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Carsta Neuenroth

**We Make the Road by Walking:
NGOs and Civil Society in Guatemala**

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After many years of military dictatorship and civil war a process of democratization has started – like in many other Latin American countries – also in Guatemala.

The significance of “civil society” for the construction of democracy is lively discussed in governmental as well as non-governmental circles. Numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) claim active participation in the process of shaping democratization.

Carsta Neuenroth shows in this study how the social, political and economic environment defined the character and development of civil society and particularly of NGOs in Latin America. She analyses the influence of economic liberalization and structural adjustment, globalization and democratization on the relationship between NGOs and civil society. It becomes clear that the behavior of NGOs as organizations of civil society depends on how their leading representatives conceptualize and interpret civil society. Thus, NGOs which support a concept of civil society based on the liberal tradition of thinking tend to support state politics, while organizations which interpret civil society in the neo-Marxist sense principally want to participate in shaping politics. But – are they really able to do so as representatives of a predominately non-articulated society?

A series of interviews with NGO representatives in Guatemala shows how these organizations try to fulfill this claim within their society, which relationship they have with the state, and how they relate to the social movements.