applies to all three generations of issue-oriented organizations. "Governmental sponsorship" and a medium, as well as a low, political profile (playing neither the role of "intermediary" nor "advocate") in general correlates with easy relations with government agencies.[16] Other resources, in combination with a specific political profile, do

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15. This finding applies to those issue-oriented organizations founded after 1995. Three-fourths of the interviewed representatives of organizations founded in 1990–95 indicate an "easy" relationship; one-fourth have "no idea."

16. The number of such cases is very small.

not seem to have any decisive impact on which kind of relationship arises out of the interaction.

The following conclusions can be drawn from these findings: in Hanoi, to be in command of "funding from foreign partners" might bolster the independence of issue-oriented organizations from governmental organizations, potentially even bringing about a conflict in their relations. Cash-strapped governmental organizations may see such organizations as competitors for resources, and may, in turn, foster a hostile attitude toward them and increase conflicts. Moreover, it might be that a general tendency towards more control of societal organizations in the second half of the 1990s has led to special attention on such foreign-funded groups that demonstrate a concomitant self-confidence.

In Ho Chi Minh City, issue-oriented organizations keep a lower political profile than their counterparts in the North. Nevertheless, one of the most traditional funding sources, "donations from domestic sources," seems to worsen the two-way relationship from the very outset. I assume that the availability of resources from private donors may not only bolster the societal organization's independence but may also attract the special attention of governmental organizations. Since the origin of such funds may not be entirely comprehensible to governmental organizations, issue-oriented organizations which receive such donations may arouse official suspicion and subsequent problems.

Factors Derived from Second-Phase
Interview Responses

It is mainly from the in-depth interviews that I have gained insight into the importance of the following three factors for the relationships between issue-oriented organizations and governmental organizations: "issue-culture" (i.e., the dominant ways to deal with social problems, etc.), "negotiating with governmental agencies at local level," and "state traditions" (i.e., how central and wide-reaching the state's role should be).

Issue-culture refers to the fact that each city dealing with social problems is bound by different traditions and experiences. One important example can be found in the realm of social work. In Ho Chi Minh City, "modern" or "Westernized" practices and theories of social work are comparatively well known. In the 1950s, 1960s, and the first half of the 1970s, many groups and individuals participated in French, and particularly, American, training and assistance programs. The tradition of "modern" social work was kept alive throughout the years after 1975, even when, officially, other methodologies were preferred. It may be that this social work practice has strengthened a certain public understanding of alternative methods, and such practice may even have instilled state officials with an adequate understanding of social

problems. Due to historical specifics in the North and the South during the 1950s and 1960s, there are still some differences in local cultural experiences and in modes for dealing with social problems. I assume that since traditions and experiences such as those mentioned above may help to ease problems between issue-oriented and governmental organizations, the absence of such background experiences could lead to more strained relations.

According to the founders of a variety of women-related projects in Ho Chi Minh City with whom I had a discussion, negotiating with governmental organizations proved very successful for minimizing problems. They told me that the relationships with governmental organizations are "easy" indeed. This is because local authorities at ward or district level could be per-suaded—after lengthy talks—that there was no good to the groups' alterna-tive methods for solving certain social problems, e.g., starting a credit cooperative to help poor women who were also suffering from domestic vio-lence. This and similar projects were able to begin in the early 1990s. Since work by these groups proved successful, local authorities increasingly be-lieved in such projects and their founders. Here has been put into practice, at the local level and by very small, grassroots-based projects and organizations, what advocates of a "dialogical state-society approach," such as Ben Kerk-vliet, call "negotiating the state."[17]

State traditions are a major factor in precipitating strained relations be-tween both issue-oriented and governmental organizations, especially in Ha-noi. The perception of a bias against non-state ("private") activities on the part of government officials, government organizations, and mass organiza-tions is evident in all interviews (done at the second stage of our survey) with representatives of Hanoi-based issue-oriented organizations. Some inter-viewees indicate a general "lack of understanding," even a "prejudice" against their organization and its activities (at least at the time of founding, but often later on as well). Some mention the "ignorance" that government officials show regarding issue-oriented organizations and their activities, and some others criticize the unconcealed attitude of "non-cooperation" mani-fested in words and/or deeds by state officials. Other representatives of such organizations in Hanoi even report unpleasant incidents occurring when gov-ernment officials were approached. Some indicate an unjustified preference for state organizations and state-owned enterprises, when the social organiza-tions wanted to participate in bids for Overseas Development Aid or similarly

17. Koh offers an instructive short description of this "dialogical approach." See David Koh, "Negotiating the Socialist State in Vietnam through Local Administrators: The Case of Karaoke Shops," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 16:2 (October 2001), p. 280. At present there are at least three "schools" conceptualizing state-society relationship in Vietnam. For an excellent overview see Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, "An Approach for Analysing State-Society Relations in Vietnam," in ibid., pp. 238–78.

funded programs and projects. Some state agencies and state-owned enterprises seem to perceive issue-oriented organizations as competitors that need to be kept out of business, or at least under their thumb.

Many government officials contribute to problems in the relationships between governmental organizations and issue-oriented organizations. In interviews, some officials acknowledge that it took a long time before they understood not only the objectives of issue-oriented and other types of civic organizations and the sense of some of their activities, but also the real power and the direction of some of these groups. My impression is that even today, many state officials do not clearly understand the activities of such organizations. Nevertheless, officials insist upon directing, guiding, and controlling all societal organizations. They insist upon their right to approve any activity undertaken by organizations under their administration. Even more, issue-oriented and other types of civic organizations are seen as only temporarily necessary. This view is put forward in a nutshell by a People's Committee chairwoman in Ho Chi Minh City (district level). In her view, for example, poverty alleviation is a duty of the state and a problem which will be solved mainly by state-administered programs at a given time: "The operation of social organizations is just temporarily urgent!"

Despite the last quotation, "statism" seems to be less of a problem for issue-oriented organizations in Ho Chi Minh City. It is noteworthy that representatives of such organizations request the state's financial and organizational support, insist on and believe in the necessity of clear-cut roles and a common understanding of the tasks both "partners" have to carry out, and ask for regulations favorable to issue-oriented organizations and other types of civic organizations. But, in comparison, they do not ask as strongly for an appreciation of their work and their group by governmental organizations. Most of the Southern issue-oriented organizations have "easy" relationships with governmental organizations due to a clear-cut, but rather traditional, definition of the role they are meant to play: as a former representative of one such group remarks, "As long as we do charity work or our work is understood as charity work by the authorities, there is no problem."

Conclusion

At present, Vietnam has a wide variety of different types of civic organizations, among them issue-oriented organizations. Their great numbers, and their variety of activities, are empirical evidence for the thesis of an increasing diversification of social, economic, and political practices in Vietnam. The different modes and roles arising out of the relationships between issue-oriented organizations and governmental organizations are also understandable as a first and preliminary verification of two of my basic hypotheses. First, the "modernization" of Vietnamese society, and ongoing processes of

societal change, result in the emergence of new social actors, who can be seen as protagonists of these processes of change. Second, the complex process of societal change implies an opening of some political space. Issue-oriented organizations, as well as other types of civic organizations, can make use of it.

The following conclusions should shed some light on the relationship between societal change and the emergence and development of issue-oriented organizations in Vietnam. In addition, I would like to review the impact that political conditions have on the nature of the relationships between issue-oriented and governmental organizations. Also, I will come back to the thesis of different sociocultural conditions and traditions prevalent in both cities, and their impact on activities of, and approaches applied by, the issue-oriented organizations. Last, but not least, I will offer some conclusions with respect to possible changes in the patterns of state-society relationships.

First: The main activities that issue-oriented organizations pursue in both cities show that these organizations respond to a variety of societal and political problems. Their fight against social problems, the use of social work practices to combat domestic violence, the offer of training and education classes free of charge, the establishment of public health care projects, etc., point to the fact that there is a widening gap between desperate societal needs and what the state and the economy can provide. Issue-oriented organizations that offer services in different policy areas (research, consulting, training, further education) react to the needs of the government, international donors, international NGOs, and other organizations for human resources, as well as to an urgent need for policy alternatives in various policy fields. Issue-oriented organizations based in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are filling a wide variety of gaps, and they are filling these gaps in very specific ways.

Second: The policy of reform offers different political opportunities for the founding of civic organizations—this holds true even in the case of civic organizations of the same type. For this thesis, I would like to offer only one example: for those who wanted to found new issue-oriented organizations engaged in research, consulting, and related services, two legal documents issued in January and November 1992 were positive signals allowing their establishment.[18] Thus, favorable legal provisions precipitated the first boom

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18. Here I refer to the following two legal documents: "Nghi dinh so 35-HDTB ngay 28-1-1992 cua Hoi Dong Bo truong ve cong tac quan ly khoa hoc va cong nghe" [Decision 35-HDTB of January 28, 1992, of the Council of Ministers on the management of science and technology], in *Cac van ban phap luat ve khoa hoc cong nghe* [Legal texts on science and technology] (Hanoi: National Publishing House, 1993), pp. 42–50; "Thong tu lien bo so 195-LB ngay 13-11-1992 cua Bo Khoa hoc, Cong nghe va moi truong–Ban to chuc–can bo Chinh phu huong dan dang ky hoat dong cua cac to chuc nghien cuu khoa hoc va phat trien cong nghe" [Joint Circular 195-LB of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment and the Government Commis-

in such organizations in Hanoi during the mid-1990s. No such similar positive "signal" was given to those who wanted to found issue-oriented organizations in social work, public welfare, etc., at that time. In fact, most of the founders of such organizations, and here again I think of the founders of such organizations in Ho Chi Minh City, had to rely on what marks their strength: personal motivation, personal endurance and energy, and various kinds of resources (e.g., donations from domestic sources, trained and educated staff members, supporters).[19]

Third: Among the most striking findings of the survey are the differences between issue-oriented organizations based in Hanoi and those working in Ho Chi Minh City. The particular economic, political, and sociocultural conditions prevailing in each city seem to have a strong impact on the activities of these organizations and the approaches they apply in order to tackle social problems. From a historical, sociological, ethnological, and "culturalistic" perspective, the activities, as well as the approaches, of the Hanoi-based issue-oriented organizations could be assessed as more "tradition-bound" (i.e., emphasizing the importance of knowledge and knowledge-based concepts, teaching, education, and appealing to government organizations in order to solve social problems), whereas those of the Ho Chi Minh City-based issue-oriented organizations could be seen as more "modern" (i.e., focusing more on practices of direct intervention wherever social problems evolve; putting to use various concepts of social work; self-reliance, energy, and flexibility without ignoring the state; open-mindedness towards new problem-solving ideas and practices as the need arises). One could even say that the geographical differences between such organizations express different societal identities prevailing in the North and South. Further substantiation of this thesis is far beyond the scope of this article.[20]

Fourth: There are strong indications for a sharply defined change in the patterns of state-society relationships. Change began in the mid-1990s, at the latest. The findings point to varying policies that led to a certain opening at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, followed by a relative

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sion for Organization and Personnel promulgating implementing regulations for registration], in *Cac van ban phap luat ve khoa hoc cong nghe* [Legal texts on science and technology] (Hanoi: National Publishing House, 1993), pp. 51–65.

19. It is possible that some issue-oriented organizations, especially those in the South, and especially those working in the field of social welfare, are not dependent on such conditions. Their independence of political opportunities might be seen as a function of their general orientation, their organizational structure (small, flexible, grassroots-oriented), how they perceive the structure of the problems their activity is focused on, and how they deal with these problems.

20. Taylor's superb book on a distinctive Southern identity offers an excellent starting point for such an endeavor. The book draws heavily on a broad discussion among Vietnamese scholars on this issue in the early 1990s. See Philip Taylor, *Fragments of the Present: Searching for Modernity in Vietnam's South* (Crows Nest and Honolulu: Allen and Unwin, 2001).

closure of "political space." My hypothesis would be that Vietnam is moving towards state corporatism, i.e., admitting or conceding the emergence of new civic organizations (issue-oriented, professional, and business), yet keeping them under strict control. By containing, dissolving, or remolding organizations, including through legalizing them, governmental organizations are trying to weed out those outside the framework of the political system, which is undergoing processes of reform but remains under the control of the Vietnamese Communist Party. A so-called NGO-Law has been under discussion since the early 1990s and a general legalization process is inevitable. This law will probably require registering organizations with a specific political-administrative body. This will bring in an additional tool commonly used in other Southeast Asian countries that helps governmental organizations to weed out groups that are "unwelcome" for whatever reason, and to more effectively control all the others.

In addition to legalization, processes of commercialization may play a supportive role in further integrating specific civic organizations into the political system. I assume that the possibility of receiving fees for scientific and other services or opportunities to participate in foreign-sponsored development programs administered by governmental organizations (for example, those aiming at developing rural areas) will offer some issue-oriented organizations (additional) funding sources. Such opportunities increase the likelihood that some issue-oriented organizations will adapt their profile and activities more and more to correspond to the principles of potential donors or funders.