

ABSTRACT

A changing international context which involves the birth of new actors and the rooting of ideologies has strongly modified the conditions under which the main traditional actor of international relations functions and is structured. It is becoming increasingly difficult to legitimize the actions and justify the existence of the modern State in its current form within a globalized context that tends to emphasize the supranational over the national and plurality over unity in society.

This phenomenon poses a significant threat to State cohesion and must therefore be dealt with in a form which allows for the existence of differences within national societies without endangering the existence and unity of the State. As opposed to the early stages of State and nation building, when it became crucial to centralize power and increase homogeneity within the country through centralized initiatives in order to consolidate the State, current conditions demand that the State decentralize and allow a wider margin of plurality within society in order to ensure survival.

In response to this legitimacy crisis of the State, many authors have established that the solution lies in the empowerment of local government institutions within national government systems. Local government has taken on a new role in the efforts carried out by States in order to adapt to the changing context they are currently facing. Under this perspective, States become a sum of localities rather than a single unified entity.

The local answer to the question of the State crisis has gained importance in Latin American countries over the last ten years. Several of the most important Latin American States have increased their efforts to promote democracy and effective governance after a long history of military dictatorships and dictatorial regimes. This effort gives strong importance to the role to be played by local governments in governing the countries' communities and have therefore often included decentralizing strategies that transfer power to the local level of government. Municipalities are seen as the breeding grounds for political legitimacy and increased popular participation.

Mexico has not been the exception in Latin America on the issue of decentralization and strengthening of local government. The Mexican municipality known as the *municipio* has a long history of existence which dates from the arrival of the Spanish *conquistadores* at the beginning of the sixteenth century. However, for too long, the role of local government in Mexico has been limited to a symbolic figure tied to the control and domination of intermediate and central governments. They have never been given the autonomy and the resources to manage the most important problems faced by their communities. As a result, power and resources remain concentrated in the higher levels of government, which are not necessarily in touch with society's problems and priorities. Therefore the main argument of this thesis is that the most effective way to overcome and confront the problems that Mexico is facing today is by restructuring government: delegating power, responsibilities and resources from the central government to local governments while reforming and strengthening the latter at the same time.