

### Dariusz Gawin, Piotr Gliński (eds.): Civil Society in the Making

Skovajsa, Marek

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Rezension / review

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Skovajsa, M. (2006). Dariusz Gawin, Piotr Gliński (eds.): Civil Society in the Making. *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 42(6), 1265-1268. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-56620>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

**Dariusz Gawin, Piotr Gliński (eds.):**

*Civil Society in the Making*

Warsaw 2006: IFiS Publishers, 377 pp.

Once suspected by some observers to be a trendy term that would have its fifteen minutes of fame and then be relegated again to a second-rank position in social-science vocabulary, civil society has instead become an elementary concept for theorising about democracy. Its popularity is not only not waning but, on the contrary, is climbing to ever greater heights. *Civil Society in the Making* is a collection edited by Piotr Gliński and Dariusz Gawin, researchers at the Institute for Philosophy and Sociology at the Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. Naturally it focuses mainly on Polish civil society, but individual articles are also dedicated to civil society in Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia and to European and global civil society. A timely combination, indeed, for a book published on the eve of the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union, which, in turn, gives increased relevance to the issue of EU membership for Western Balkans countries.

As the book editors rightly point out in their introduction, civil society is a multidisciplinary concept open to disputes and containing an inherent tension between normative and empirical levels of analysis. Correspondingly, the disciplinary identity of contributions oscillates between sociology, political science and political philosophy and most, if not all, combine a normative approach with an empirical one. The volume's sixteen articles are divided into four sections. The first section addresses various conceptual issues in civil society theory. Whereas the second part focuses on the development of civil society at the European and global level, in the third section entitled 'Cultural and Regional Aspects of Civil Society' questions of political culture and civic attitudes in various regions are addressed. The fourth section of the book is devoted to the development of the NGO sectors and the obstacles to their growth in Poland and Bulgaria.

Inevitably, given the ambiguity of civil society as a concept, there is some overlapping of the various themes addressed in the different sections of the volume. For instance, interesting contributions to the controversy about the most appropriate definition of civil society can be found both in the theoretical essays and in the empirical studies. Nataliya Leshchenko makes a strong case for the inclusion of political parties in civil society in the new democracies, where, in her view, the parties cannot be clearly separated from civic movements and civil society organisations because they often perform some of the functions that would fall to the latter in advanced democratic systems. In a remark of interest to Czech readers, she notes that the Czech dissidents were the only ones in post-communist Europe to have adopted what she calls 'a self-effacing stance' (p. 30) keeping a relatively low profile in post-1989 politics. An informed discussion of the definition of NGO sector by Galia Chimiak arrives at the opposite conclusion that political parties should be left out of the third sector, as they aspire to directly participate in government. Chimiak is also arguing for the exclusion of churches from the NGO sector, mainly owing to their undemocratic character (p. 300–301). This view differs again from the balanced perspective defended by the Serbian author Ivana Spasić in her discussion of the state of civil society in Serbia before and after the 2000 collapse of the Milošević regime. Spasić warns against a one-sided and normatively overburdened understanding of civil society, in which only pro-democratic and Western-oriented organisations are admitted, arguing that from a neutral sociological viewpoint non-democratic and anti-democratic civic groups are equally a part of civil society (p. 216). Even if these and the other various views on the scope of civil society and the NGO sector presented in the volume may at first glance appear contradictory, they are in fact justified as a reflection of the complexity of this phenomenon, which is revealed in comparisons be-

tween different societies, and, as such, they provide a solid contribution to improving our understanding of the realities of civil society.

Civil society is studied in the volume from diverse angles and perspectives. Nataliya Leshchenko reflects on the impact of civil society on the social attitudes and values of the society at large in a methodological and theoretical study. She assigns civil society 'an ideational role' (p. 28) vis à vis the wider society and proposes a list of variables and indicators for measuring how efficiently civil society plays this role. Among other things, she also emphasises the need to study moral leaders as the engines of value change in society, a recommendation certainly worth following to avoid the risk of conceiving society as a playground of blind systemic and structural forces.

The contribution by Daria Łucka looks at civil society from the point of view of contemporary political philosophy. The author favours a communitarian interpretation of civil society, which she plays against the liberal position on the one hand, and either the conservative or the social-democratic position on the other. In her view, 'communitarianism searches for intermediate, moderate solutions ... it proposes non-ideological, non-extreme explanations, which are close to social practice' (p. 36–37). In Łucka's view, this kind of 'golden mean' offered in the communitarian version of civil society successfully avoids the pitfalls of both the extreme individualism of which liberalism is guilty and the exasperated collectivism to which conservatism and the social-democratic outlook, both in their own ways, fall victim.

The theoretical contribution by the co-editor Piotr Gliński sets itself the difficult task of finding a viable operationalisation of civil society. The author lists nineteen descriptive features of civil society that appear to be mutually reinforcing, even though, as he readily admits, they may at times weaken or even contradict each other. Worth singling out is Gliński's feature number 1 – civil society is a residual social realm situated between small

primary groups and big societal structures – and feature number 15 – civil society is the field in which civic virtues are cultivated; a theoretical view on politics similar not only to that of Aristotelians but also to the prominent Polish sociologist Maria Ossowska.

Traditions in political thought about civil society are the point of departure for the study on European civil society by the volume's other co-editor Dariusz Gawin. His analysis of the official EU documents in which civil society is defined and its desired role in EU politics is made explicit reveals the technocratic nature of EU efforts to use civil society as a means of overcoming its famous 'democratic deficit'. The paradox of the EU top-down support for European civil society is conveyed in the Foucault-inspired concept of governmentalisation: in order to be treated as partners, the organizations of civil society must mould themselves into the image of EU institutions and accept the rules of the game of the EU's consultation culture. For this the price they pay is the loss of their original spontaneity and embeddedness in broader society. For Gawin, the EU's conception of civil society is thus heir to neither the Natural Right tradition of resistance to despotic rule nor the tradition of morally transformational civic engagement represented by Havel or Michnik. It instead bears similarity to the Hegelian concept of civil society run by an enlightened 'universal class' of state bureaucrats. There is, however, a second current of European civil society, in the radically leftist youth movement against globalisation. It remains to be seen if the two can become allies on a permanent basis, or only occasionally, as when Western Europe protested against the war in Iraq.

Interesting theoretical insights are sketched out in a brief essay on volunteerism and Polish cultural traditions by Andrzej Siciński. He distinguishes three cultural dimensions defined by the polarities between: *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Catholic and Protestant churches, liberal free-market societies and communist regimes. Noting that

the *Gemeinschaft* type of social solidarity represented a very strong cultural tradition in Poland, Siciński explains the relative weakness of the *Gesellschaft* civic activism in Poland in the combined effects of factors as disparate as the Catholic tradition and the communist legacy.

The issue of European civil society is addressed again in the study by Sami Makki on the involvement of NGOs in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. The author examines different levels of NGO participation in various policy-making mechanisms in the framework of CFSP, reflects on the existing reserves that could be used in order to increase the role of NGOs, and discusses the ways in which to avoid marginalising the NGOs from new member states in the EU policy-making process. The geo-sociology of global civil society is the subject matter of Paweł Załęski's article, which approaches the arena of global NGOs from the perspective of bureaucracy and public administration theory. The author argues that this approach refrains from either overestimating or underestimating the role of the state, of which both international relations theory and social movements theory, respectively, are guilty, and allows for an objective assessment of the professionalisation of the global NGO sector. He concludes that the apparatus of global governance is dependent on the global non-governmental administrative system that exercises considerable influence over the recipients of its benefits in virtually any corner of the world. A specific phenomenon of global civil society, the anti-globalisation movement, is analysed by Piotr Gliński in a critical study of the movement's inherent contradictions. For the author, the fundamental contradiction between its civic goals and its uncivil and violent practices accords the movement an essentially self-destructive character.

Various cultural and regional dimensions of civil society are illustrated in articles on Poland, Romania, and Serbia in the third section of the volume. Based on qualitative interviews, Anna Wyka's study investigates how

Polish NGO representatives interpret the principle of subsidiarity that is explicitly mentioned in the Preamble to the Polish Constitution. The author also looks into the perceived impact of this constitutional principle on social practice. She notes that the implementation of the subsidiarity principle is far from perfect, owing to the 'unhealthy competitiveness' (p. 192) between various levels of public authority, but she sees signs of future improvement in recent changes to the Polish non-profit law and the sector's increasing professionalism. The article by Ivana Spasić offers a well-argued discussion of the situation of civil society in Serbia and of the role it played during and after the fall of the Milošević regime. As noted above, this author is very sensitive to the potential risks of uncritical use of the civil society concept. She rejects not only normatively one-sided, exclusive concepts of civil society, but also the downplaying of the role of the state and of nationalist and religious currents in civil society, while at the same time she points to both the financial and the conceptual dependence of pro-Western NGOs in Serbia on Western donors. In his text on Romanian political discourse, Ovidiu Caraiani discusses the stances taken by nationalist and anti-nationalist intellectuals and politicians in Romania between the 1930s and the 2000s. In the conclusion, he argues for a liberal conception of a neutral state, rejecting the politics of identity and a collectivist-communitarian vision of the state as the embodiment of a shared conception of the good.

The outcome of independent research into the inter-dependency of the use of the Internet and NGO activism are presented by Artur Kościański. Following Bach and Stark's thesis that the path of NGO development in Central and Eastern Europe copies the spread of new technologies, Kościański investigates how the availability of the Internet modifies the opportunities for civic activism and organisation in voluntary associations. Based on the 2002 European Social Survey data for Poland, he notes a higher lev-

el of civic activism among frequent Internet users. However, when assessing the overall impact of Internet technology on the Polish NGO sector, his position is somewhat sceptical: there is a clear digital divide between privileged well-funded, well-equipped and professionalised elite NGOs and the majority of others. Many NGOs have a local focus and therefore little motivation to 'get on-line', and some NGO leaders have resisted the use of the Internet fearing that the new technology would democratise the organisation and undermine their source of authority.

The last section of the book, concentrating on the NGO sector, deals mainly with the situation in Poland. The only exception is the closing article by Iliyana Nikolova on Bulgarian NGOs, based on focus groups and interviews with representatives of the Bulgarian third sector. Their assessment of the overall situation in Bulgaria is a fitting description of the NGO sector in any post-communist country: very diverse, but dependent on foreign donors, divided, without a unified structure, and focused only on immediate partners.

The remaining three articles in the last section of the volume focus on Poland. Piotr Gliński's study uses a rich basis of quantitative data to disclose the dilemmas of development of Polish NGOs. His criticism of a situation in which large portions of government funding for NGOs go to very un-civic sports organisations, an inexhaustible reservoir and safe haven for many communist-era cadres, would undoubtedly fall on sympathetic ears in the Czech Republic. Also his description of anti-civic interest groups and the clientelism burgeoning in local politics is very familiar to Czech readers. Galia Chimiak in her systematic study of the NGO sector in Poland delves into the relationship between civil society and the NGO sector, concluding that 'NGOs constitute one of the media of civil society' (p. 300) and thus deserve to be studied in depth in their own right. After reviewing literature on the emergence of the non-profit sector in general and in post-communist countries in particular, she pro-

ceeds to describe the rise of the NGO sector in Poland. Her findings are fittingly complemented by a study authored by Barbara Lewenstein and Hanna Palska that addresses the issue of the stance Polish NGOs take towards political authority. Drawing on Claus Offe's idea of non-institutional politics and Christopher Lasch's thesis on the rebellion of the elites, the authors conducted qualitative interviews with representatives of leading politically active Polish NGOs. They discovered a surprising similarity of views within the respondent group and a general trend to accord the utmost importance to their relations to political authorities: 'their identity as public actors is more influenced by their relations with the sphere of power than the society' (p. 351). This again is an observation that is likely to apply not just to Poland but to all post-communist countries, and the same is true when the authors emphasise the limits of this model of operation of NGOs in society. In Poland, along with anywhere else in the region, the NGO sector as such has failed to build up durable channels of communication with authorities other than old and new friendships, and the support of the wider public is far from satisfactory.

The state of civil society in post-communist countries certainly offers few grounds for feeling confidently satisfied about its progress. But what has not yet been created, fully achieved and completed, can at least be in the making. Galia Chimiak is certainly right in observing that the practice of involvement in non-profit organisations is becoming increasingly embedded in the social structure of Poland (p. 325) and the validity of her claim can be extended to other post-communist societies. The studies collected in the volume support this moderately optimistic view. At the same time they offer positive evidence that the Central and Eastern European civil societies in the making can more than ever before rely on reflexive knowledge produced by local academics.

*Marek Skovajsa*