

# Civil Society Regionalization in Southern Africa

– The Cases of Trade and HIV/AIDS

av

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## Abstract

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This dissertation investigates civil society regionalization, that is, the transnational regional process where people engage in co-operation within diverse types of regionalist civil society frameworks. The point of departure is the study of ‘new regionalism’, which refers to the wave of regional integration globally since the 1980s. Compared with the state-centric first wave of regionalism of the 1950s and 1960s, the ‘new regionalism’ involves a broader range of actors. Besides inter-governmental organizations (RIGOs), market actors and civil society organizations (CSOs) also play important roles in regional integration. Hence, CSOs have engaged in various regionalization processes, partly independently of state-driven regionalism, and play different roles in so-called regional governance. In Southern Africa, this trend is particularly pronounced. The research community is not ignorant of the regional processes sweeping the world. However, whilst the current regionalism studies undoubtedly contributes to a deeper understanding of regional processes, important gaps remain, in particular the relatively scant emphasis given to civil society.

The overarching aim of this dissertation is therefore to analyse the dynamics of civil society regionalization in Southern Africa, both empirically and from a theoretical perspective. More specifically, the study poses three, interrelated, research questions:

- How is civil society regionalization influenced by RIGOs and donors?
- What is the composition of civil society on the regional level and how do CSOs relate to each other in the process of regionalization?
- What are the motivations for regionalizing among CSOs?

Adopting a qualitative case study approach, two separate but related studies are conducted on two embedded cases, i.e. civil society regionalization in the trade and the HIV/AIDS sectors. The dissertation draws on semi-structured interviews as well as written primary sources.

The study finds that CSOs can be more active in regional governance than has previously been conceptualized and can contribute to regional policy-making and service provision. Additionally, CSOs are highly active in terms of constructing regionalization through framing issues and, to a less extent, making identities ‘regional’. They should therefore be taken more seriously in regionalism studies as actors in their own right. Furthermore, the thesis enhances knowledge of the heterogeneous nature of civil society regionalization, for example finding that CSO engagement with regional governance is more multi-faceted than commonly perceived. ‘Going regional’ is only partly an autonomous process and also has to be understood as under the influence of the deeper statist and capitalist social structures marking the regional order in Southern Africa. In this vein, the dissertation shows the power dynamics inherent in CSO participation in regional governance, where some CSOs are included and others excluded. The study also finds that regional donor funds do indeed facilitate regionalization, but through their market-orientation and volatile funding preferences donors also create a vulnerable financial situation for CSOs, as well as shaping their development agendas. Lastly, the thesis shows that CSO regional issue-framing and identity-making often centre around RIGOs as perceived ‘regional’ actors, which in turn spurs ‘going regional’.

**Keywords:** regionalization, regional governance, civil society, foreign donors, development, trade, HIV/AIDS, identity, issue-framing, critical theory, social constructivism, Africa.