

Civil society and the 2030 Agenda. An assessment of the implementation of SDG-actions in the Metropolitan District of Quito

La sociedad civil y la Agenda 2030. Una evaluación de la implementación de las acciones de los ODS en el Distrito Metropolitano de Quito

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Abstract

Coordination between multiple centers for decision-making and types of actors, across scales and sectors, is critical to improving the effectiveness of the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This challenge is particularly crucial for metropolitan arrangements in developing countries where State capacity is weak, and people often lack resources to act upon the problems they face. In the Metropolitan District of Quito, various centers of decision-making implement actions to address policy problems through coordination with third sector organizations. In principle, coordination should lead to better policy implementation; however, we know very little about how this system behaves and of its outcomes. In this article, we analyze three issues: first, we look at the distribution of SDG-actions implemented by the system's actors; second, we study the participation of different types of civil society organizations in the implementation of these actions; finally, we explore the association of civil society involvement and the effectiveness of policy implementation.

Keywords: SDGs, policy implementation, policy effectiveness, civil society, Quito.

Resumen

La coordinación entre múltiples centros para la toma de decisiones y los tipos de actores, en todas las escalas y sectores, resulta fundamental para mejorar la efectividad de la implementación de la Agenda 2030 y los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible (ODS). Tal desafío es especialmente crucial para los acuerdos metropolitanos en los países en desarrollo donde la capacidad del Estado se muestra débil y las personas, a menudo, carecen de recursos para actuar sobre los problemas a los que deben enfrentarse. En el Distrito Metropolitano de Quito, varios centros de toma de decisiones implementan acciones para abordar problemas públicos relativos a políticas a través de la coordinación con organizaciones del tercer sector. En principio, la coordinación debería conducir a una mejor implementación de políticas; sin embargo, sabemos muy poco acerca de cómo se comporta el sistema y de sus resultados. En este artículo, analizamos tres cuestiones: primero, observamos la distribución de las acciones de los ODS implementadas por los actores del sistema; segundo, estudiamos la participación de diferentes tipos de organizaciones de la sociedad civil en el desarrollo de dichas acciones; finalmente, exploramos la asociación de la participación de la sociedad civil y la efectividad de la implementación de políticas.

Palabras clave: ODS, implementación de políticas, efectividad de políticas, sociedad civil, Quito.

1 Introduction

The formulation and implementation of public policies for working towards Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require coordination between state, for-profit, and non-profit actors (Sachs 2012). In particular, the coordination between multiple centers for decision-making across scales and sectors is critical to improving efforts to make policy implementation more effective; therefore, the importance of current scholarly attention to the origins, dynamics, and outcomes of polycentric systems (Berardo & Lubell 2016, Heikkila *et al.* 2018). These systems operate across scales and sectors and include, among others, formal centers of decision-making with legal competencies to address policy problems in interaction with civil society organizations.

In this paper, we study the implementation of actions related to the achievement of the SDGs in a developing country. We prefer the term «action» over policies because countries have only started framing policies within the logical and temporal frame of Agenda 2030 in the past two to three years.

Our main objective is to understand how civil society organizations participate from the implementation of actions that contribute to the advancement of Agenda 2030 in a polycentric metropolitan system. We understand third-sector or civil society organizations following Salamon and Anheier's structural/operational definition. According to this definition, these organizations share five essential characteristics. They are formal, private, non-profit-distributing, self-governing, and voluntary. Formality refers to the existence of some institutional reality to the organization, which goes beyond mere legal incorporation. This reality must be different from public sector organizations, that means, public officials should not govern third sector organizations. Whoever governs these organizations does not receive profits from their operation; therefore, non-profits are non-distributing. Third sector organizations are self-governed if they are equipped to control their activities. Finally, these organizations are voluntary if they have some voluntary input; may this be in the form of contributions or staff (Salamon & Anheier 1992).

Scholars argue that the rise of civil society organizations since the 1980s responds to a crisis in the confidence in the capabilities of the state (Kooiman 1994, Salamon 1994). By forming this type of organizations, citizens sought to respond more effectively to pervasive policy problems such as hunger, unemployment, or lack of public services. Due to their flexibility and capacity to engage grass-roots energies, third-sector organizations could fill in the gaps left by the State and for-profit organizations for delivering goods.

After almost three decades, the role of the third sector organizations in responding to these and other challenges of sustainable development seems to remain as important as ever as noted in the central role they have in the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda (Hege & Demailly 2018).

However, decades of scholarly work on the activity of civil society show that the context where third sector organizations operate weight highly on such capability (Andersson & Ostrom 2008, Brass 2012, Lu & Xu 2018); for example, some states heavily regulate nonprofits working on policy issues such as natural resources governance. Some governments regard nonprofits and their supporters as the source of unwanted interference in policy formulation and delivery (see Dupuy *et al.* 2016).

Despite recent advances in identifying the influence of certain factors on non-profit activity, there is still much to be done to parse out the interactions among different forms of civil society activity and policy effectiveness, more so regarding the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. As Galway *et al.* put it, «despite the growing prominence of NGOs in LMICs, the ways in which these organizations influence and are influenced by the context in which they work is not well understood» (2012, p. 1).

This article is a step that direction because it investigates the distribution of nonprofit activity in the implementation of SDGs. Additionally, it looks at the association between that distribution, the conditions of the localities where they operate, and the effectiveness of implementation. The unit of observation for the case study is the interactions between the five levels of government present in the Metropolitan District of Quito (DMQ).

Our research adds to the literature on civil society and the SDGs discussing how ecological factors in developing countries influence nonprofit density (see Brass 2012, and references therein). It presents a complex picture of different types of civil society organizations in interaction with different levels of government across policy issues.

2 Theoretical framework

Scholars and practitioners have increasingly acknowledged civil society organizations indispensable component of a country's policy affairs. In particular, the nonprofit sector is often a source of innovative solutions to public problems and a significant player in the development and implementation of public policy (Lu 2017). The shift to allocating large amounts of resources to solve problems through non-profit organizations

arose in part from donor frustration with opaque and inefficient state-based systems for development, which spawned an interest in accounta-

bility and governance mechanisms involving nonstate actors, including NGOs. NGOs have been seen as more efficient, effective, flexible, and innovative than governments, to be other-oriented and ideologically committed to democracy and participatory pro-poor development, and to be more accountable and transparent than the government (Brass 2012).

Existing knowledge of the factors that explain the participation of civil society organizations in the delivery of goods shows mixed findings; for example, some studies find strong and significant associations between non-governmental organization (NGO) density and the heterogeneity of the population in a locality, while others do not. Contradictory findings repeat for other correlational analyses produced in the past 15 years (Lu & Xu 2018). In the remainder of this section, we review this literature to identify relevant variables for an empirical assessment of the participation of civil society organizations in the implementation of SDG-activities.

One early formulation about the presence of nonprofits in a locality relates to the idea of government failure. In the original formulation presented by Weisbrod (1986), the government failure theory suggests that nonprofits are established to fill the service gap left by government provision, a gap caused by the tension between diverse needs and a majority voting system. Lu (2017) undertook a meta-analysis of the effect of population heterogeneity on non-profit sector size. The study tests the demand heterogeneity hypothesis, which argues that, in communities where citizens' tastes for public goods, are more diverse than what median voters prefer, there will be more nonprofits established to provide public goods to satisfy the demand unmet by government provision. The study finds a significant and positive association between the two variables, but the magnitude of the relationship is substantially small.

The idea that NGOs locate their activities where needs are higher is closely related to the government-failure or heterogeneity approach. In her study in Kenya, Brass (2012) shows that the placement of NGOs at the sub-national level corresponds to an area's objective level of need, but also the convenience of the location for accessing beneficiaries, donors and elite goods (see also Galway *et al.* 2012, and the references therein). However, based on an empirical study of Bangladesh, Fruttero *et al.* (2005) show a relatively low association between NGO presence and objective indicators of need, suggesting that NGOs may avoid the places where governments fail the most.

In their study of NGO distribution across municipalities in the health sector of Bolivia, Galway *et al.* (2012) also analyze population heterogeneity. They study the relationship between poverty, health and development needs of the population (measured as the relative size of vulnerable populations), urbanization, limited coverage of public services, and NGO density. Their findings show that population size, the extent of urbanization, and size of the indig-

enous population are significantly related to NGO activity in municipalities. While urbanization is negatively associated, the other two are positively associated with NGO activity.

Van Puyvelde and Brown (2015) differentiate between demand and supply-side determinants for nonprofit density. The main idea is that stakeholders demand from existing non-profits, but they also form new organizations to take care of problems by providing collective goods directly. They approach the demand side-aspect from the government-failure perspective. With respect to the supply-side side, they argue that higher income and education increase the likelihood of demand-side stakeholders to form their own non-profit because they reduce the costs associated with forming and managing an organization.

In contrast to the government failure thesis, the interdependence thesis proposes that government and nonprofits form partnerships to jointly address public problems because each compensates for the other's weakness (Salamon 1987). Empirical evidence supports both the government-failure and the interdependence thesis (Lu & Xu 2018). Lu and Xu published a meta-review of peer-reviewed articles and other sources on the relationship between the level of government activity and level of non-profit activities. In line with the interdependence argument, the study finds that «the overall relationship between government activities and non-profit activities in a locality is more likely to be complementary than supplementary» (Lu & Xu 2018).

Almost all of the afore-mentioned research is focused on NGO-density; however, as Hemmet (2004) shows, NGOs are only part of what we know as the «third sector» or «civil society». These often-professionalized organizations interact with donor agencies and their allies while working with less professional grassroots organizations. For this reason, we adopt the term GROs to refer to grassroots organizations operating at the community or regional levels.

It is inside the networks formed by different types of civil society organizations that we explore the interactions between actors coordinating and policy outcomes. O'Toole and others argue that networks are critical to improving policy delivery (Bogason & Toonen 1998, O'Toole 2000, Toonen 1998). As the argument follows, the interaction of public sector organizations and non-profit organizations has the potential for generating synergistic effects in the policy process because it mobilizes complementary resources. However, Brinkerhoff argues that especially in developing countries the formation of networks for policy implementation is limited by the capacity of actors to reach an agreement of policy programs and objectives. One significant limitation is the power differential between policy actors that make the objectives of the stronger partner prevail. Often this partner is on the State-side and operates

at the national level (Brinkerhoff 1999). Given this differential, the perception of policy effectiveness could be relatively weak in such situations.

To sum up, in this paper, we study nonprofit density as a function of population heterogeneity, needs or demand-side factors, urban-bias, and supply-side factors. For this exploration, we use aggregated and disaggregated measures of non-profit density, that is, we differentiate between the actors that compose the nonprofit subgroup: NGOs, GROs, international cooperation agencies (ICs), and religious organizations (ROs). Additionally, we explore the extent to which the interactions between civil society organizations and State-actors influence effective policy implementation.

3 Methods

We measured nonprofit density by counting the number of times respondents identified an NGO, and international cooperation agency, a grassroots organization or a religious organization as a partner in the implementation of the SDG-actions. Respondents were the presidents of the lower level of government in the DMQ, the rural parish governments. They were in office since 2014 but the majority had already served one or two periods of four years each before that year. Respondents answered a standardized survey questionnaire, which was administered by two research assistants in four weeks. On average, interviews lasted one and a half hours. Out of 33 rural parish presidents, 31 agreed to participate in the study.

To identify SDG-actions, we presented respondents with a roster containing a list of actor-types and SDG-targets. We selected the SDG-targets from the list published by the national statistical authority INEC, from which we left out all targets with indicators in Tier III, while targets with indicators in Tier I and II were included if they did not pertain to the competencies at the national level (e.g., improving collaboration with other nations, or improving the tax system).¹

The questionnaire also included an open-ended question, that allowed respondents to suggest other SDG-actions implemented in the 2015-2018 period. Two respondents reported «the promotion of sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture products», which relates to SDG target 8.9. These answers were coded with target 4.4 related to «increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship» by agreement of the three coders involved in the process. In Table 1, we present the operationalization of the dependent and independent variables.

1 Indicators in Tier III are those without an international standard methodology of standards are not yet available for the indicator.

Dimension	Independent variable(s)	Indicator(s)
Government failure or population heterogeneity	Population size	Number of inhabitants in the parish reported in the 2010 census
	Population (ethnic) diversity	Equitability diversity index
Needs or demand-side factors	Poverty rate	Percentage of the population with NBI
	Income inequality	Score in the Gini index
	Level of risks	Score in the risk index
Urban bias	Rurality	Percentage of the agricultural area in the rural parish
	Convenience to access goods and political support	Euclidean distance to the municipality headquarters
Interdependence	The relative strength of State presence	Number of state actors interacting with the rural parish
Supply-side factors	Education	Percentage of people with higher education per parish
Policy outcomes		Perception of policy effectiveness by rural parish presidents measured in a Likert scale

Table 1
Operationalization of variables

Population heterogeneity was calculated considering the proportion of ethnicities per parish with data from the 2010 Ecuadorian Population and Housing Census. For this census, respondents reported their belonging to one of the following ethnic groups: indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian or *negro*, mulatto, *montubio* (coast region cultural-ethnic group), mestizo (mixed ethnicity, usually indigenous-white), white, and «other ethnicities». We used an entropic index to calculate ethnic diversity (White 1986):

$$Equitability\ index = -\sum_{i=1}^n (P_i \log P_i) / Hmax$$

where P_i is the proportion of each ethnic group in a rural parish i , and $Hmax$ represents the maximum theoretical diversity value for each parish.

For the needs or demand-side dimension, we considered the perceived level of risk in each rural parish as another relevant predictor of policy activity. The rationale is that previous studies treat ethnic diversity as a proxy to vulnerability (Galway *et al.* 2012). However, vulnerability is only one component of the criteria non-profits may use to decide where to implement actions. Other factors relate to the types of threats and exposure to those threats by the population in need of assistance. To capture this logic, we used the risk index of the DMQ, which includes variables such as the exposure to floods, volcanic eruptions, and forest fires.

Finally, to measure the effectiveness of policy implementation, we used the perception that respondents have of the effectiveness

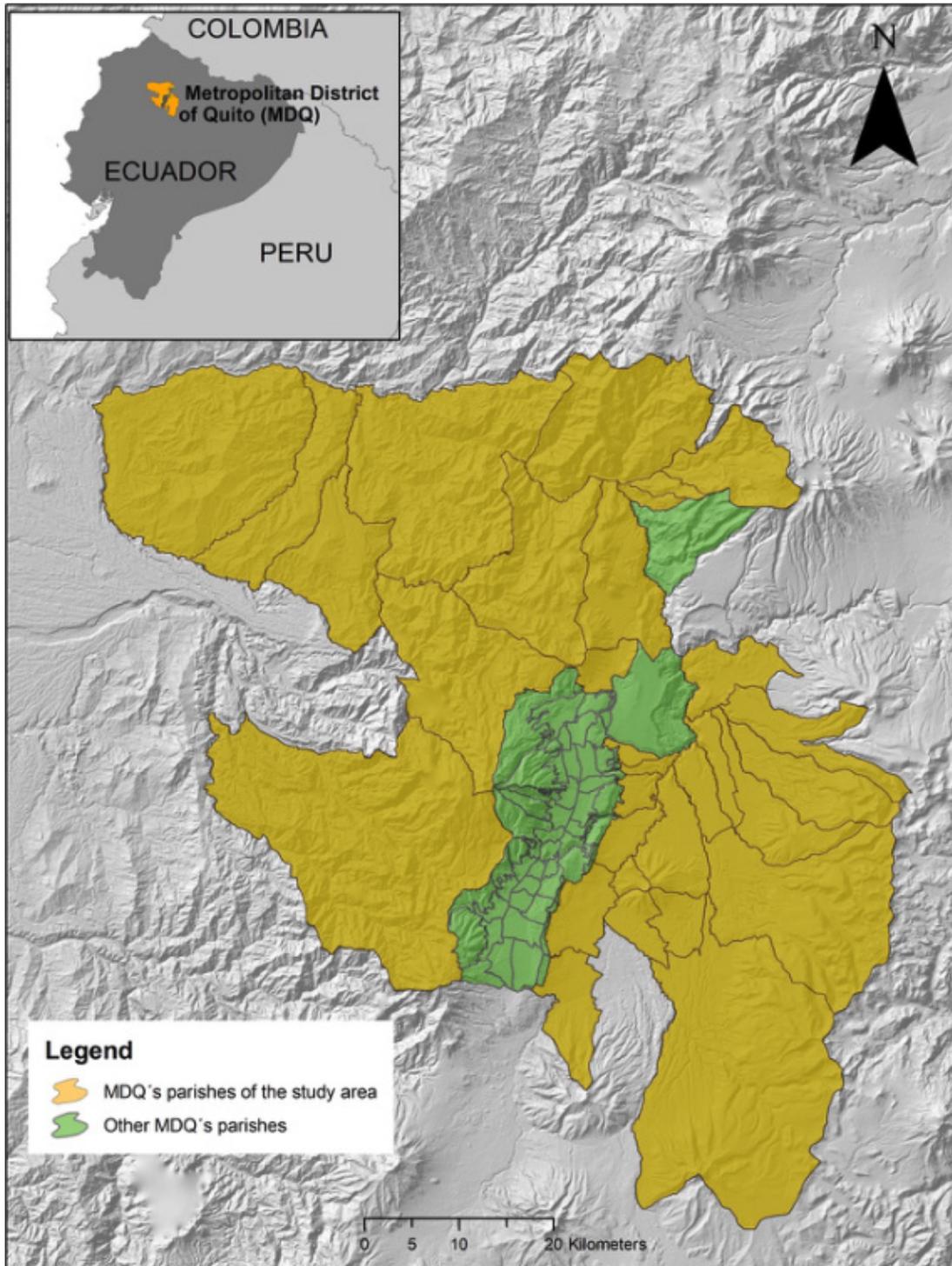
of SDG implementation as a proxy. We measured these perceptions on a three-point Likert scale.

3.1. The case

The city of Quito is one of two metropolitan conglomerates in Ecuador, and it also has one of the older metropolitan governance systems in Latin America (Subirats 2017). Most of the existing studies of metropolitan governance in the region deal with the few cases of mega-cities such as Sao Paulo, Ciudad de México or Buenos Aires, where several municipalities join in a metropolitan governance body. Studying a pioneer case of metropolitan governance in a smaller urban conglomerate such as Quito can shed light over a large group of emerging metropolitan arrangements, where one municipality adopts a decentralized government within a multi-scale national system.

The DMQ was created in 1993 under the Law for the Regime of the DMQ (*Ley para el Distrito Metropolitano de Quito*), which allowed the existing municipality to assume some competencies previously assigned to the national government (land-use, transport, environment, and later tourism, security, and infrastructure). The law allowed the city government to adopt a system adapted to the emergence of multiple urban centers around the peripheries of Quito. The new governance model aims at deepening democratization bringing the municipal government closer to the citizens by activating decentralized management of public affairs and promoting social participation in the definition of local priorities (Córdova 2010). Two specific mechanisms were created to implement metropolitan governance in the DMQ. The first one was the division of the city in nine Administrative Zones, which are deconcentrated dependencies of the central municipality. The second mechanism was the creation or strengthening of specialized secretariats to address specific policy problems or to undertake specific functions of the municipality. During the period covered in our analysis (2015-2018), 12 secretariats existed in the DMQ: Environment, Communications, Territorial Coordination and Participation, Culture, Education, Social Inclusion, Mobility, Planning, Security and Governability, Territory, Habitat and Urbanization, and Health. An empirical assessment of the interactions between government and non-profit actors in an actual decentralized polycentric system should show many interactions between these two components of the metropolitan system and all the other actors across SDGs, especially those related to the mission of the specialized secretariats.

The Constitution approved in 2008 maintained the status of Quito as an autonomous metropolitan district. This Constitution also redefined the competencies for the other five existing levels of government, which are the national, regional, provincial, municipal, and rural parish. The most significant change occurred at the level



Map 1
Location of the study area

of the rural parishes. Up until 2008, rural parishes did not receive resources from the central government or had clear competencies in their jurisdictions. However, after 2008, they became the elected government that operates closest to the people. The jurisdiction of the DMQ overlaps with 33 rural parishes (see Map 1), and the provincial government of Pichincha. There are also 32 urban parishes within the DMQ, which are governed directly by the municipality.

4 Results and discussion

In Figure 1, we show the distribution of all the SDG-actions undertaken by the rural parishes and their partners between 2015 and 2018. The highest proportions correspond to SDG 3 «Life on Land» (17 %), SDG 1 «Good health and Well-being» (16 %) and SDG 6 «Clean Water and Sanitation» (12 %).

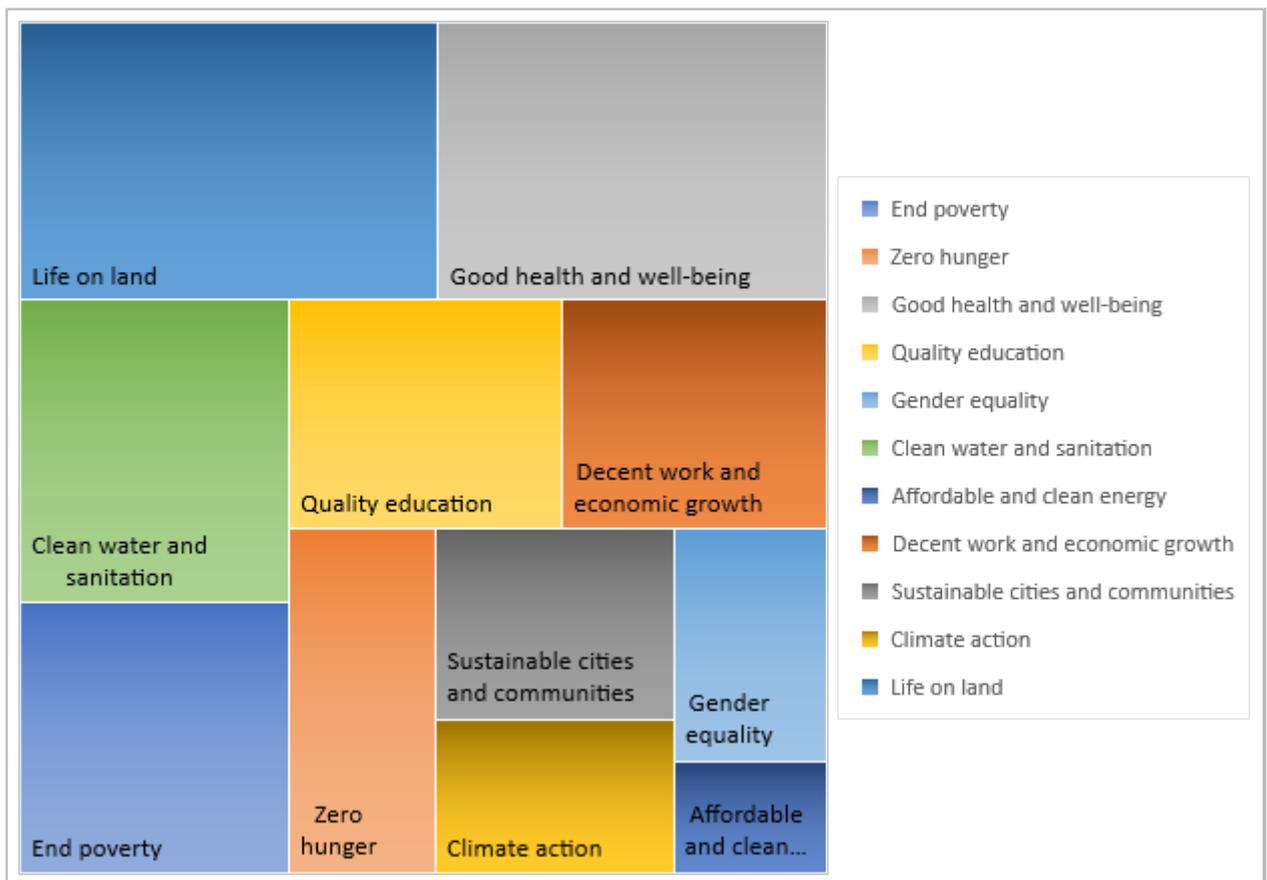


Figure 1
Distribution of implemented SDGs

In Figure 2, we show a disaggregated distribution to the level of SDG-targets. Among them, the «sustainable management of forests» (Target 15.2), «eradication of extreme poverty» (Target 1.1), and «increasing the skills for employment» (Target 4.4) are the most frequent.

The highlighted bars in Figure 2 correspond to the issues identified by the latest study of vulnerabilities of the DMQ published in 2015 and constructed in consultations with rural parish presidents. The point-biserial analysis shows a correlation ($r_{pbi} = 0.3042$) between the frequency of SDG implementation and the identification of a policy issue as a priority by the central administration

of the city. However, the correlation is only statistically significant below the 90 % threshold ($p\text{-value} = 0.14$). This finding suggests that the priorities of the central administration of the city structure the governance system only loosely. Most of the SDGs acted upon are chose in interactions among the different types of actors, present in the DMQ.

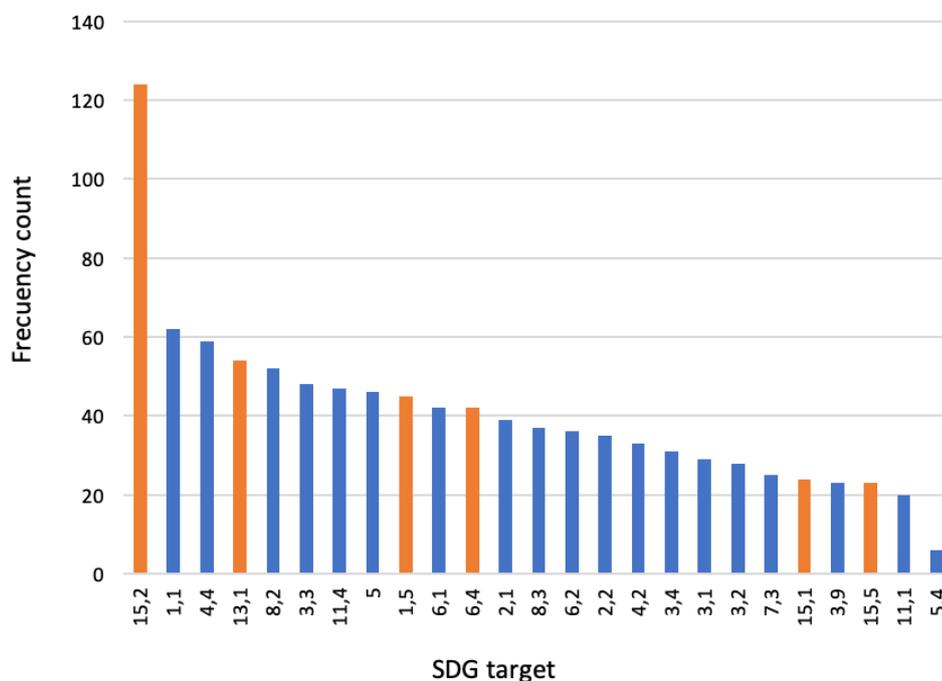


Figure 2
SDG-actions by target

The first independent variable of interest for this study is non-profit density. We measured density as the proportion of nonprofit actors in each rural parish. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the proportions of the four main types of actors identified by respondents; nonprofit, state, universities, and private or for-profit. We separated universities from the for-profit subgroup and the state subgroup because respondents indicated that the nature of their interactions with universities, both public and private, related to extension-activities or participatory research projects, but did not receive money from these interactions.

The median counts of state actors and nonprofits are larger than those of universities and for profits. The mean proportion of nonprofit density reported was roughly 17 %, while the maximum was 60 % and the minimum 0 %. The standard deviation of nonprofit density was 13.4 %. For state actors, the mean was 13 %, while the maximum was 57 % and a minimum of 0 %. The standard deviation, in this case, was 11 %. These proportions suggest similar distributions across both groups of actors.

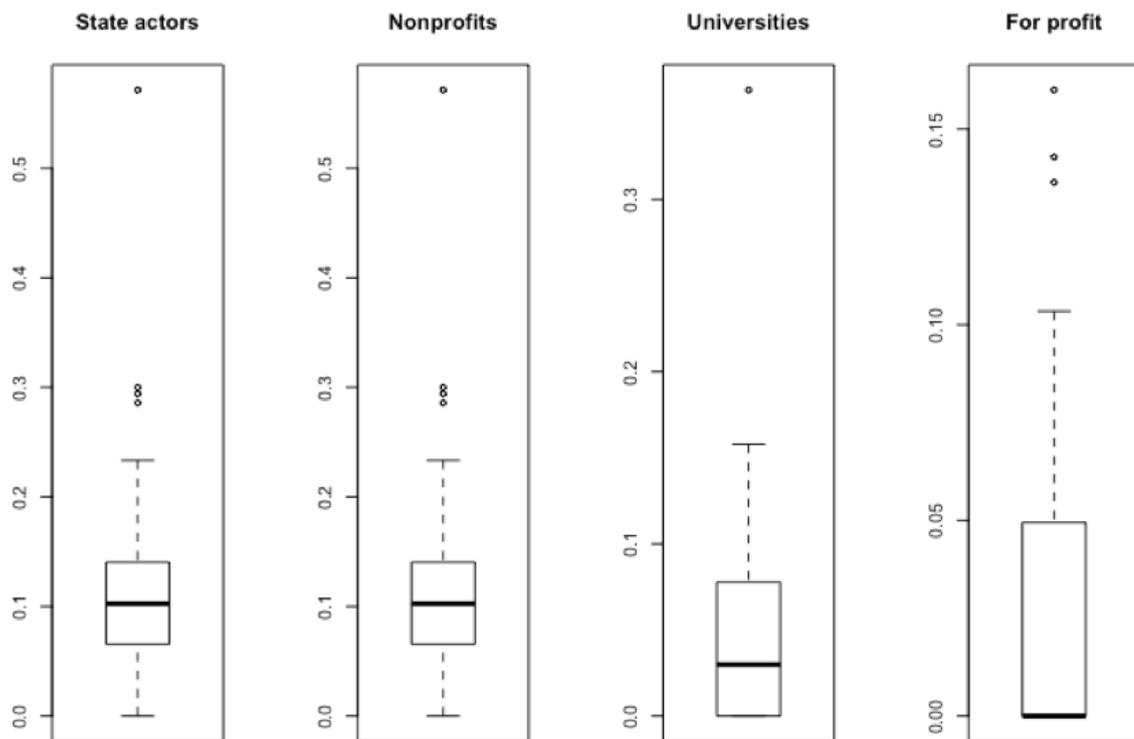


Figure 3
Distribution of nonprofit and State-actors

The histograms in Figure 4 show the distribution of the variables and their corresponding residuals. Given three conditions, the relatively small sample size ($n = 31$), that the shape of the distribution of all groups cannot be assumed as different from normal according to the Shapiro test, and that there is no significant difference in variances across groups according to the Levene test, we conducted a Kruskal-Wallis test to statistically compare the medians of the four groups of actors. The result shows that the medians of the groups are statistically different. Then, the Wilcox test was used to assess if the medians of the state and nonprofit groups were statistically different. Upon obtaining a positive result, we applied the Mann-Whitney-Wilcox test to identify the size of the effect, confirming the statistically significant difference. This finding shows that state and nonprofit actors are present in the implementation of SDG-actions at the parish level in substantially different ways.

In Figure 4, we show a breakdown of nonprofit density across rural parishes. Results show that interactions with GROs are more commonly reported by rural parishes. All the GROs mentioned by respondents fall in one of the following categories: water-boards, neighborhood committees, and local associations of producers. These are all grassroots organizations that deliver public goods in their localities, unlike cooperation agencies which often only intermediate

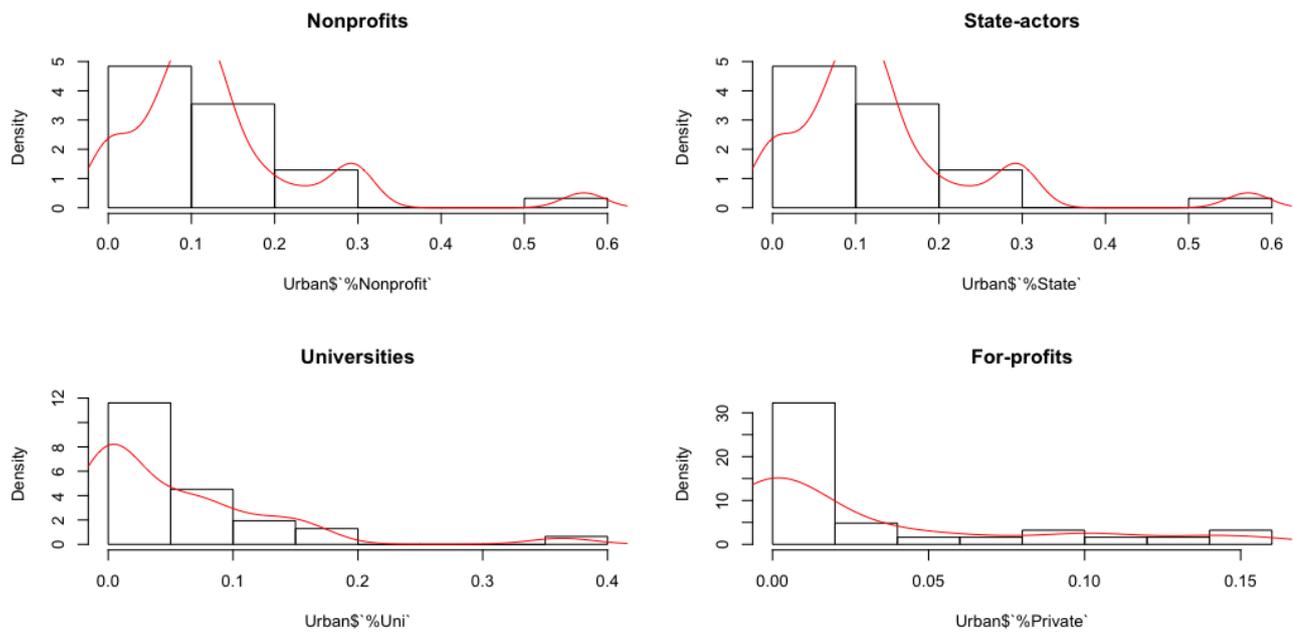


Figure 4
Histograms of actor types

among actors or implement projects through partners (mostly NGOs). The limited presence of religious organizations was somewhat surprising for a country where most people report to be religious. Some respondents explained that although religious organizations operate in their jurisdictions, the level of interaction is minimal because they serve only those belonging to their immediate group and not the broader community where they operate.

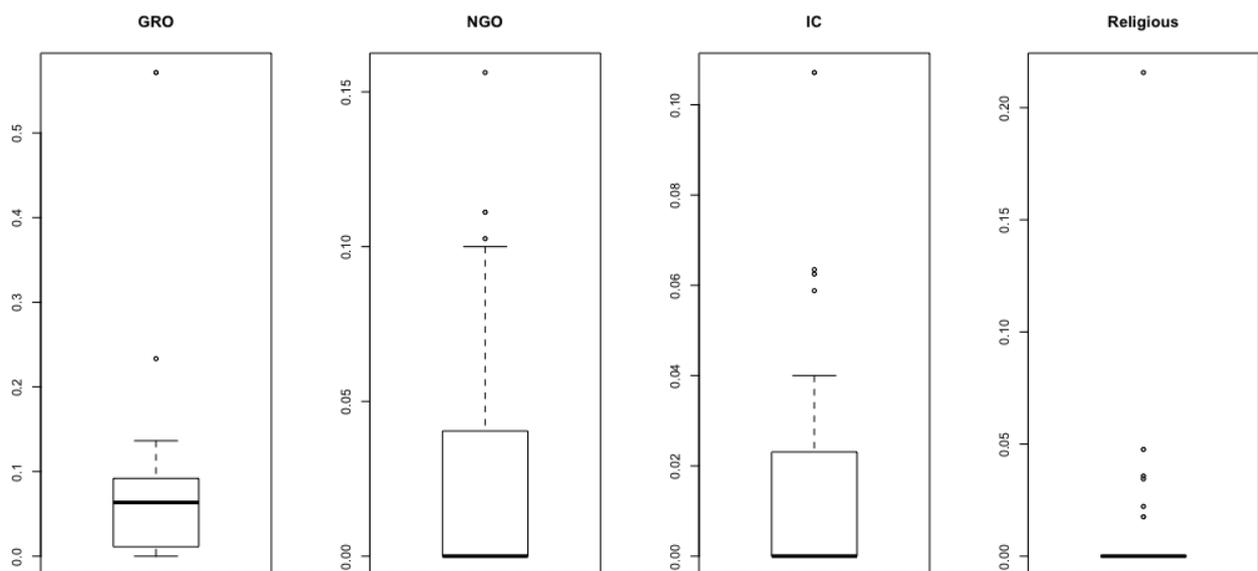


Figure 5
Distributions of nonprofit actors

A comparison of medians was conducted to explore the statistical difference among the proportions of subtypes of nonprofits present in the system. Provided the distributions are not normal and the variations are homogenous, we found a statistical difference for three groups: NGOs-GROs, IC-GROs, and GROs-religious. The size of the effects is statistically significant in all cases. This finding confirms that some substantial differences exist on how different types of nonprofits participate from the implementation of SDG-activities in the DMQ.

4.1. Explaining non-profit density

In this section, we explore the association of nonprofit density with population heterogeneity, needs or demand-side factors, urban-bias, interdependence, and supply-side factors. In Table 2, we present a summary of the correlations calculated for the variables of interest. We calculated correlations for two types of data on nonprofit density. First, we used the aggregate measure of nonprofit density. Then, we used the proportion of each nonprofit subgroup. The *p-value* column presents the most significant correlations in bold, considering an alpha of 0.05.

Dimension	Independent variable	Dependent variables	Correlation coefficient (R ²)	<i>P-value</i>
Heterogeneity	Equitability index	% nonprofits	0.32	0.08
		% GROs	0.36	0.05
Needs-demand side	Poverty rate (% of poor)	% nonprofits	-0.31	0.09
		% NGOs	0.34	0.06
		% GROs	-0.35	0.05
		% religious	-0.40	0.03
		% GROs	0.31	0.09
		% religious	0.34	0.07
	Level of risk (score in risk index)	% NGOs	0.43	0.15
		% GROs	-0.42	0.02
Urban bias	Convenience (Euclidean distance to DMQ headquarters)	% NGOs	0.46	0.01
		% ICs	0.36	0.05
		% ICs	0.37	0.04
Power differential	% State actors	% religious	0.31	0.09
		% ICs	-0.42	0.02
		% Nonprofits	-0.32	0.08
		% GROs	-0.40	0.03
		% Parish	0.43	0.02
		% ICs	0.59	0.07
Supply-side	-	-	-	-

Table 2
Summary of results

For the dimension of population heterogeneity, the Equitability index, that measures population diversity, reports positive and significant correlations with the aggregate of nonprofit density and with the proportion of GROs. This finding makes sense in light of the state-failure approach given that if a population has a large number of minorities, and the government allocates goods with a mean-voter approach, individuals in each minority group will have incentives to associate for taking part of the implementation of SDG-actions.

This finding also provides some support for the needs or demand-side argument. Regarding that dimension, the proportion of the population that is considered poor correlates negatively with nonprofit density. This finding is compatible with previous studies, that show fewer nonprofits working with the poorest. However, the disaggregate measure of nonprofit density shows that the negative correlation only holds for GROs and religious groups. Those in an extreme situation of poverty may not find enough resources to form or maintain these forms of association. Additionally, the positive correlation between the percentage of poor and NGO density suggests that NGOs may operate where poverty is prevalent.

The score in the Gini index positively correlates with the density of GROs and religious groups but only when alpha is set to 0.1. The size of the correlation and the significance offer partial support to the idea that some nonprofits avoid situations of extreme inequality.

Another variable in the demand-side dimension relates to the perceived level of risk of the population in the rural parish. In this case, the score in the risk index shows a negative correlation with the proportion of GROs. Given that risk and the percentage of poor are also strongly correlated, we could entertain the argument that more poor and vulnerable populations struggle to form organizations to tackle problems.

Within the urban-bias dimension, the Euclidean distance to the municipality, which is our measure of access to political influence and goods, shows a positive and highly significant correlation with the density of NGOs and ICs. This finding means that the more distant rural parishes collaborate with a higher number of organizations of those two types. This finding partially contradicts the urban-bias argument. However, the contradiction points towards another issue, urban bias does not hold across policy issues as the correlation between density of ICs and the area dedicated to agriculture in the rural parish suggests.

The analysis of the interdependence dimension shows that the percentage of interactions with state actors correlates positively only with the density of religious organizations. Additionally, if we break down the state-actor group, we found negative correlations between the percentage of interactions between national-level ac-

tors and the density of ICs, and between the provincial level and the densities of GROs. Finally, the proportion of interactions with other parish-level actors correlates positively with NGO density. These findings offer some support to the idea of interdependence between state and civil society actors because only specific types of civil society organizations seem to be affected by the presence of more powerful actors.

The absence of significant correlations between the interactions with the municipal and zonal levels and nonprofit density confirms that the national level heavily influences the dynamics of the metropolitan area in terms of implementation of SDG-activities.

Finally, we did not find significant correlations for the supply-side factor and the density of civil society organization at the aggregate or disaggregate levels. Therefore, there is no support for the idea that better education facilitates the development and maintenance of local organizations in this context.

4.2. Does nonprofit density influence policy effectiveness?

In this section, we present the results for the analysis of the association between nonprofit density and the perception of the effectiveness of SDG-actions. In Figure 6, we show the count of perceived effectiveness grouped by SDG. For most SDGs (80 %), respondents reported highly effective implementation. On average, the options of no-effectiveness or a non-answer only accounted for 14 % of the total responses across SDGs.

We calculated correlation coefficients for the proportion of interactions between the rural parishes and state-actors and the proportions of perceived effectiveness per SDG. The proportion of interactions between rural parishes and the national or the zonal levels of government report negative and significant correlations with the proportion of medium effectiveness ($R^2 = -0.54$, $\alpha = 0.1$) and no effectiveness ($R^2 = -0.60$, $\alpha = 0.05$), respectively.

On the civil society side, correlation coefficients for the density of nonprofits and the proportions of perceived effectiveness per SDG show that only NGO density has a statistically significant correlation with the proportions of high ($R^2 = -0.54$, $\alpha = 0.1$) and medium effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.60$, $\alpha = 0.05$).

Together, these findings suggest that the presence of a higher number of interactions with state-actors is not be associated with a better perception of policy effectiveness. The same is true for nonprofit density and policy effectiveness, except when there is a high density of NGOs in a locality.

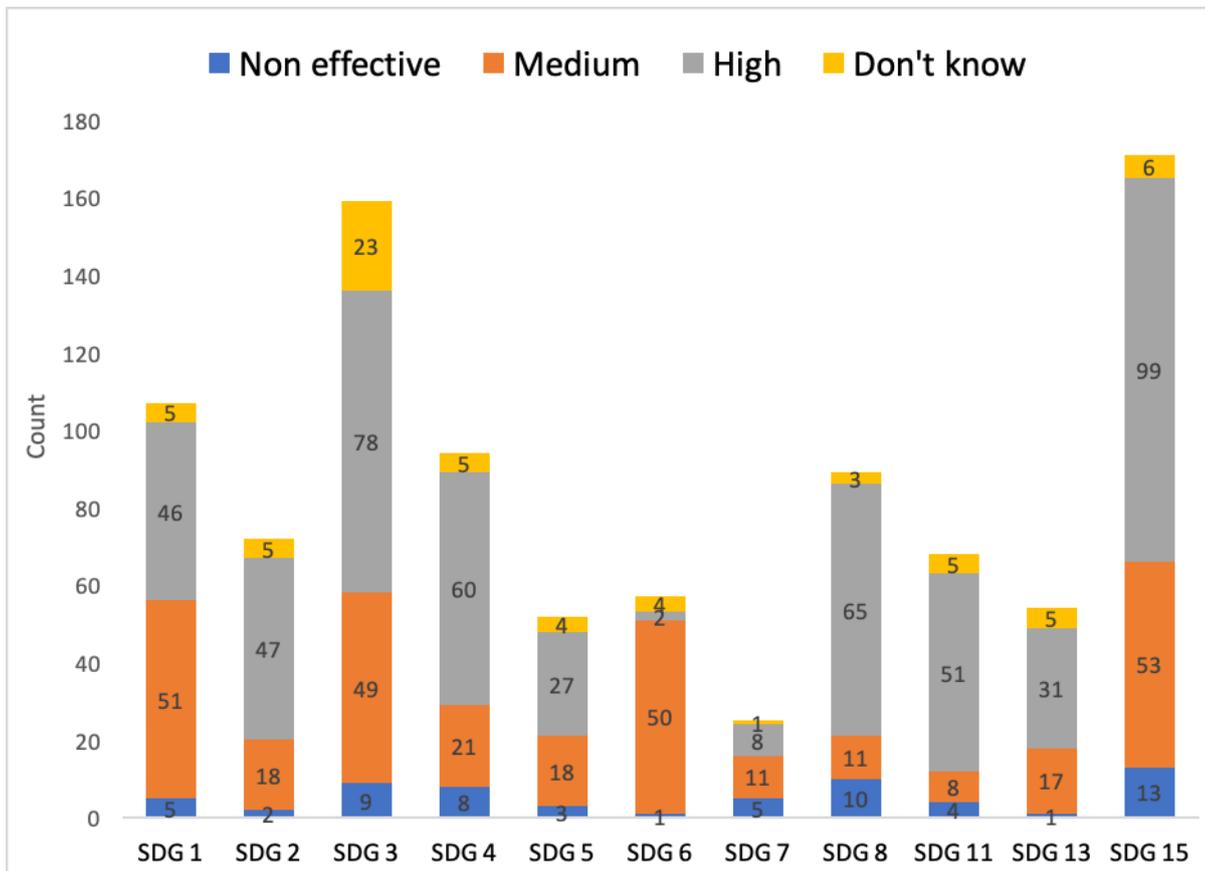


Figure 6
Effectiveness of implementation

5 Conclusions

Civil society organizations are an essential component of the implementation of SDG-actions in urban settings. This statement is part of prescriptive ideas that seek to set guidelines to generate better policy outcomes across the developing world. Such prescription finds empirical grounds in a growing body of research that seeks to clarify how SDGs come into fruition in specific localities.

In this paper, we have proposed an assessment of how civil society organizations engage in the implementation of SDG-actions in the metropolitan governance system of a developing country. Our results provide support to the idea that the conditions of the locality heavily influence the density of nonprofits and that the presence of certain types of nonprofits influences positive perceptions of policy effectiveness. Among the most critical conditions defining nonprofit density are the poverty rate, the level of perceived risk, the access to centers of political influence and goods, the proportion of agricultural land and the type of state actor that participates from SDG-implementation. Our findings add nuance to various arguments present in the literature on nonprofit density about the

relations of complementarity between State and non-state organizations for policy implementation. Additionally, we find sharp differences in the involvement of NGOs, GROs, and International Cooperation agencies as well as religious groups. These differences hold across SDGs.

Our study of SDG-actions could inform the design of SDG policies in settings where municipalities decide to establish a deconcentrated and decentralized governance system to bring people closer to the management of public problems. As this case study shows, the existing mechanisms to implement actions towards the SDGs in the DMQ are not generating a great deal of interactions with the governments closest to the people but allow for specific local arrangements to emerge which effectiveness seems to be relatively high. Striking such balance between structuring interactions and generating conditions for innovation appears to be one of the main challenges for designing governance systems for the implementation of SDG policies.

We encourage scholars interested in the nonprofit sector and its interactions with state and for-profit actors to continue assessing the variables that influence nonprofit density and the effectiveness in producing desired policy outcomes. More extensive data sets that allow cross country comparisons are still needed to parse out relevant associations that could inform the development of incentives to promote nonprofit involvement in areas where private and state actors fail to act. Such strategies must consider the substantive interests and capacities of nonprofits and their partners, as well as the role of the design of different governance systems in encouraging or constraining interactions with public sector organizations.

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