

## Social Accountability as an Innovative Frame in Civic Action: The Case of *Rede Nossa São Paulo*

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**Abstract** In the past three decades, Brazil's state and civil society have undergone a transformation. Non-profit organizations have proliferated, revealing new opportunities for participation, while sustainability and corporate social responsibility have produced new agendas for corporations. Against this background, accountability has emerged within the debate, particularly with regard to governmental transparency and efficiency. This paper examines the *Rede Nossa São Paulo* movement, which pledges social justice and sustainability and promotes social accountability as its main strategy to achieve its mission. Thus, the main objective of this study is to understand social accountability; more broadly, the goal is to examine governmental accountability in the mobilization process developed by *Rede Nossa São Paulo* by referring to the framing perspective as a core aspect in the understanding of social movements. Social accountability is presented as a frame that is composed of the union between movements that are historically bonded by the *motto* of social justice and other groups that are related to urban development and social and environmental responsibility.

**Résumé** L'état et la société civile brésiliens se sont transformés au cours des trois dernières décennies. Les organisations à but non lucratif ont proliféré, ouvrant de nouvelles opportunités de participation, alors que dans le même temps le développement durable et la responsabilité sociale des entreprises ont mené les entreprises à adopter de nouveaux programmes. C'est dans ce contexte que la question de la responsabilité a émergé au sein du débat, et plus particulièrement en rapport avec les questions de transparence et d'efficacité gouvernementales. Cet article examine le mouvement Rede Nossa São Paulo qui, dédié à la justice sociale et au développement

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durable, a fait de la responsabilité sociale sa stratégie principale pour remplir sa mission. Ainsi, l'objectif principal de cette étude est de comprendre la notion de responsabilité sociale ; de façon plus générale, le but est d'examiner la responsabilité gouvernementale au sein du processus de mobilisation que Rede Nossa São Paulo a développé, en approchant le cadre conceptuel comme un aspect essentiel de la compréhension des mouvements sociaux. La responsabilité sociale est présentée comme un cadre résultant de l'union entre des mouvements historiquement unis par leur adoption de la justice sociale comme mot d'ordre et d'autres groupes liés au développement urbain et à la responsabilité sociale et environnementale.

**Zusammenfassung** In den vergangenen drei Jahrzehnten erlebten die Staats- und die Zivilgesellschaft in Brasilien eine Transformation. Nonprofit-Organisationen nahmen stark zu und boten neue Möglichkeiten der Partizipation, während die Nachhaltigkeit und soziale Verantwortung der Unternehmen neue Unternehmensprogramme schufen. Vor diesem Hintergrund tauchte das Konzept der Verantwortlichkeit in Diskussionen auf, insbesondere im Hinblick auf die Transparenz und Effizienz der Regierung. Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht die Bewegung Rede Nossa São Paulo, die soziale Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit verspricht und die soziale Verantwortlichkeit als ihre wichtigste Strategie zur Erfüllung ihrer Mission fördert. Das primäre Ziel dieser Studie ist es, zu einem Verständnis der sozialen Verantwortlichkeit zu gelangen und im weiteren Sinne die Verantwortlichkeit der Regierung in dem von der Rede Nossa São Paulo entwickelten Mobilisierungsprozess zu untersuchen, wobei auf die Framing-Perspektive als ein wesentlicher Aspekt für das Verständnis sozialer Bewegungen Bezug genommen wird. Die soziale Verantwortlichkeit wird als ein Framing-Aspekt präsentiert, der sich aus dem Zusammenschluss zwischen Bewegungen, die historisch an das Motto sozialer Gerechtigkeit gebunden sind, und anderen Gruppen, die in Verbindung mit der Stadtentwicklung sowie der sozialen und der Umweltverantwortlichkeit verbunden sind, zusammensetzt.

**Resumen** En las últimas tres décadas, el estado y la sociedad civil brasileñas han sufrido una transformación. Las organizaciones sin ánimo de lucro han proliferado, revelando nuevas oportunidades de participación, mientras que la sostenibilidad y la responsabilidad social corporativa han producido nuevas agendas para las corporaciones. Frente a este telón de fondo, la rendición de cuentas ha entrado en el debate, en particular con respecto a la transparencia y la eficiencia gubernamentales. El presente documento examina el movimiento Rede Nossa Sao Paulo, que promete justicia social y sostenibilidad y fomenta la rendición de cuentas social como su principal estrategia para lograr su misión. De este modo, el principal objetivo del presente estudio es comprender la responsabilidad social; más en general, la meta es examinar la responsabilidad gubernamental en el proceso de movilización desarrollado por Rede Nossa Sao Paulo haciendo referencia a la perspectiva de estructuración como un aspecto fundamental en la comprensión de los movimientos sociales. La responsabilidad social se presenta como un marco que está compuesto por la unión entre movimientos que están unidos históricamente por la consigna de

la justicia social y otros grupos que están relacionados con el desarrollo y la responsabilidad social y medioambiental.

**Keywords** Accountability · Social movements · Frame analysis

## Introduction

In the decades since the re-democratization of Brazil (1985), the country's state and civil society have been experiencing a transformation: new decentralized and managerial models of public management have been debated and implemented; non-profit organizations have proliferated, revealing new opportunities for participation in different public arenas of the country; and sustainability and corporate social responsibility have created new agendas for corporations. In this context, accountability has emerged within the debate, particularly with regard to governmental transparency and efficiency. Social accountability, which refers to the *non-electoral yet vertical mechanism of control of political authorities that rests on the actions of an array of citizens' associations and movements and the media* (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2006, p. 10), has become part of the discourse of new social movements. These movements are characterized by the diversity among their members and by the changes that they have been producing in the current institutional status. Among these new social movements, *Rede Nossa São Paulo* (Our São Paulo Network) is an example of the innovations that are occurring in civic action. The movement pledges social justice and sustainability for the second largest city in the world and emphasizes social accountability as the key component of its mission.

*Rede Nossa São Paulo* has become a reference within the realm of civil society because of its strong articulation capacity and its organizational and political model, with dozens of similar initiatives spreading throughout Brazil and Latin America. By the middle of 2011, after 4 years of existence, the movement consisted of 649 associated organizations, including multilateral agencies, neighborhood associations, professional associations, companies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), networks, media, workers' unions, and universities. The majority of members are non-state public organizations or grassroots organizations that focus on a variety of objectives from political mobilization to the provision of services. The number of corporations—and their related philanthropic branches—that are participating and financing the movement is also notable, as partnerships among social movements and private sector actors are a recent development in the country (Fischer 2005).

The main objective of this article is to understand how social accountability—and more broadly, governmental accountability—act as a “social frame” as defined by the frame analysis perspective in social movement theory (Benford and Snow 2000; Campbell 2005; Goffman 1974; Snow and Soule 2009) in the mobilization process developed by *Rede Nossa São Paulo*. By studying *Rede Nossa São Paulo*, this research examines the emergence of social accountability, which is presented as a frame that unifies movements that are historically bonded by the *motto* of social

justice with other groups related to urban development and social and environmental responsibility. The background discussions include the right to the city, the classic dilemmas on representation and the new paths in the field of democratic models.

### Frame Analysis Perspective in Social Movement Theory

The frame analysis perspective has emerged from the microsociology studies of Erving Goffman (1974), who introduced the concept of frames as cognitive structures that guide the perception and representation of reality. Moreover, frames are social structures that are unconsciously developed through communicative processes; they are interpreting schemes that locate, perceive, identify, and label what is in the “outside world” and explain “what is going on.”

[t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. (Entman 1993, p. 52)

Among different social movement theories, the frame analysis perspective has proliferated since the 1980s and has focused on the conceptualization of cultural aspects of social movements, relating frames, and cultural phenomena as a basis for understanding mobilization processes (Snow et al. 1986; Benford and Snow 2000; Campbell 2005; Snow and Soule 2009). These cited authors use the concept of frames and collective action frames to understand the character and course of social movements, including their origins, diffusion, and any mobilizing or counter-mobilizing ideas. Collective action frames are “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of social movement organizations” (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 614).

Johnston (2002) identified five fundamental elements of frames: (1) their content, (2) their cognitive structure or the hierarchical organization of the content, (3) their patterned form of sharing by different individuals, (4) their fixed (interpretive repertory) and emerging (processes) elements, and (5) their representation of symbolic behaviors and structures in text (written and spoken). To understand how frames guide collective action, an analytical model that focuses on the development process of frames and their relation with social movement mobilizations must be constructed by considering these fundamental elements.

The studies on frame analysis have been based primarily on the variables that characterize collective action frames, such as the means of identifying a problem and the responsible parties, the inclusive or exclusive characteristics of movements, the width of scope of the built frames and their degree of cultural resonance. In particular, the credibility of frames is viewed as a key component of their mobilization ability (Snow et al. 1986; Benford and Snow 2000; Snow and Soule 2009). Opportunities for successful frame mobilization are greater in a context of more consistent ideology and actions of the movement, which are observable and measurable in the daily life of the people who the frame intends to engage and are articulated by leaders with status and/or expertise that is publicly acknowledged.

Moreover, it is worth noting how frames relate to the lives of prospective members and whether such frames are central to and aligned with the dominant values that are inherent to this group.

Framing some issues implies a strategy of creating and manipulating shared meanings and understandings of the world, its problems and viable courses of action. “Frames are metaphors, symbols, and cognitive cues that cast issues in a particular light and suggest possible ways to respond these issues” (Campbell 2005, p. 48–49).

Consequently, Benford and Snow (2000) identified the following three main “tasks” in framing: “diagnostic framing,” in which social movements present their initial view of the situation or condition that must be changed; “prognostic framing,” in which social movements assign the responsibility for these changes to an easily identifiable person, group or thing; and “motivational framing,” in which social movements propose an alternative scenario, calling on others to act on this transformation. When building the “diagnostic frame” to address a problem, social movements acknowledge different levels of scale, which lead to frames that serve a specific movement or frames that apply to different movements, known as master frames. With a larger and broader picture of the issues presented, the likelihood of the successful mobilization of the movement increases. Next, the process of “prognostic framing” presents an action plan that outlines proposals for the solution to the identified problem and strategies for its achievement. The specificities of choices typically differentiate one movement from others by offering the identification elements of collective identities. Finally, in “motivational framing,” movements call on members to act, using slogans that mobilize them to participate in the organization process of the collective action.

Parallel to the stages of mobilization of social movements through diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing, processes that are conceptualized as discursive, strategic, and contested also occur. In the discursive process, the speeches and writings of movements are articulated in a particularly new way to form a frame, which is then amplified with the growth of events, issues or beliefs that symbolize the wider efforts of the movement. Slogans, for example, are discursive elements for frame amplification. Efforts to bind people to specific frames and their various strategies have been defined as the process of “frame alignment:”

Frame alignment refers to the links of interpretive guidelines between individuals and social movement organizations, so that a group of people with similar interests, values and individual beliefs and the activities, goals and ideology of social movement organizations are congruent and complementary (Snow et al. 1986, p. 464).

The process may occur through the construction of a relationship between two or more frames of a given problem that are congruent but that were not previously structurally connected (Benford and Snow 2000). Another strategy may involve bringing existing values that previously played a supporting role into the main focus. Numerous social movements embrace the frames and/or interests of potential adherents by extending the frame that was originally conceived (although scholars highlight the risks of this process as a potential source of future internal conflict).

Movements may also consider the transformation of existing frames to create new meanings for them.

Another process involves the diffusion of a frame between movements and cultures. As noted by Benford and Snow (2000), this process depends on the relationship between the social movement that transmits a frame and the social movement that will adopt the frame. In certain situations, the frame is adapted to the cultural conditions in which the receptor movement is embedded, whereas in other situations, the frame may be accommodated to these conditions.

Notably, the dynamic development of frames is embedded in political and sociocultural contexts that are crucial and must be recognized. Frames have varying degrees of resistance to pressures of or changes in political opportunities. Furthermore, the ways in which movements are positioned within the policy context may result in opportunities. The selection of the elements of a cultural frame is also a dynamic process that reflects movements of meaning and involves the reframing of cultural society. However, the various public scenarios to which the frames of motion relate may require frequent transformation and revisions over time.

## Research Design and Methods

An exploratory case study was conducted between 2008 and 2011, and the study included a literature review, document analysis, and in-depth interviews that focused on the genesis and mobilization of the movement and its lobbying for new legislation that now requires local government to present a four-year plan with goals and public reporting every semester.

Because the study also included participant observations, the investigative team adopted precautions to mitigate typical methodological problems that can arise from this mode of investigation. Consequently, the research also involved typical participant observation strategies, such as informal interviews, direct observation, participation in the life of the group, collective discussions, the analyses of personal documents produced within the group, self-analysis, and life histories (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002).

With regard to the data analysis, we referred to the frame analysis perspective as a core aspect in the understanding of social movements (Benford and Snow 2000; Campbell 2005; Goffman 1974; Snow and Soule 2009).

In this direction, the following analysis levels were considered: the historical context of Brazilian re-democratization, the circumstances that enabled the creation of *Rede Nossa São Paulo* and the emergence of different frames in different discursive acts.

## The Case of *Rede Nossa São Paulo*

### Context

Brazilian re-democratization transformed the country's state, market, and civil society in the following ways: new decentralized and managerial models of public

management were discussed; civil society organizations proliferated, revealing new opportunities for participation in different public arenas of the country; and sustainability and corporate social responsibility fostered new corporate agendas.

The new constitution of the country, promulgated by a constituent assembly in 1988, carried the new spirit of *res publica*, with the democratization of decision-making and greater equity of outcomes in public policies. The process of democratization produced several actions regarding political and fiscal decentralization in a “revitalized federation.”

Municipalities not only gained more autonomy but also confronted growing demands linked to the increasing population needs and the economic crisis and assumed the following new duties and competences: (a) the provision of public services of local interest, including public transportation; (b) the maintenance of early childhood education and elementary school programs, with technical and financial cooperation from the federal government and state; (c) the provision of health care services for the population, with the technical and financial cooperation of the union and state; (d) the promotion of appropriate land use, planning and control through the use, subdivision and occupation of urban land; and (e) the promotion of the protection of historic and cultural heritage sites.

In 1995, during Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s first term as president of Brazil, the Ministry of Federal Administration and State Reform (MARE) was created, and a reform plan emerged to categorize state activities into the following four areas: strategic core activities, activities exclusive to the state, non-exclusive activities of public interest (which produce positive externalities for society and have distributional effects, including the sectors of culture, health, welfare, education, and scientific research) and the production of goods to the market (which, according to the model, should be held by private companies under government regulation) (Brasil 1995; Bresser-Pereira 1996).

Meanwhile, unelected political leaders, who had a crucial role in democratization within civil society (through social movements), continued to have an articulating role following the constituent assembly by bringing the government closer to its citizens and allowing for more popular participation. According to Avritzer (2007), after the constitution of 1988, participation that had previously been contestatory and anti-institutional began to occupy institutionalized spaces. New participatory opportunities were provided, such as policy councils that rely on civil society in the decision-making process in areas of health, welfare, education, and the rights of children and adolescents. These new forums also emerged to capture the demands of segments with less access to the state apparatus and to articulate the interests of various social groups. In the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, the chapter on urban policy (Brasil 1988) also opened doors for the participation of civil society organizations in directing the development of cities by insuring the social and welfare of their inhabitants (Brasil 1988). In 2001, the “Estatuto da Cidade” (Statute of the City) was approved, providing policies for the democratic management of cities and considering the citizens and their associations in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of urban social development projects (Brasil 2001). The population, which had then become closer to the decision-making bodies, had a greater opportunity to gain control over public resources. A

decrease in patronage and corruption was expected with the improvement of public services and planning policies. Following the institution of the “Estatuto da Cidade,” several studies have analyzed the quality of participation, highlighting the achievements, and numerous challenges of this new relationship among citizens, elected representatives and bureaucrats (Dagnino and Tatagiba 2007; Lavalle et al. 2006; Lavalle 2011). In any case, it is undeniable that social order had been in transformation, establishing new political and social developments at national and local levels in the country.

Meanwhile, a strengthening occurred in Brazilian civil society. This paper bases its study on the public sphere concept as described by Habermas:

Civil society is composed of those more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life sphere, distill and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere. The core of civil society comprises a network of associations that institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres. (Habermas 1998, p. 367)

In the meantime, various linkages in which “the meanings of social action are built and where there are power disputes, struggles that may have a municipal, intramunicipal, inter-regional or a micro scale” were consolidated (Spink 2000). In 1991, a survey conducted by Leilah Landim as part of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project noted the existence of 219,559 non-profit organizations in Brazil, including religious organizations. In fact, the 1990s are known as the “boom era of NGOs.” In 2005, there were already approximately 338,000 foundations and non-profit organizations in the country (IBGE 2008), and the average age of these organizations was 12.3 years.

With the indiscriminate opening of the economy, the domestic industry that had been protected for decades found itself confronting a new competitive landscape and being forced to modernize its plants, lower its profit margins and increase the efficiency of its production processes. Unions, which inherited their structures from the corporatism of the Vargas period, claimed their space to participate in decisions regarding the new directions of the country. The unions reorganized themselves, creating the Workers Party, which led Luis Inácio Lula da Silva to the presidency of Brazil two decades later. A portion of the business sector believed that the government was authoritarian and suffered the consequences of the neoliberal policy of former president Fernando Collor de Mello without a voice in the issues affecting their businesses.

In this context, in 1990, a group of businessmen created the *Pensamento Nacional das Bases Empresariais* (PNBE)—“Business Basis National Thinking.” The group’s members presented themselves as entrepreneurs with a new mentality in pursuit of a state that would be more closely aligned with social democracy based on the assumption that social responsibility must also be shared by the business class. The group formed a platform from which the Ethos Institute for Corporate Social Responsibility, the World Social Forum and *Rede Nossa São Paulo* would emerge in the next two decades.



The new Brazil that emerged in 1988 was a more permeable state with new public spaces, stronger civil organizations that were important legitimating actors of state power and various interest groups that increasingly participated in the country's decisions. Debate and inclusion in deliberations were broadened. Civil society organizations assumed responsibility for public activities that were “non-exclusive” of the state. Citizens organized themselves and gained an increasing voice. Among the advances and retreats, this increased participation strengthened the representative democracy that was re-established. Networks of civil society organizations became part of the state and began to participate more frequently in its decisions by developing advocacy power and demanding governmental accountability.

### The Creation of *Rede Nossa São Paulo*

In 2007, *Rede Nossa São Paulo* was launched as an initiative of the members of civil society in São Paulo who were willing to promote social accountability; its mission was as follows:

To mobilize several sectors of society to, in partnership with governments and other institutions, build and commit to an agenda and a group of goals, articulate, and promote actions, aiming for a fair and sustainable São Paulo. (Movimento Nossa São Paulo 2010)

In its launching rhetoric, the organization seeks to recover the values of sustainable development, ethics, and participatory democracy in non-partisan action (as a movement because its participants may have affiliations and political roles) in a manner that is inter-religious and open to all. The organization is based on a belief in shared responsibility, reciprocal belonging, and the possibility of transformation.

*Rede Nossa São Paulo* was created from the initial articulation of Oded Grajew, a businessman who was publicly known for his engagement in social initiatives and was founder and member of the PNBE, the Ethos Institute and the World Social Forum. Based on these experiences, Grajew sought to systematically unite the initiatives of various social movements and civil society organizations in São Paulo based on the perspective of greater social accountability and citizen dialog with the government.

The Avina Foundation invited Grajew and other community leaders and Brazilian businessmen to visit an initiative in Colombia known as *Bogotá Como Vamos?* (2009) (Bogota, How Are We Doing?). During this trip, the results of the Colombian experience were reported to the Brazilian visitors. The outcomes included significant results in the re-appropriation of politics and of the city by its citizens, thus greatly improving the local social indices. The civic innovation that was observed provided inspiration for a similar initiative in São Paulo, which culminated in the launch of *Rede Nossa São Paulo* in 2007.

The main newspapers soon opened space for Grajew to spread the news:

(Rede) Nossa São Paulo, founded in the spirit of belonging and transformation intends to, based on its comprehensiveness, representativeness, credibility, commitment, and effectiveness, build a political, social, and economic force

that can commit the society and successive governments with an agenda and a set of goals, aiming to offer a better quality of life to all inhabitants of the city. (Oded Grajew, Folha de São Paulo 2007)

The leadership of *Rede Nossa São Paulo* can be attributed to an unexpected union between business and religious leaders. The main spokespersons are Grajew and the priests Jaime Crowe and Ticão, articulating the forces of grassroots movements with a significant role in the poor regions in the southern and eastern areas of the city. *Rede Nossa São Paulo*'s organizational dynamics includes the following groups: a “support board” (similar to a board of advisors) of 25 opinion leaders with recognized political and social power in the city, with the task of defining strategic guidelines and fostering networks; 16 thematic working groups that perform studies, present demands, and form groups in their fields; and the Sustainable São Paulo Institute, the legal representation that offers the movement accounting and operating basis with a structure that demands approximately R\$ 2 million (~USD 1.2 million) per year. These expenses are funded by a group of companies, most of which are also associated with the Ethos Institute.

The main actions of *Rede Nossa São Paulo* since 2007 are outlined as follows: research on the perception of quality of life (yearly); the Citizen Observatory, which quantifies and publishes data based on social indicators that reflect the level of inequality in the city; the organization of the World Day With No Cars; the launch of the Business Forum to Support the City of São Paulo; the creation of the Sustainable Cities Platform; and active participation in the debate regarding the policies that regulate the level of sulfur in diesel, as pollution is an important theme in the city.

In addition, one of the main achievements of *Rede Nossa São Paulo* was the success of its lobbying for the “Target Plan Law” (São Paulo 2008). Inspired by Bogota, the leaders of *Rede Nossa São Paulo*—supported by their own personal political and economic power, the weight of their board and their network of partner organizations—articulated the development and adoption of legislation establishing the obligation of elected mayors to submit a plan of goals within 90 days after assuming power. According to the law, the current mayor of São Paulo, Gilberto Kassab, presented “Agenda 2012: Target Program for the City of São Paulo,” a document containing his commitment to the city during his administration. The opening of the document reads as follows:

The document Agenda 2012: Target Program for the City of São Paulo reiterates the commitment of the municipal government with transparent, responsible, and innovative public management: it defines short-, medium- and long-term goals that reflect the government plan approved by the majority of citizens in the elections of last October and at the same time creates mechanisms that allow citizens of São Paulo to monitor these goals. (City of São Paulo 2009)

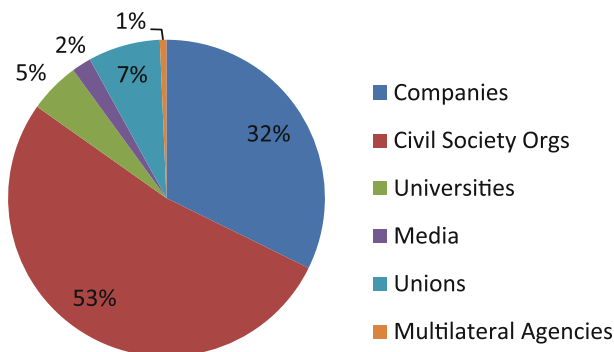
A detailed analysis of Agenda 2012 would most likely demonstrate numerous opportunities for improvement in terms of both content and technical accuracy as a planning instrument and as a basis for social accountability. However, such an

analysis is beyond the scope of this paper and represents a possible area of future research, particularly at a time in which it will be possible to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the goals presented and their influence on the development of the city. The “Target Plan Law” represents an important step for social accountability in the city because the legislation led to the commitment of the executive government to publicize its plans and to offer transparent information and updates on the implementation of this commitment, thus allowing monitoring and control by the public and the media and promoting better government accountability.

### The Mobilization and Dissemination of Power

*Rede Nossa São Paulo*'s website noted the participation of 606 organizations as of April 2010. To analyze the profiles and levels of diversity of the organizations associated with the movement, each organization was listed and classified as one of the following: (a) a company, (b) a civil society organization, (c) a university, (d) media, (e) a trade association or (f) a multilateral agency, as shown in Chart 1.

The results of the classification indicate that the majority (53 %) of the participants were civil society organizations whose objectives included both advocacy work and the provision of services. Interestingly, there is also a strong presence of companies (32 %). Associations, unions, and federations that until recently were the protagonists of the political action of civil society are represented in smaller numbers (7 %). Universities represent a relevant albeit small portion of the organizations (5 %). In fact, three of the leading educational institutions of the country are part of the movement. The media, which played a major role in the process of launching *Nossa São Paulo* and in informing the population to exercise their social oversight, are nonetheless not strongly associated, representing only 2 % of the organizations. Finally, multilateral UN agencies are minimally represented (accounting for only 1 %); however, the weight of these agencies' presence lends credibility to *Rede Nossa São Paulo* in the international agenda and enables the inclusion of the movement in a universal perspective of social action. By December 2010, the initiative had grown to 649 participating organizations. Of particular interest within the context of



**Chart 1** Profile of organizations participating in Nossa São Paulo (elaborated by the authors)

organizations participating in *Rede Nossa São Paulo* is the presence of social and political groups of differing ideologies and the speed with which a mobilization of this magnitude occurred. The number of participants grew exponentially during the first two years of the initiative to reach the level reported above.

Furthermore, the *Rede Nossa São Paulo* model has already been replicated in several Brazilian cities. The Brazilian Network of Fair and Sustainable Cities already has more than 20 affiliates, and its Latin American version reaches more than 40 cities. Among the Brazilian movements, 13 movements use the term “Nossa” in their name, which directly alludes to the model that has disseminated based on the experience in São Paulo. There has also been an internal diffusion within the city of São Paulo on the east side of the town. The model inspired the launch of neighborhood movements with a similar format and a similar use of “Nossa” in their names. The power of mobilization and dissemination of *Rede Nossa São Paulo* and its role in promoting social accountability attract attention and provide an interesting case study on innovation in social accountability.

### **Social Accountability as the Frame for *Rede Nossa São Paulo***

When the frame analysis is applied to *Rede Nossa São Paulo*, social accountability is the product of its mobilization process. The initiative proposes a pact in political society based on the re-appropriation of the city and the dialog among citizens, civil society organizations and government. The space created by *Rede Nossa São Paulo* is the channel for this dialog, and the mechanism of the target plan is the code, this new proposed language. The following analysis of the diagnostic, prognostic, and alignment frames led to this conclusion in this paper.

#### Master Frame: Social Justice and Sustainability

It is possible to identify the motto of “social justice and sustainability” as the movement’s master frame through the interviewee statements, in the materials released in the media during the launch of *Rede Nossa São Paulo* and in the movement’s publications. The union between these two constructs is the factor that aggregates movements and organizations with backgrounds and political ideologies as diverse as the employer union of the construction industry and the movement of homeless people.

The theme of social justice represents the groups that fought for democratization and that have been working since the 1960s and 1970s for the promotion of civil rights equality. Charities that share the same perspective of justice have also been relevant in the history of Brazilian social humanitarian aid and have been active in political action as articulated by the church, particularly by priests linked to liberation theology.

The aspect of sustainability has been adapted *Rede Nossa São Paulo* by entrepreneurs. This rhetoric reached the officers of companies through factories and production managers who were concerned about needing to produce more, spend less, and comply with the new regulations and laws that emerged in the 1990s to

protect the environment. Given the wide communication regarding environmental issues, consumers became aware of the influence of business activities in society and began to reward or punish positive and negative corporate practices. Numerous companies now publish annual reports on their activities based on international standards, incorporate parameters that require an accountability report and generally exceed their accounting and legal compliance requirements.

The definition of sustainability by Ignacy Sachs incorporates a dialog with other authors linked to the “right to the city” and to “development as freedom”. When discussing the participation of the population involved, the socio-cultural and educational security system refers to the theories of Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Amartya Sen (2000), whose theories are widely used by Brazilian scholars and activists engaged in the struggle for democratization of the country. With regard to rights, opportunities and participation, a bridge between social justice and sustainability emerges, indicating the outlook chosen by *Rede Nossa São Paulo*.

Therefore, the debate on urban development should be highlighted as a hidden but central element in the master frame of “justice and sustainability” that is promoted by *Rede Nossa São Paulo*. The movement has functioned as an articulator since its launch, based on the territorial perspective of the city. This urban perspective links the various ideologies that are represented to date in the diversity of the mobilized group. Through this linkage, there is an initial frame alignment process that connects the interpretive guidelines of individuals, organizations, and social movements. This process could have occurred based on different strategies, but in this case, one may observe the creation of a bridge between two pre-existent frames, a phenomenon known as frame bridging. Urban development, which refers to interest in the city, emerges as the bridge between these silent groups and networks that were already organizing themselves. This development is the focal point that gathers the forces around the theme of a “fair and sustainable” city.

#### Diagnostic Frame: Urban Chaos

The diagnostic frame developed by *Rede Nossa São Paulo* provided insight into urban chaos. In 2007, the year of the launching of the initiative, the megacity of São Paulo was home to 11 million inhabitants, with 3.5 million households distributed in an urbanized area of 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> divided into 96 sub-districts, with a fleet of 5 million vehicles circulating through 17,260 km of public roads. São Paulo has the highest GDP among the states of the federation, reaching R\$ 283 billion in 2006 and representing 12 % of GDP, primarily driven by the industrial and the service sector. The municipal budget in 2010 exceeded R\$ 34 billion. The city’s luxury shops produced world records for sales, and vertical mansions sold rapidly.

Comparing the social indicators of the 31 sub-districts of the city, one can observe a picture of inequality. In health, for example, the sub-district with the highest provision of hospital beds has 24.29 beds per 1,000 inhabitants, whereas the two sub-districts with the lowest provision have no beds. In housing, the wealthiest region consists of only 0.31 % slums, whereas 40.41 % of households in the poorest region live such conditions. Regarding cultural facilities, there are nine sub-districts without any cultural center and 14 without a theater. The issue of mobility can be

depicted by the average 138 km of congestion in the afternoon in the city, in which drivers cannot exceed 15 km per hour on average.

The increasingly disorderly growth of the metropolis leads to exclusion. High rates of violence, slums, traffic jams, and flooding, combined with a lack of public transportation, has caused the deterioration of schools and underemployment, resulting in a municipal human development index (MHDI) of 0.841.

In a study on public perceptions of the quality of life, the results showed a grade of 4.8 on a scale from 1 to 10. Several people noted their intention to leave the city and described their feelings of insecurity. Dissatisfaction was also evident in the following non-attended demands of public life: ethical and peaceful living among citizens, poor environmental conditions, a lack of relationship with the municipal government, a lack of political transparency and the absence of opportunities for participation. The perception is that churches and the federal government contribute most to improving the quality of life of São Paulo, but the same perception does not apply to the local government, including the mayor, the city council, city halls, and municipal councils. There is strong suspicion among citizens regarding the institutions that are directly or indirectly related to the social and political life of the city.

In its launching presentation, *Rede Nossa São Paulo* highlighted this urban chaos scenario, which led to an understanding of the complex and enormous size of the territory, its glaring economic inequality, the unsustainability of this model and the lack of social services and infrastructure that guarantee dignity and equal rights, and it culminated in the perception of the poor quality of life and social exclusion. These key themes were presented at cultural centers, association meetings, and events. Notably, the responsibility for the situation was not attributed only to the rulers, as had been expected. Rather, the diagnostic frame developed by *Rede Nossa São Paulo* incorporates the lack of civic engagement of the population regarding the direction of their city. Therefore, responsibility is attributed to the lack of dialog between citizens and rulers.

### Prognostic Frame: The Perspective of “Another City”

The prognostic frame of *Rede Nossa São Paulo* is of “Another City.” This motto had already been referenced during the World Social Forum, in the following form: “Another world is possible.” The motto seeks “Another City” that is fair, prosperous, beautiful, safe, healthy, efficient, supportive, and democratic. With regard to fairness, *Rede Nossa São Paulo* seeks a fairer income distribution and the promotion of respect for diversity and equity to offer equal conditions of development for its citizens. Prosperity is viewed as the existence of decent work opportunities and income generation. Beauty is combined with smarter and more welcoming urban planning. Based on the principle of promoting a better quality of life for all residents, *Rede Nossa São Paulo* promotes a healthier city by valuing care for the environment and by requiring pollution control, sanitation, and recycling improvements. The movement also accounts for the challenges of urban violence by pleading for more security and respect for civil and human rights. In terms of efficiency, the group seeks improved public services, with special attention

to urban mobility and transportation. The government is expected to provide the necessary structure for information and communication among citizens. Solidarity has been linked to good relationships, creativity, and multiculturalism. Finally, *Rede Nossa São Paulo* works to uphold democracy, beginning with the guarantee of high-quality public education and culminating in a more participatory and direct system of governance.

The vision of “Another City,” an ideal society that is fair and sustainable, draws on the similarities of the varied participants of the movement to develop a collective identity shared by the leaders of the member organizations. In the 1950s, Blumer (1951) noted the importance of symbols such as songs, slogans, sentences, gestures, and costumes for social movements. The “totem” of symbols and signs of *Rede Nossa São Paulo* includes green concepts, the sky, water, recycling, multicultural images, the sun, street art, the idea of inclusion and pedestrians in images displayed at the launching events and on the group’s website.

### Motivational Frame: Co-responsibility

In the “motivational framing” stage, movements encourage members to act using slogans that mobilize them to participate in collective actions. Particularly, motivational framing underscores the credibility of the leaders behind the frame as key to their ability to mobilize. The motivational frame of *Rede Nossa São Paulo* is social accountability. This concept urges people to rethink their vote, encourages social organizations to unite in a more articulate manner and suggests that politicians be prepared for public scrutiny and to be responsible for their actions. The participation of citizens in shaping the direction of their city is stimulated, but at the same time, politicians are warned that the political scenario will change. One of the campaigns promoted by *Rede Nossa São Paulo* portrays the following proposal: during the mayoral election, radio spots were released on major stations using spokespersons who are famous for their professional performances (players and artists) and for their involvement as citizens. The end of each spot featured the *Rede Nossa São Paulo* signature: “São Paulo wants proposals, not ‘mumbo-jumbo’.”

Another aspect that is highlighted by the theory of frame analysis is the influencing factor of credibility in the process of motivational framing. In the case of *Rede Nossa São Paulo*, this element was critical. The public credibility of Oded Grajew and other members of the board and of the main articulators proved crucial to its mobilizing success.

### Social Accountability: A New Frame in Social Movements

Social accountability is the product of the frames that *Rede Nossa São Paulo* composed over its mobilization process. Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006) introduced the concept of societal accountability:

Social accountability is a non-electoral yet vertical mechanism of control of political authorities that rests on the actions of an array of citizens’

associations and movements and the media. The actions of these groups monitor public officials, expose governmental wrongdoing, and can activate operation of horizontal agencies. Social accountability employs both institutional and noninstitutional tools. The activation of legal actions or claims before oversight agencies is an example of an institutionally channeled action; social mobilizations and media exposés are examples of noninstitutional ones. (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2006, p. 10)

According to the overview of experiences gathered and studied by the authors, a major goal of social accountability is to insure that governments follow the law. Individual citizens have experienced difficulties in insuring compliance with the law because of the still fragile and interdependent legal and political systems of new democracies. As the weight of the joint pressure by different social groups, the action of oversight agencies, the public exposure of transgressions, and the influence on the public agenda becomes heavier, social accountability has increased the costs of illegal or immoral political behavior. Its main actors are civil society organizations, NGOs, social movements and media.

The proliferation of these particular actors in the past two decades in Latin America, driven by networks articulated in the fight against authoritarian regimes, has brought social accountability into the spotlight of political accountability. In the social accountability agenda, themes such as political security, judicial independence, election monitoring, and combating corruption are studied experiences.

An important point defended by Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006) is that social mechanisms are able to exercise control because they can enable the operation of horizontal mechanisms (O'Donnell 1994, 1998) or of oversight agencies (Moreno et al. 2003). Given the power of mobilization of social movements, the mass dissemination capacity of campaigns or investigations of wrongdoing by media and the possibility of activation directly or indirectly in court by individuals or organizations, governments, and bureaucrats should be aware of social accountability because any mistake may lead to reputational costs or even to the risk of judicial trial.

Much more recognized for its *ex post* monitoring and evaluation role of government action, social accountability has been increasingly understood as a mechanism that also includes participation in decision-making, *ex ante*. This concept is beginning to be viewed as a means of monitoring and reacting to actions and decisions. These actions or decisions can be past or future actions performed by individual or collective actors for public interest purposes, provided that in a context of autonomy, direct resources (such as elections) or indirect resources are used through the activation of the parent controlling institutions applied to the public administration and the offered public service.

*Rede Nossa São Paulo* proposes a pact in political society regarding the re-appropriation of the city and the dialog among citizens, civil society organizations, and public authorities to exercise social accountability *ex ante* and *ex post*. In this study, the concept of social accountability is constructed from the inside, that is, developed in the process of framing and from the repertoire of different groups that are part of the initiative, and it represents an innovation in the field of civic action.



The members of *Rede Nossa São Paulo* who have been active in the struggle for democratization, which was previously presented as linked to the frame of social justice, bring to this particular construct of social accountability the notions of participation, advocacy, and democratization of the political space. The vision is that citizens should be able to contribute to the definition of the direction of their own city (rescuing it from drifting away) not only at election time but also throughout the deliberative political process in relation to the development of the city. The elected representative is no longer the only one to speak for the people and must instead engage with organizations and movements that also call themselves representatives of the citizens. Elections are no longer the only place to validate the representative process. The traditional system of a purely representative democracy through voting is beginning to be penetrated by participatory mechanisms. As an interviewed member of the *Rede Nossa São Paulo* board stated: “it means that the representative democracy that we live in will have to be complemented by some form of participatory democracy.”

Business groups add a vision of accountability from the business world, highlighting demand for the efficient use of public resources and demanding quality services and accountability to society. Public management is assessed by indicators and targets, and the city is studied, understood, and managed by an information system that allows for statistical analysis. Public planning moves from a measure of performed investments (means) to tangible and achieved results (ends).

From all sides, social accountability also implies the expectation of ethical and moral probity, which is promoted by the transparency that allows information to reach citizens and social organizations and movements that are strengthened to better perform the monitoring of the acts and omissions of elected officials. By being better informed and reasserting the ownership of their cities, citizens are expected to demonstrate civic behavior in which particular and individual actions consider the public good and are engaged in open political spaces.

The key words in the social accountability frame developed by *Nossa São Paulo* are outlined in Illustration 1:

The most interesting point is that these speeches influence one another and are recomposed based on new articulations that are promoted by combining the previous frames. One can observe religious community leaders discussing accountability and transparency, leftist militants discussing indicators and targets, and businessmen demanding opportunities for participation. The contribution of the interpretation offered by *Rede Nossa São Paulo* opens new channels and new languages with which to promote governmental accountability.

## Final Considerations

As noted by Manin et al. (2006), several challenges remain: are there, after all, institutional mechanisms to promote accountability that are able to force elected officials to be loyal to the platforms that they promoted when they were candidates? To what extent will the actions taken by *Rede Nossa São Paulo* (and the initiatives that were mirrored in this model) make government leaders fulfill their promises?



**Illustration 1** The social accountability frame: created by Nossa São Paulo (Our Development, 2010)

Can one expect the frame of social accountability that was developed by these initiatives and the advent of the “Target Plan Law” to transform the relationship between representatives and represented, leading to an increasingly republican government? This paper undoubtedly contributes to the previous literature, although the full understanding of the study’s reaches and limits must be considered further.

By entering into the master frame of “justice and sustainability” and offering a united interpretation of these two worlds that is translated into social accountability, Nossa São Paulo provides a mirror of the debate that is occurring in the public sphere and of the consequent changes in relations among citizens, politicians, and bureaucrats. Former players are reshaped into new subjects, new advisory bodies emerge, and deliberative spaces are expanded; in addition, the territories in question are decentralized, and the notion of public as truly public is strengthened. Do these changes signal that we are moving toward co-management, with a more collaborative democracy? Do they suggest that the citizens of São Paulo are closer to living with the rights to their city?

What can be observed is that the frame of social accountability that was developed by *Rede Nossa São Paulo* paves the way for a strengthening of the business class as a political actor and amplifies its influence on the managerial vision of public administration. The frame also brings a diagnosis of inequality in the city to the public, offering solutions and a vision of “Another City” with the potential for systemic articulation of the actions of its various agents. The frame empowers community leaders through the instrumentation of debates on governance by illuminating the black hole of public administration, translating their plans into understandable codes and channels of communication with citizens, offering the media a new source for their work of social accountability over the government and potentially facilitating a reconfiguration of local political dynamics, strengthening the representative system, and adding social accountability.

The initiative inspired by the Colombian model still has a limited reach to the middle class and opinion leaders, without mass outreach to the population in general and to all individual voters. The group's political influence is based on the power of its board members rather than on its representative force. The initiative must cope with the dilemma of being funded by big business while searching for a popular representation. Ultimately, the group still depends on the media and organs of horizontal social accountability for the "Target Plan Law"—a mechanism that represents the main creation of this model—to have effective sanction power in the promotion of greater governmental accountability.

By bringing the discussion of public management to the city level, *Rede Nossa São Paulo* offers the argumentative force and parameters that are needed to understand the fight against inequality, including its origins and consequences, not only as a matter of income distribution but also of equality of access to safe space, social networks, knowledge, work tools, additional time, and information. Understanding the concept of law as a social product that is created to allow the negotiation of a regime that protects people from abuse, cruelty, and degradation, one wonders to what extent these conditions are offered by the city to all its residents. Recognition of the complexity of the problems of the city can be useful in analyzing the issues and searching for solutions, as it is not possible to continue with the segmented vision that structures governments and their policies. The debate regarding the "right to the city" is accompanied by the redefinition of citizenship as a means of increasing political participation.

The theme of sustainability has been a channel for this recognition. However, the question includes an undercurrent of conflicting power and ideologies that is not openly mentioned. The search can be for sustainability and justice, but in which sense, and who and what defines them? The development of urban areas is based on different projects from different world views, and it is in this pluralistic context of conflict that the debate concerning the "right to the city" is inserted. The entire debate ultimately pertains to the economic and political models of societal organization, the articulation between local and global phenomena, and access to public space.

By bringing the discussion to the public sphere, democracy expands, and facilitates greater involvement of citizens in the debate regarding their city and their rights. Milton Santos (2007) noted that the urban dimension extends beyond mere geographical space; in fact, it consists of the uses, appropriations and meanings that social groups build, reproduce and constantly re-signify with respect to their territory. Thus, it is viable to discuss the "right to the city" only if the participation of different interest groups present in the region is considered and if their varying needs are included in the discussion. Rich and poor, ruling and dominated, elite and masses should participate in the debate, each contributing their perspective and pleading for policies that they believe to be a priority for their city.

Good governance was identified at the most recent World Urban Forum as one of the essential elements of insure a better future within cities, although such a governance model does involve implementing the announced reforms. The wealthy and powerful must learn to share decisions pertaining to the future and facilitate the participation of those who have had less access to opportunities in the past; in other

words, a city must be guided by its inhabitants, as required by Lefebvre (1991). All citizens are responsible for the construction of this space and must be respected in deliberations related to the space. A new model is needed, and social accountability can pave the path. However, the question remains as to whether this concept will be explored by all or by only a few.

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