

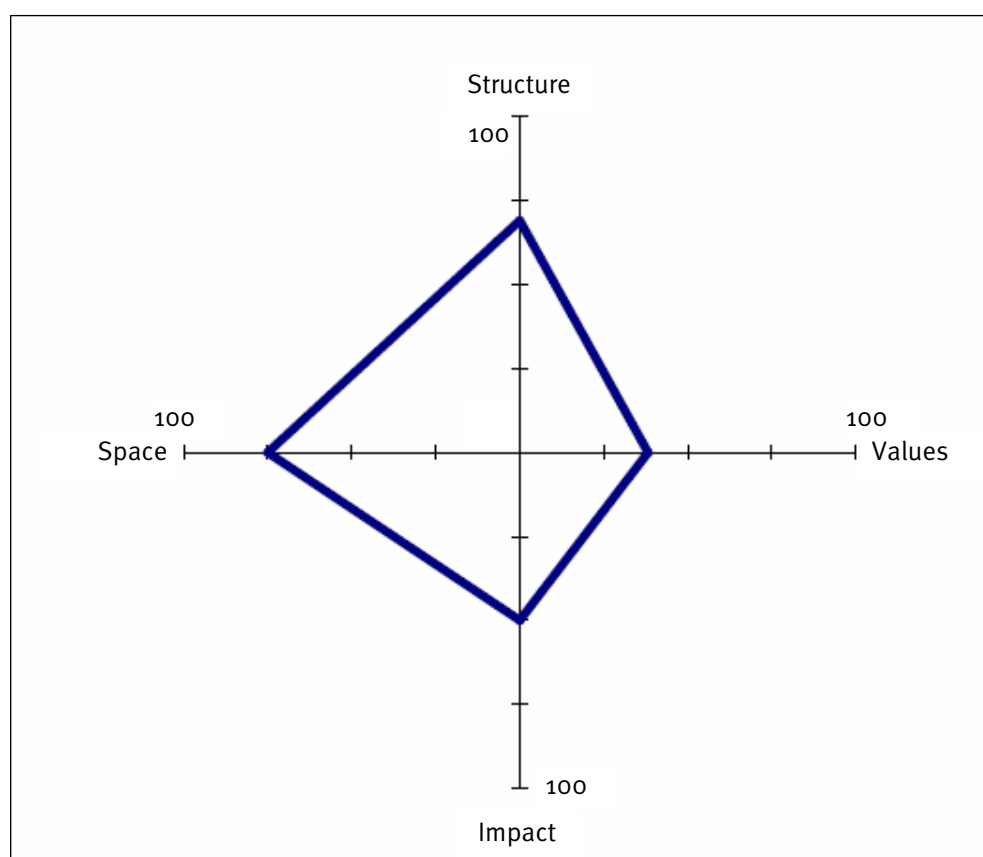
1. Civil Society Index (CIVICUS)

A tool for assessing and comparing civil societies, in order to strengthen them

What is the Civil Society Index?

The Civil Society Index (CSI) was developed by CIVICUS, an alliance of civil society organisations with members in over 100 countries. The goals of the CSI are to enhance the strength and sustainability of civil society and to strengthen civil society's contribution to positive social change. The strategy for contributing towards these goals is one of generating and sharing knowledge about the state of national civil societies. The index uses a standard framework to assess the health and vitality of national civil societies, and then employs a graphical device – the ‘civil society diamond’ – to present this information.

Figure 1: The CIVICUS Civil Society Diamond



How does the Civil Society Index work?

The CSI defines civil society as ‘the arena, outside of the family, the state and the market where people associate to advance common interests’ (Heinrich, 2004: 13). The CSI is a tool for mapping various dimensions of this arena. By beginning with a broad definition of civil society, the CSI encourages local researchers to decide for themselves what exactly is, and is not, included within their own definition of civil society. The CSI also recognises that civil society extends beyond NGOs and that it is composed of negative and violent forces that may obstruct social progress as well as positive and peaceful forces (Heinrich, 2002).

A CSI assessment collects data on four dimensions of civil society, identified as important by CIVICUS. These dimensions are:

- **Structure:** What is the internal make-up of civil society? How large, vibrant and representative is civil society? What are the key relationships? What resources do they command?
- **Space/environment:**⁴ What is the political, socioeconomic, cultural and legal environment in which civil society exists? Are these factors enabling or disabling to civil society?
- **Values:** What are the values that civil society practises and promotes?
- **Impact:** What is the impact of civil society? Is it effective in resolving social, economic and political problems, and in serving the common good?

Each dimension has a range of individual indicators scored from 0 to 3. The scores are aggregated and can be graphically represented in the form of the civil society diamond, although this process of aggregation necessarily means that some of the richness of the qualitative information is lost.

The aim is for the CSI country reports to give as rich an account as possible, without the constraint of having to quantify or score it. The CSI's designers therefore suggest a citizen jury approach to the scoring. Assessments have been led by prominent civil society organisations, which have coordinated input from a range of stakeholders – including government, business, international agencies, media and academia. The approach emphasises the importance of moving back and forth between research and analysis, and involving a range of stakeholders at all stages of the process. The CSI approach has been implemented in more than 50 countries.

Elements of the Civil Society Index

Conceptual approach and indicators

- With its focus very much on civil society, and its aim of providing both a framework for analysis and a process for building civil society, the CSI will be of considerable interest to CSOs.
- The approach taken by the CSI is to map civil society according to how close it is to being a 'healthy civil society', characterised by tolerance, human rights, gender equity, sustainable development, social justice, democracy and transparency. This approach, while open to criticism, does have the benefit of making explicit the normative stance taken.
- CSOs may find the dimensions and sub-dimensions of civil society considered by the CSI index of use in their own efforts to map context. Starting from a clear statement of purpose, CSOs could put together their own mapping tool making use of a perhaps smaller number of sub-dimensions.

Box 4: Dimensions and sub-dimensions assessed by the CSI approach

Structure: breadth and depth of citizen participation; diversity within civil society; level of organisation; inter-relations; resources.

Space/environment: political context; basic freedoms and rights; socioeconomic context; socio-cultural context; legal environment; state-civil society relations; private sector-civil society relations.

Values (of civil society): democracy; transparency; tolerance; non-violence; gender equity; poverty eradication; environmental sustainability.

Impact: influencing public policy; holding state and private corporations accountable; responding to social interests; empowering citizens; meeting societal needs.

⁴ In some applications of the CSI, 'environment' is used instead of 'space'.

Data

- The CSI approach suggests the following data sources: media reviews; stakeholder consultations; and community surveys. Such data sources may be of use to CSOs seeking to map contexts for their own purposes.
- The CSI approach is designed to be very interactive, so that the capacity of civil society is built in the process of producing a map of civil society. This provides an additional benefit of CSO involvement in CSI processes.
- The CSI approach is designed to be flexible and to encourage in-country adaptations, with an evaluation of the approach describing it as a 'contextually flexible and uniquely participatory tool' (Batliwala, 2003: 1). The loosely structured approach to mapping civil society provides a good balance between valuing country comparability and acknowledging country specificity.

Analysis, presentation and recommendations

- The careful positioning of the CSI approach is carried over into the analysis and presentation of results. On the one hand, the civil society diamond provides a useful graphic device for comparative purposes. On the other, the country reports provide country-specific detail. This is a useful way of producing outputs that are useful for different audiences.
- At a country level, the information provided by a CSI assessment can help CSOs to think more strategically about their future activities and contributions to strengthening civil society. At an international level, the CSI can enable CSOs and others to make quick comparisons among countries, identifying countries where there might be particular lessons to be learnt about how to strengthen civil society, or where engagement to strengthen civil society might be particularly effective.

Key references

The CSI tool itself can be found at:

http://www.civicus.org/new/media/improving_understanding_and_strength_of_CS.pdf.

With further details at:

http://www.civicus.org/new/media/CSI_Methodology_and_conceptual_framework.pdf.

Discussions of the CSI include:

Batliwala, S. (2003) 'Main Findings and Recommendations of Evaluation of the Pilot Phase of the CIVICUS Index on Civil Society project' (Executive Summary), online at <http://www.civicus.org> – CSI, Documents and Publications section.

Bežovan, G., S. Zrinščak and M. Vugec (2005) *Civil Society in Croatia, Gaining Trust and Establishing Partnerships with the State and Other Stakeholders*, Zagreb: Centre for Development of Non-Profit Organizations (CERANEO).

Heinrich, V. F. (2002) 'Managing Trade-offs: Challenges Faced in Designing the Implementation Approach of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index', paper presented at the ISTR Conference, Cape Town, 6-10 July, online at <http://www.istr.org/conferences/capetown/volume/heinrich.pdf>.

Heinrich, V. F. (2004) 'Assessing and Strengthening Civil Society Worldwide. A Project Description of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index: A Participatory Needs Assessment and Action-planning Tool for Society', online at <http://www.civicus.org> – CSI, Documents and Publications section.