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Making sense of “weakness” of post-communist civil society: Individual vs. organized engagement in civil advocacy in the Czech Republic

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Working paper WP KVE – 02/2013

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Abstract:

Starting point of this paper is alleged weakness of civil society in Central-Eastern European countries as often demonstrated by sparse organizational infrastructure, low membership in civil society organizations (CSOs), or insufficient community activism and privatism of citizens in these countries. This paper focuses on the Czech Republic and claims, first, that there is a considerable discrepancy in the citizens' engagement in organized civil society activities depending on whether these are perceived as political (advocacy) or not, and second, that the gap between organized and individual engagement within the field of civil advocacy does not necessarily stem (only) from the "legacy of communism" but (also) from the dissidents' conception of "non-political" civil society. The paper deals with the empirical analysis of EVS data, original survey data (N=800), and focus group interviews. It aims at understanding what the motives of citizens and advocacy CSOs for keeping their distance are. Furthermore, the paper attempts to sketch more general causes of this disconnectedness through illustrating the roots of the conflict between the categories of collective/individual and political/ethical in the Czech history of thinking about civil society.

Key words:

Civil society, democracy, civil participation, non-governmental organizations, Czech Republic.

JEL classification D72, L31

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1. Introduction

The starting point of this paper is the presumed weakness of civil society in Central-Eastern European (CEE) countries reported earlier by some observers [Rose 1999; Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1996; Howard 2003; *ibid* 2011; Newton, Monterro 2007] and assessment of this evaluation twenty years after the regime change. Assertions of undeveloped civil societies in post-communist region are usually supported by the reported evidence of sparse organizational civic infrastructure, low membership in civil society organizations, or insufficient community activism and privatism of citizens in these countries. This paper claims, first, that there is a considerable discrepancy among the citizens' engagement in organized civil society activities depending on whether these are political (advocacy) or not, and second, that the gap between organized and individual engagement within the field of civil advocacy does not necessarily stem (only) from the legacy of communism but (also) from the dissidents' conception of civil society.

Paper starts with discussion of the theoretical perspectives that lies at the heart of every inquiry into the quality of civil society. It argues that the claim of alleged weakness of CEE civil societies partially stems from two generalizations. First, that the citizens' engagement within the framework of CSOs is more important than individual (non-organized, distant) participation outside CSOs, and second, that the advocacy and explicitly political activities are more important form of civil society realm than non-advocacy or non-political forms of engagement. In other words, the paper claims that it is primarily the idea of politicized citizens organizing themselves on the grassroots and community level that lies at the heart of the common idea of "proper" - strong and vibrant - civil society: and so, it is this normative assumption of privileged forms of civic action that also lies at the heart of the critique of the weakness of CEE civil societies.

Second, the paper deals with the empirical analysis of EVS data showing that while organized engagement of Czech citizens within political or advocacy oriented civil society organizations (CSOs) is lower than in the case of western

democracies, overall civic engagement in non-advocacy CSOs is considerably higher and display relative richness of associational life.

Third, paper aims at understanding why the individual engagement within advocacy oriented CSOs is low, or, why there is disconnectedness between the organized and the individual civil society actors in the Czech Republic. It attempts to describe the gap between citizens and CSOs, to explore and to understand the reasons and motives of the relevant actors for keeping their distance from one another.

Furthermore, the paper attempts to sketch more general causes of disconnectedness between organized and individual civil advocacy activities. Here the paper strives to identify the key attitudes and opinions of both individuals and (the representatives of) the collective actors and compares them with the dissidents' original vision(s) of civil society: it seems that the original 'dreams' of civil society already dealt with the cleavage between the collective/individual and political/ethical and that the preference for the second options seems to be embodied in the Czech civil advocacy today. Paper concludes with hypothesizing that it is not only the legacy of the undemocratic rule before 1989 that devastated voluntary civic engagement and eroded interpersonal trust in society, but that the current divide between organized collective actors and individual citizens can also be traced back to the deliberations of the most influential intellectual leaders of the anti-communist opposition in the 1970s and 1980s: the suspicion towards organized (political) action and emphasis on individual ethical concerns is consistent with the attitudes of Czech citizens towards advocacy CSOs today.

The structure of the paper is as follows: first, we introduce the theoretical framework of the paper that defines two main traditions of thinking about civil society and of its social science analysis – that based on the perspective of the citizens, which emphasises individual participation, and that of the social movement perspective, which emphasises collective activism. We suggest that these two perspectives stem from different theoretical backgrounds but are equally important in accounts of social reality.

Second, the paper introduces EVS data and explores the level of advocacy (political) and non-political organized engagement in the Czech Republic as compared to the major European countries.

Third, the paper aims at an empirical exploration of the basic features of both the individual and the collective forms of participation in advocacy activities as apparent in the current Czech context. It attempts to show the extent and the forms of individual participation and to introduce the practices of CSOs vis-a-vis members of the public. Furthermore, the paper offers an empirical exploration of motives, attitudes and opinions of both citizens towards CSOs and, vice versa, of CSOs towards citizens. Paper aims to show how the two relate to each other, what motivates the two sides to keep the “demand” and “supply” sides of Czech civil advocacy separate

Finally, the paper shows how these attitudes are related to the original dreams of Czech dissidents. It explores the cultural milieu which influenced the formation of civil society theory and praxis after 1989 and presents the key visions as they were developed during the communist years by leading dissident intellectuals. It briefly characterises them so that these visions can be compared with the situation twenty years after the Velvet Revolution as it appears in our findings.

2. Four dimensions of civil society participation

In order to assess properly the state of Czech civil society, the paper aims to show that there are various traditions of theorizing and analysing of the concept that focus on different classes of subjects and different types of activities. Two dimensions are particularly important here: level of politization and the mode of coordination of civil society activities.

Some of the contemporary normative perspectives on civil society propose an ideal type of civil sphere that prevent the powers of the state and the market from invading the lives of citizens (e.g. J. Habermas, T. Skocpol, J. Ehrenberg). This political – or advocacy – function of civil society may be further described as the representation of “the non-commercial collective interests of the general

public as opposed to the special economic interests of particular segments of society” or the commitment “to the public interest defined in terms of noneconomic, collective or indivisible interests that have the general public as their intended beneficiary” [Jenkins 1987: 296]. More specifically, this function of civil society may be further decomposed into aggregating, cultivating and channelling of the opinion of citizens, supporting of their political socialization, preventing political conflicts and controlling the political power, or, in other words as facilitation of democracy through grass-root social action [Hager 2010: 1096].

However, apart from targeting political process, political institution or elites, and apart of mobilizing citizens for political causes and “pushing” them into politics, the civil society is often described as fulfilling also other functions. One of them is a service delivery, where civic actors usually focus on those who are unable to pay for certain services or those who are in acute need (e.g. during natural disasters, famine, diseases). Besides that, civic actors may provide other goods that are not secured by the state or by the market - e.g. education, information or law services. Another function may be described as maintaining social and cultural diversity - sometimes described also as a community building function - that is usually covered by cultural, religious and leisure actors focusing on various subcultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic issues [Ibrahim, Hulme 2011; Hager 2010].

The other main cleavage in the research and thinking of civil society is also represented within key works and analyses on civil society. The cleavage arose around the question on the form of civil society participation, or more precisely, on the mode of cooperation of individual participation. Different perspectives of civil society, stemming from different traditions of civil society research, put emphasis on different types of civil society actors. In political-philosophical terms, one of them seems to build upon the tradition of civil society conceptualization referring namely to the work of Tocqueville and puts more emphasis on the civic collective bodies themselves as the core civil infrastructure than on their individual members’ involvement. On the other hand, there is another classical tradition of civil society theorizing that come from the

“Rousseau-Hegel-Habermas” tradition. In this perspective, it is primarily the involvement of free and equal individuals that makes civil society something distinct and valuable vis-a-vis the hierarchy of the family, the anonymity of the market and the instrumentality of the political system. These two conceptions of which type of actors primarily constitutes the civil society may be identified as the second important crossroad in the way how the civil society is conceptualized and studied empirically.

Following these philosophical foundations, some analysts describe civil society basically as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), some more broadly as civil society organizations (CSOs), some as social movements and their organizations (SMOs), some as local and grass-root associations, and some as social enterprises. More complex definition describes the civil society as being populated by “community or grassroots associations, social movements, labour unions, professional groups, advocacy and development NGOs, formally registered non-profits, social enterprises, and many others” [Edwards 2011: 7]. But there is a growing theoretical discontent about analysing the CEE societies only through the lens of the concepts of grass-root and membership-based civil society actors that were developed in pre-war Western Europe and the US and which sometimes do not even fit the reality of the developed countries today. The concept of “social movement societies” [Meyer, Tarrow 1998; Rucht, Neidhardt 2002], which predominantly builds upon the mass mobilization capacities of social movement organizations and other collective actors, with their focus on the permanent involvement of citizens, is, on the one hand, being supplemented (or challenged) by the concepts of less embedded civic actors that focus on the horizontal cooperation with other SMOs or on vertical relations (either conflicting or cooperative) with the elites and the system rather than on the engagement of citizens; and, on the other hand, by the studies of new forms of direct individual engagement in civic and political issues (internet activism, political consumerism, e-donations etc.).

In other words, the previous research accent on the building of social bonds between organizations and citizens is balanced with the focus on the building and maintenance of the organizational infrastructure between organized civil

actors themselves (transactions of resources, information etc.) [Diani 2003; Baldassarri, Diani 2007]. This shift of emphasis towards the research of inter-organizational behaviour of civil society actors was soon codified in the notion of transactional activism [Petrova, Tarrow 2007; Cisar 2008; Cisar 2010]. The concept was developed in the post-communist context, where the apparent lack of mass membership in social movements and lack of popular mobilizations is compensated for by the plurality of CSOs and various civic organizations that focus not on mobilizing people but prefer to promote their goals while making use of professional staff and which tend to be financially dependent on external sources (EU grants, foundations, public funding etc.).

The acknowledgement of the importance of organized actors and meso-level civil activities was accompanied temporal and loose inter-personal networks, platforms, campaigns and temporary events and – probably most importantly – also an individual engagement in the form of volunteering, event participation, financial support for groups, campaigns or advocacy projects or active citizenship (ethical consumerism, charity giving, writing letters to a public official and other). Furthermore, the rise of new means of communication and repertoire of political participation and coming of digital age seem to change profoundly usual means of coordination of citizens within the realm of civil activities and offer new opportunities for individual engagement of citizens [Norris 2001; Shirky 2008; van Deth 2012].

Table 1: Four dimensions of civil society participation

		<i>Mode of coordination of individuals</i>	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Level of politicization</i>	<i>Low</i>	Individual participation within the field of service provision, charity giving, ethical consumerism	Membership in service providing organizations, engagement in welfare, sport, cultural or religious associations
	<i>High</i>	Individual participation at demonstrations and political events, support of advocacy campaigns, signing petitions	Membership in advocacy or political organizations, engagement in peace or women movement, or in trade unions

Source: Author

Table 1 presents the key divides that drive our understanding of civil society and that should be considered for the empirical analyses of its qualities. The multifaceted notion of civil society quote naturally implies many dimensions that may be and should be inspected empirically. Separation of these dimensions or types of functioning of civil society naturally does not mean that these are detached or mutually independent on the societal macro-level. On the contrary, empirical research convincingly illustrates how these large-scale processes depend on each other - e.g. how community building function may be broadly understand as a “school of democracy” that in the long term leads to higher involvement of citizens in public affairs, which in turn may have large positive effect on the transparency and effectiveness of political process and accountability of political elites, which may further lead to positive economic development and higher satisfaction of citizens [Putnam 1993; *ibid* 2000]. Nevertheless, since this paper focuses namely on the micro-level processes of citizens’ engagement and their motives for civic (non-)participation, and on the relations between citizens and their counterparts from CSOs, it is interested primarily in the different qualities of these spheres as perceived from the part of individuals.

This paper deals with the area of civil advocacy, or, the area of politicized civil participation, in more detail. The reason for that is that despite the authoritarian rule before 1989, a large proportion of the service provision and community building activities did not cease to exist (at least in the Czech Republic) even if

they became subject of the control from the part of state bureaucracy, security services and political elite. On the other hand, many analyses and theorizing of post-communist civil societies – including the critics of their weaknesses - have been driven by the expectations of the impact of the fall of authoritarian regimes on the renaissance of politically active citizens defending their rights and liberties, organizing in groups and associations, and actively seeking how to express and pursue their preferences and views on a broader, political scale. Following previous division of civil society activities between individual and organized, the elaboration of the situation of civil advocacy in the Czech Republic build upon the distinction between advocacy organizations and groups on the one hand, and citizens involved in advocacy issues outside organizations.

3. Data and methods

Paper is based upon the analysis of two main data sources. The first of them is European Value Survey conducted between 2008-2010 in 47 countries in Western and Central-Eastern Europe. The dataset was used for the analyses of membership of citizens in voluntary organizations. The question was: “Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organisations and activities and say which, if any, do you belong to?” There were following options: Social welfare services for elderly, handicapped or deprived people; religious or church organisations; education, arts, music or cultural; trade unions; political parties or groups; community action on issues like poverty; employment, housing, racial equality; Third world development or human rights; conservation, the environment, ecology, animal rights; professional associations; youth work (e.g. scouts, guides, youth clubs etc.); sports or recreation; women’s groups; peace movement; voluntary organisations concerned with health; other groups; or none of them. Following types of organizations were selected for analysis of membership in advocacy and non-advocacy groups: social welfare, cultural, sport and youth as non-advocacy types; and women, political, peace and trade unions as advocacy ones. Other groups were neglected as they cannot be easily identified either with advocacy or with service provision or community

building (typically community action, environmental protection, religion, or health issues).

The other data used in the paper were collected within the framework of an international comparative research project on the embeddedness of civil societies in seven CEE countries ("Has Our Dream Come True? Comparative Research of Central and Eastern European Civil Societies"). The project was focused specifically on the advocacy function of the CEE civil societies, the reason for the focus was twofold: firstly, the original expectations of some of the dissident elites who had expected our societies to become areas where citizens stand for their political rights and interests, organize themselves to express their preferences, thus providing the day-to-day basis of democracy; secondly, the alleged weakness of our civil societies, which might be due to excessive Westernization of the civil society analyses (see above). The concept of embeddedness of civil advocacy became the central notion of the research, and the research focused both on the level of organized civil society and on the level of citizens in an effort to explore their mutual relations and to suggest possible explanations of the current situation and its possible roots. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. In the quantitative part, a telephone survey (N=800) was conducted, in the qualitative part the focus group and interview methods were used. The survey was used in order to find out in which advocacy areas citizens are the most/least involved (either through their support, participation or knowledge). The aim of the qualitative methodology was to get a picture of the embeddedness of advocacy organizations and their campaigns from the perspective of the collective actors. The focus groups were designed to explore the attitudes of the collective actors towards the involvement of citizens. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the representatives of 31 CSOs. The interviews were connected with the survey through the sampling strategy: the sample was based on the combination of three basic criteria – the advocacy area in which the group was active (groups from the 4 most and the 4 least embedded advocacy areas were invited), territorial focus of the group (15 nationwide and 16 local) and the level of its

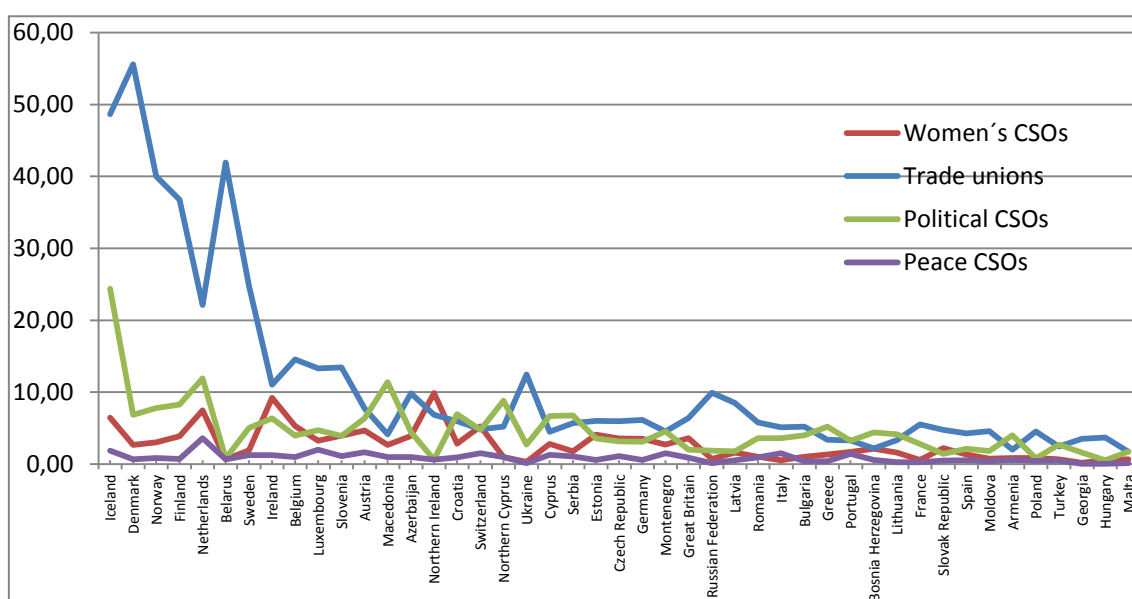
embeddedness (15 involving citizens and 16 not involving citizens). The interviews were conducted in the course of January 2011.

Data were processed with IBM SPSS Statistics software.

4. Membership in advocacy and non-advocacy groups compared

After clarifying important conceptual issues, we may step to the comparison between organized advocacy and non-advocacy activities in different European countries. A brief look at politically oriented activities within the realm of civil society suggests several things. First, one of the most unevenly distributed types of membership is a trade unionist one with the highest rates among Northern countries, but also with some post-communist countries (Belarus, Ukraine). The distribution of other membership types in advocacy organizations (women’s, political, peace) is less dramatically distributed. Overall picture suggests that Western countries have generally higher scores, but with quite a lot exceptions from Eastern Europe – namely because of their high number of members in trade unions. As far as the Czech Republic is concerned, it is situated exactly in the middle of chart of selected European countries.

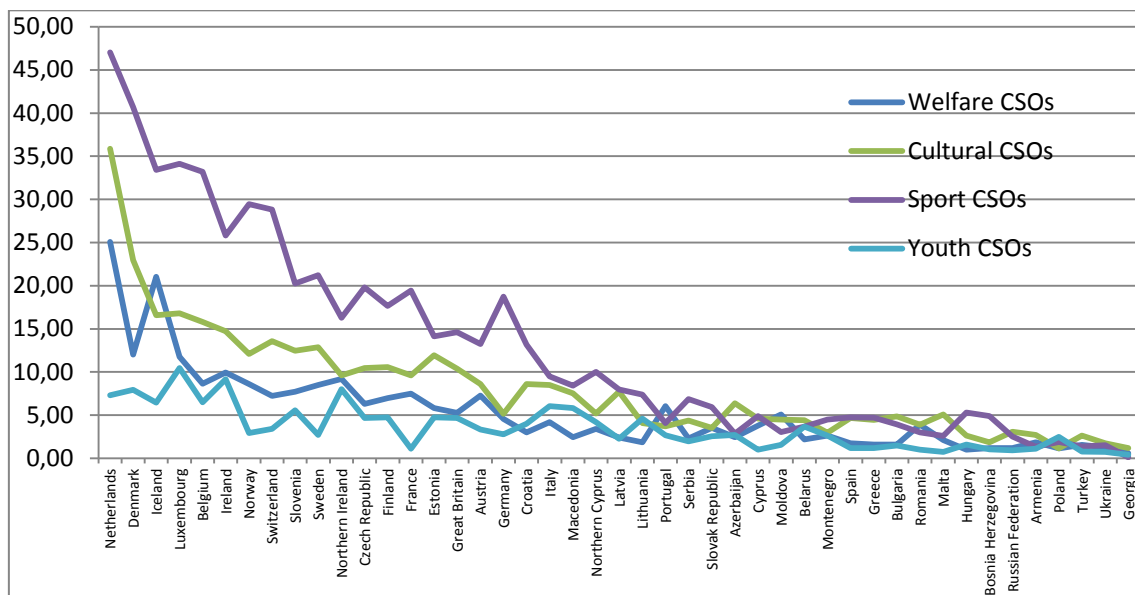
Figure 1: Average membership in civil advocacy organizations in European countries



Source: European Value Survey 2008-2010

Data on non-political engagement of citizens within groups or organizations suggest more uneven distribution of membership scores than in the previous case. Most of the leading countries are from Western Europe, and Slovenia, Czech Republic and Estonia are the only Central-Eastern European countries among the first third of the countries on the list. Czech Republic occupies the twelfth position which is a improvement by 11 ranks in the chart as compared to the advocacy organization membership. This is the second largest shift to the top of the chart in the list, after France (22 ranks). On the contrary, the largest shift to the bottom of the chart describing the membership in non-political organizations was experienced by Belarus and Ukraine (both by 25 ranks).

Figure 2: Average membership in civil non-advocacy organizations in European countries

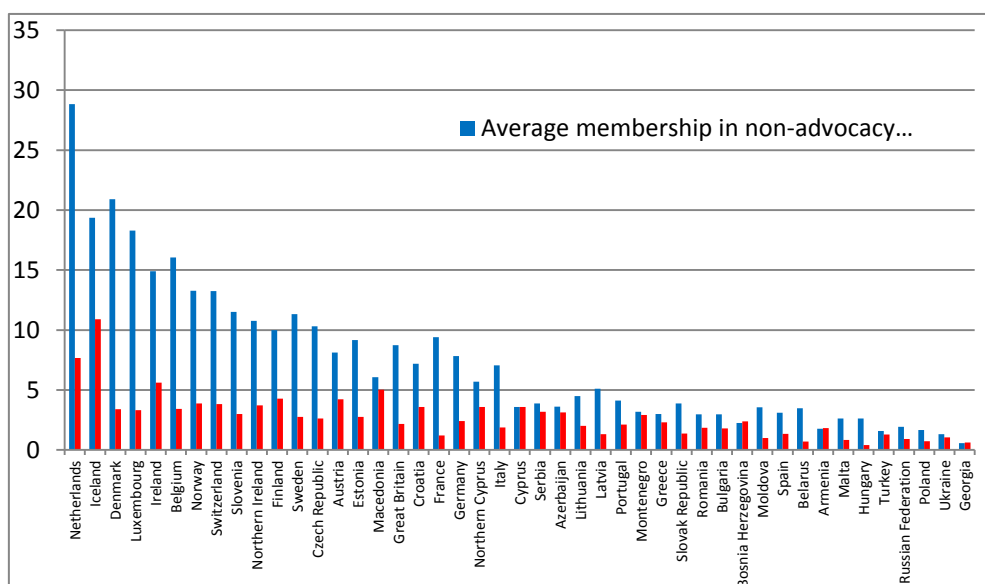


Source: European Value Survey 2008-2010

If we compare both preceding figures and focus on the averages of all non-advocacy and advocacy organizations membership (see Figure 3), we see that most of the countries the membership in non-advocacy organizations clearly prevails. This is even more visible for the first part of the chart, where most of the West Europeans countries are situated. The Czech Republic is the

thirteenth country with largest gap between average membership scores between advocacy and non-advocacy organizations.

Figure 3: Average membership in civil advocacy and non-advocacy organizations in European countries



Source: European Value Survey 2008-2010

However, far most interesting is the difference in the ranking of the Czech Republic based on these two types of organizational membership. It seems that while in non-advocacy areas and activities, Czech citizens are quite similar to the countries that are usually described as “mature” democracies with long and stable tradition of civil society, and are clearly separated from the rest post-communist countries (with the exception of Slovenia). However, ranking of the organized engagement within the areas of is much worse: Czech ranking sharply fall into the middle of the chart and Czech Republic is surrounded by other post-communist countries. The question arises, what are the causes of this discrepancy in the Czech case. Why are Czech citizens not willing to join advocacy oriented CSOs? What are the strategies of these CSOs towards the engagement of citizens?

5. Individual participation in civil advocacy activities

This section aims at the exploration of the activities of Czech citizens and CSOs in various advocacy areas. First, we turn to the general aspects of participation in civil advocacy activities among Czech citizens. The general level of participation seems quite high: contrary to the numbers of membership in civil advocacy (see Tables 1 and 3) almost one third of the respondents declared their personal involvement in civic advocacy activities. Even if people are not actively engaged at the moment, they may become involved later. Even though the answers to questions about intended future action may not be very reliable, it may nonetheless indicate some will or attitude to take part. The data on possible future engagement reveal that 13% of the people that are currently not engaged are thinking of future involvement.

In the next step, it is interesting to look in more detail at what the most popular reasons are that people give to explain why they are not engaged in civic advocacy (Table 2). The two most important reasons are consistent with several theories of civic engagement that put an emphasis on the resources that condition participation and which are absent: in the Czech case, these (lacking) resources are time and money. The third most important reason is an attitude towards civic actors and activism as such which suggests some general public distrust of (collective) civic actors that we want to explore in the next section.

Table 2: Reasons for non-involvement in civic advocacy activities

	Yes	No	DK	NA	Total
no time	68,3%	31,7%	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%
have no money to support them	63,0%	36,3%	0,5%	0,2%	100,0%
solving those problems should be done by other actors, not by civic ones	47,5%	43,4%	9,1%	0,0%	100,0%
I do not believe that civic activism could change anything	34,0%	61,5%	4,5%	0,0%	100,0%
health conditions do not allow me to be active	26,2%	73,8%	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%
not interested in principle	21,3%	75,3%	3,4%	0,0%	100,0%
I had been active but I got disappointed	19,9%	79,3%	0,8%	0,0%	100,0%

Source: Czech Survey 2010

But what is the structure of citizens' actual involvement? What are the most favourite types of individual involvement? The data suggest that there is an obvious disproportionate preference in citizens' individual participation that partially "neutralizes" the relatively high level of active participation in civil advocacy activities (see Table 3): a vast majority of people that are active in advocacy prefer donation or some other form of loose support rather than engaging more "directly", e.g. as a member of an CSO or as a voluntary worker. This helps us explain why so many Czech citizens easily declare themselves to be active in civic advocacy. On the other hand, there is still a decent share of respondents that do voluntary work – unlike membership in CSOs.

Table 3: Forms of personal involvement in civil advocacy activities

	%
donation	89,8
supporter (signing petitions, participating in campaign)	52,4
voluntary work	37,0
chatting, blogging etc.	26,5
member of an CSO	20,3
other (promoting ideas and attitudes)	5,3
don't know	,2

Source: Czech Survey 2010

This general look at the basic structure of citizens' reported engagement may be further differentiated and detailed if we focus on various issue areas of civil advocacy (see Table 4) and differentiate between the attitudes of citizens towards organized activities in these areas, their perception of organized activities and their own - both real and planned - engagement in these areas.

First, we assess the "attitude dimension", or the importance of CSOs' engagement in these areas as perceived by citizens (Q: How important is it that advocacy CSOs should be active in the following areas in your country?). Not surprisingly, the areas where the organized activities are perceived as the most important overlap with humanitarian issues and with the most vulnerable, or tender, social groups – disabled people and children. A reflection of the current political discourse may be found in the massive preference for the anticorruption issue. On the other hand and quite surprisingly, animal and environmental issues – which tend to be over-reported in the mass media - are somewhere in the middle of the list, together with security, education and consumer protection themes. Finally, and again not surprisingly, the least support for organized advocacy activities was expressed for national/ethnic minority rights (presumably tied to the issues of the Roma minority) and LGBT rights (presumably a consequence of a feeling of mission accomplished: registered (civil) same-sex partnership was established in Czech law in 2006).

Table 4: Ranking of advocacy areas according to the importance of CSOs activity, perceived CSO activity, and personal involvement

<i>ranking</i>	<i>Importance of CSO advocacy activities in the area</i>	<i>Perceived activity of civil organizations in the area</i>	<i>Personal involvement in the civil activities in the area - actual or planned</i>
1	rights of children	rights of children	rights of children
2	disabled people's rights	environment	animal rights
3	anti-corruption	national minority rights	disabled people's rights
4	citizens' security	animal rights	environment
5	human and citizens' rights and freedoms	disabled people's rights	human and citizens' rights and freedoms
6	environment	human and citizens' rights and freedoms	citizens' security
7	education, health, social policy	women rights	education, health, social policy
8	consumer protection	education, health, social policy	consumer protection
9	animal rights	international and global issues	women rights
10	women rights	consumer protection	anti-corruption
11	economic policy	citizens' security	international and global issues
12	work of democratic institutions	LGBT rights	work of democratic institutions
13	international and global issues	work of democratic institutions	economic policy
14	national minority rights	economic policy	LGBT rights
15	LGBT rights	anti-corruption	national minority rights

Source: Czech Survey 2010

The next – cognitive - dimension of embeddedness of advocacy areas covers the perceived activity of CSOs in particular areas (Q: How active are CSOs in your country in the following advocacy areas?). The data reveal several aspects of how citizens relate the importance of CSO activity and its perception. It seems that the rights of children are perceived as well covered by CSOs. But many other issue areas where the importance of collective activism is deemed very high are thought to be neglected by CSOs - or, CSOs are believed to

devote too much effort to issue areas that are not important. In other words, their activities may be perceived as wasted on low-priority areas and, as a result, in short supply in high-priority areas. This is the case of environment, national minority rights, animal rights etc.

Finally, the third dimension - i.e. both the real and the planned personal involvement in various advocacy areas - is consistent with the preceding lists in a particular way. There are basically two key patterns here: first, the rights of children are still the most important issue area, which is consistent with the previous stance. But otherwise it seems that the ranking of the advocacy areas follows the priorities in the perceived need of CSOs' involvement rather than the perceived actual activities of CSOs.

It is therefore quite obvious that citizens perceive the activities of organized civic actors as inconsistent with their own opinion of the needs for coordinated action in particular advocacy areas and with their own individual engagement. First, there are areas (disabled people rights, anti-corruption, and citizens security above all) that are a) perceived as important, b) evaluated to be relatively insufficiently covered by CSOs and (therefore?) c) people (report that they) engage in these areas. On the other hand, there are areas (environment, women's rights, national minority rights, LGBT rights above all) that are a) perceived as not so important, b) evaluated to be relatively sufficiently covered by CSOs and (therefore?) c) people (report that they) do not engage in these areas. Consequently, there may be two possible mechanisms operating behind the scene: first, people have their own preferences in the importance of various issues and they try to follow them in their individual engagement in civil society (and thus compensate for the different focus by CSOs), or, citizens evaluate the extent of the actual activity of organized collective actors and then avoid their own engagement in the areas where the activity of CSOs is believed to be high enough. Be it one or the other option, this is an important signal of a distance between individual citizens and organized civil society actors (with the only exception of the area of the rights of children).

6. Social embeddedness of organizations

After the overview of the activities and the preferences of Czech citizens towards collective agents of civic advocacy activities, we make a step further and explore the organizational level of civic activities and the strategies of CSOs towards the citizens.

To analyse the level of embeddedness of collective civic advocacy, we focus first on the actual involvement of citizens and the forms of such involvement in 31 CSOs from the 4 most embedded (17 organizations) and the 4 least embedded (14 organizations) advocacy areas (and both nominally open and closed to citizens, and both local and nationwide). We then compare the attributes and strategies of these two groups of CSOs and their campaigns.

One of the most important indicators of how much CSOs are willing to integrate citizens into their structures and activities is the institution of membership: there are elite, closed and professionalized CSOs, but also grass-roots and community oriented groups. So what is the situation in our sample? And how does it relate to the most/least embedded advocacy issue areas cleavage?

Table 5: Types of individual membership of CSOs and their distribution

			<i>formal</i>	<i>informal</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>total</i>
<i>CSOs</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>most</i>	13	4	1	18*
<i>CSOS</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>least</i>	7	2	5	14
<i>embedded AAs</i>						

* One CSO reported both types of membership – both formal and informal

Source: Czech SMO Interviews 2010

Our data suggest that organizations in the most embedded areas of advocacy are slightly more likely to be based on (individual) membership than the others (see Table 5): even the informal membership, which is usually more exclusive than the formal one, is often found there. What are the reasons? Some organizations argue that their legal form does not enable them to have formal membership. In other words, these organizations were founded and officially registered without the intention to have members (one CSO from the most embedded advocacy areas and three from the least embedded). Another type

of reasoning ignored the problem of the legal form of the organization and openly stated that the aim of the organization from the very beginning was not to have members, but to provide people with education or information.

Membership-based CSOs had various criteria for accepting new members: there were formal, informal or no criteria. Most often, some formal criteria for membership were applied (see Table 6).

Table 6: Types of membership criteria and their distribution

			<i>formal</i>	<i>informal</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>total</i>
<i>CSOs from most embedded AAs</i>			8	2	5	2	17
<i>CSOs from least embedded AAs</i>			8	0	1	5	14

Source: Czech SMO Interviews 2010

Formal criteria of membership are very similar throughout the sample: these are typically membership fees, identification with the purpose and the constitution of the organization, or age. Only one national minority organization conditioned the membership by formal membership in a (Jewish) religious community.

After a brief overview of the formal aspects of membership, we look at how the CSOs expressed their attitude to involving new members: 7 CSOs from the most embedded issue areas expressed willingness to seek new members, while 9 CSOs denied this effort. On the other hand, 6 CSOs from the least embedded issue areas claimed they were looking for new members, while 3 opposed it. One of the important aspects of CSOs' openness to new people is their strategies for attracting new members. CSOs from the most embedded areas usually try to find new people through public action and the media (campaigns, recruitment at their events, and dialogue with supporters); while the CSOs from the least embedded issue areas tend to rely on the recommendation from existing members or from the leaders of the organization, or through informal contacts among friends and cooperating organizations.

Apart from the strategies for involving new people as members, there are other aspects of embeddedness of CSOs, or, their openness towards the citizens. One of them is the extent to which other people than members, employees or

volunteers are allowed to participate in the annual meetings of the groups and organizations. In the case of organizations from the most embedded areas, 12 out of 17 organizations require that only members, employees or invited guests may participate, while the annual meetings of the other 5 CSOs are open to anybody. In the case of the 14 least embedded CSOs, just one organization admits that they invite people from outside the organization, but only on the condition of being approved in advance by the members of the organization.

The strategies of the civic organizations were somewhat more balanced in the case of formulation of their goals, which is one of the most important strategic activities: 4 of the 17 most embedded CSOs declared the possibility for the public to have influence on the shaping of their strategies, while the same was stated by 3 of the 14 least embedded groups. But what is the precise inner structure of these strategies? What type of stakeholder is more restricted from participation in the formulation of collective civic actors' strategies? What type of stakeholder do CSOs listen to? Basically, the priorities of CSOs in both types of the advocacy areas are the same: not surprisingly, the most welcomed were the opinions of employees. The second most important class of opinion-maker were cooperating CSOs, closely followed by members and experts. It was only here where the general public came into play, followed by the donors (most embedded areas) and the community (least embedded areas). Finally, and not surprisingly, the least favourite stakeholder to be included into the process of strategy formulation of the group were politicians.

We may assess the openness of CSOs towards their environment also through the comparison of the extent to which various categories of stakeholder and the public and various subjects are involved in the process of preparation of campaigns and projects. We build our comparison upon the same categories of subjects as in the case of the involvement of the public in the formulation of CSOs' goals. Within the first group (the most embedded advocacy areas), the most important are – again - the employees of the organization, which seems quite obvious. And again, the next most important factor for these groups was their collective partners and counterparts – cooperating CSOs, closely followed by members, while experts had the same ranking as the public. These were

followed by donors, the community and, finally, politicians. Nonetheless, the ranking within the second group of CSOs was somewhat different: the most important companions in the process of preparing projects and campaigns were the cooperating groups, followed by employees and members. The next important partner was the public, which preceded the experts and the community. The least favourite ones were the donors and the politicians, rated equally badly.

Apart from including citizens in the process of the formulation of goals and strategies and in the preparation of projects and campaigns, we also explored what emphasis CSOs put on their contact with a narrower social group that may provide them with some correctives of their activities – their sympathizers. Generally, however, this type of contact of advocacy organizations with their close environment mostly had a unilateral form of information for their followers (if any contact happened at all) through the “classic” media such as newsletters, magazines, mailing lists (10 of the 17 CSOs from the most embedded areas, and 7 of the 14 CSOs from the least embedded areas). The rest of the organizations declared more “direct” and interactive exchange of information and opinion with their sympathizers via social networks, face-to-face meetings, phone, or public discussions and events. As far as the periodicity of these activities was concerned, these were usually held several times a year (9 of the 17 groups from the most embedded areas); and several times a month (9 of the 14 groups from the least embedded advocacy fields). It seems that even the sympathetic public is quite restricted from direct access and communication with advocacy CSOs.

We have mentioned two important parts of organized advocacy activities and campaigns: including people in their structures and in the process of formulating their goals. However there is one more important moment that needs be stressed: the process of evaluation of the advocacy activities. How do the civil society actors obtain feedback about their advocacy efforts? How do they evaluate their campaigns? Here the role of the public is similar to that in the process of formulating the goals of CSOs: only 9 organizations (4 from the most and 5 from the least embedded areas) mentioned that they try to get some

feedback from the broader public via questionnaires or even research, or from direct recipients of their activities (participants in the events, seminars etc.). The rest of the organizations are more inwardly focused: their evaluation is based on inter-organizational discussions, on the feedback from cooperating CSOs, or on the reflections from relevant elites (donors, politicians).

So, in conclusion, how do CSOs – according to their own words - incorporate people into their activities? The groups from the most embedded areas declare that their goal is to try to have an impact on the public rather than to involve the public into their campaigns: citizens tend to only be involved locally and in the form of some logistical support (volunteering during events, help with the promotion of actions and campaigns, distribution of leaflets, spreading the information, help with collecting signatures for petitions, organizing camps, translating materials, or performing some minor tasks within the organization). CSOs from the least embedded areas enable people to get closer to their activities: they use the public as a source of information, use them as experts, tutors, include them in the cooperation on particular issues, enable them to focus on problems of their own in the framework of the activities of the organization. At the same time, a small part of these groups also use people as logistical support during petitions, as help with the organization of events and happenings etc. So there seems to be a slight difference between these two groups of organizations – the former treats citizens more instrumentally and enables them to participate on the periphery of their activities, while the latter lets them get closer to the decision-making and provides them with a certain degree of autonomy.

We may make several generalizations out of this overview: generally, CSOs take a very practical stance in the development of their goals, activities and strategies as they privilege the subjects that may be coordinated most easily – employees, cooperating groups, members. Our structured comparison reveals that there are hardly any significant differences between the organizations from the most and from the least embedded advocacy areas: both sets of CSOs are based on membership (though the CSOs from the most embedded advocacy areas somewhat more) and both prefer formal membership to informal; they

also prefer formal criteria for membership to other types of criteria. This indicates that their inner procedures follow fairly rigid rules and written regulations. Also the willingness to recruit new members is relatively balanced between the two sets of CSOs - even though the groups from the most embedded areas are less interested in the enlargement of their membership base; there are also some differences in the methods of recruitment. Both sets are similar in their attitude to inviting people from outside to their annual meetings. The comparative analysis of the preferences for the inclusion of various subjects/publics/stakeholders in the process of formulating goals and in the preparation of projects and campaigns reveals that CSOs clearly prefer relying on their employees, members and cooperating groups to opening their deliberations to external experts or the public.

7. Patterns of alienation: mutual attitudes of citizens and CSOs

Following on the preceding sections, which showed a considerable gap between organized and individual participation in the Czech Republic, we now focus on understanding the motives and attitudes of both sides of the gap. We will first deal with the citizens' attitudes to, and opinions of, CSOs.

The first dimension to be explored is the trust of individual citizens in the ability of CSOs to deal with the problems in the respective issue areas. Our data show that civil society organizations are widely perceived as capable of solving important issues of Czech society (78%). Moreover, the view that CSOs do not focus on the problems which citizens encounter does not seem to be prevalent (28 %).

On the other hand, it seems that general trust in civil society organizations as social institutions is a problem. CSOs are ranked very low compared to other social and political institutions. Our findings confirm the ambiguous and mostly negative attitudes towards CSOs, which thus resemble the attitude to the least trusted area of Czech public life – the political institutions. It seems that there is a considerable lack of trust in Czech civic and political society actors, people

only trust their closest social environment – i.e. their family and friends. The most trusted public institutions are the police and the local authority: Czech citizens seem to refuse the intermediary level of civil society organizations when solving their problems and tend to rely either on personal ties or on direct communication and negotiations with appropriate bodies that are closest to their locality.

Table 7: Probability of contacting following subject in case of any problems

	<i>likely</i>	<i>neither, nor</i>	<i>not likely</i>	<i>DK</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>family</i>	85,8%	7,3%	6,5%	0,1%	0,2%	100,0%
<i>friends</i>	69,8%	19,6%	9,9%	0,4%	0,2%	100,0%
<i>none, I try to solve it myself</i>	60,2%	18,7%	20,0%	0,8%	0,2%	100,0%
<i>the police</i>	53,7%	28,2%	17,5%	0,4%	0,2%	100,0%
<i>local authority</i>	43,4%	28,3%	27,6%	0,5%	0,2%	100,0%
<i>colleagues at work</i>	34,7%	29,1%	28,6%	6,2%	1,4%	100,0%
<i>local government representative</i>	31,0%	29,1%	38,8%	0,9%	0,2%	100,0%
<i>media</i>	21,7%	22,7%	55,0%	0,4%	0,2%	100,0%
<i>MEP and the European Parliament ombudsman/ EU institutions</i>	16,7%	14,6%	67,1%	1,4%	0,2%	100,0%
<i>civil society organization</i>	15,9%	28,4%	53,9%	1,6%	0,2%	100,0%
<i>government agency (ministry)</i>	11,9%	21,3%	65,1%	1,6%	0,2%	100,0%
<i>member of parliament</i>	9,6%	15,0%	74,5%	0,6%	0,2%	100,0%
<i>church community</i>	8,8%	9,2%	80,3%	1,5%	0,2%	100,0%

Source: Czech Survey 2010

Another aspect of the distrust of citizens towards CSO was revealed when respondents expressed their attitudes towards CSOs themselves. This more detailed inquiry into the citizens' view of CSOs finally introduces a more nuanced picture of the attitudes of citizens towards CSOs: almost two-thirds of the respondents are persuaded that CSOs do not represent civic interests, and more than a half of them think that they are not effective, are too tied to political parties and do not deal with important issues. Namely the last opinion again confirms our hypothesis of the “mechanisms” operating behind the scenes.

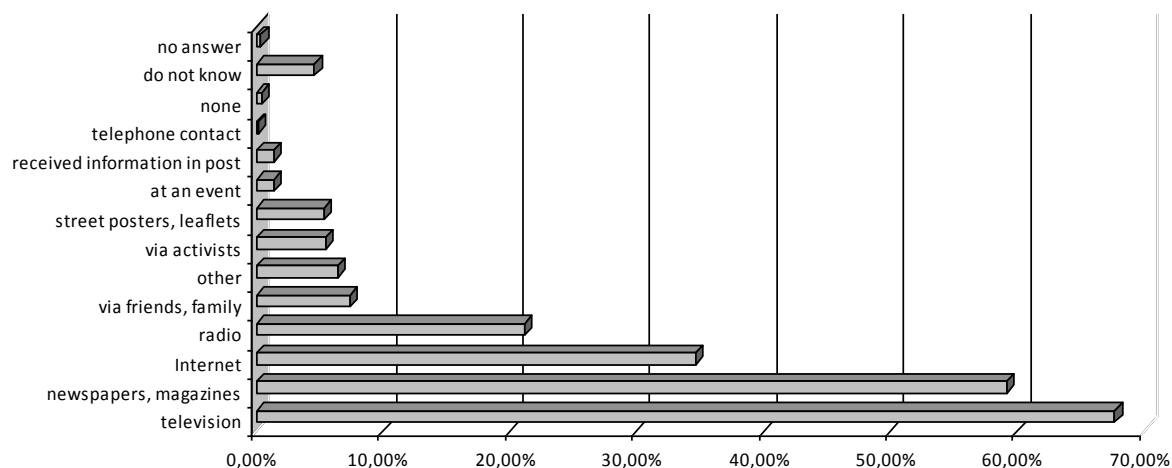
Table 8: Attitudes towards CSOs

	yes	no	DK	total
<i>I think that they represent business interests, not civic ones</i>	57,6%	31,3%	11,1%	100,0%
<i>I don't think these organizations are effective</i>	56,4%	25,9%	17,7%	100,0%
<i>I think these organizations are vehicles of political parties</i>	53,0%	36,1%	11,0%	100,0%
<i>I don't think they deal with problems that are really important</i>	52,3%	39,4%	8,3%	100,0%
<i>I think these organizations concentrate on their own financial benefits</i>	45,2%	44,5%	10,3%	100,0%
<i>I do not know anything about the activities of the CSOs</i>	39,1%	58,6%	2,3%	100,0%
<i>They represent foreign interests</i>	26,9%	58,4%	14,6%	100,0%

Source: Czech Survey 2010

An important aspect of the relation of citizens to CSOs that defines their mutual distance is communication - be it direct transfer of information and knowledge, or mass-produced pictures of CSOs that are offered to citizens by the media. This is one of the systemic features of opinions of citizens towards CSOs. Now we explore the most influential ways how people become acquainted with the collective civic actors, their events and activities. The data (Figure 4) offer a predictable picture: the most influential media are television, newspapers and the Internet, the least relevant means of getting information about CSOs are the telephone, the post or direct communication at events or from activists.

Figure 4: Channels of information about CSOs and their activities



Source: Czech Survey 2010

Based on our previous considerations and the presentation of the survey data, we can make some concluding remarks about the attitudes of Czech citizens towards collective actors within the realm of civil advocacy and the main reasons for the apparent distance of citizens that they express towards organized civic action. The data suggest that people simply do not trust CSOs and perceive them as being too tied to politics (which is in the Czech political culture generally understood as an unforgivable sin) or business, and as not reflecting their problems very well. Furthermore, there is also the issue of perceived effectiveness of CSOs: even if they are considered capable of solving problems in particular areas, their activities are believed to be ineffective. The question remains whether and to what extent this distance of citizens towards the CSOs can be explained by the sort of reporting that citizens receive about CSOs and their activities from the media – above all television, newspapers, and the Internet.

Now we shall consider the attitudes of CSO representatives towards citizens and their engagement in collective civic activities. In the preceding empirical part, we compared several types of subject with regard to the extent to which their opinions are reflected in the formulation of goals and strategies of advocacy organizations. But how do CSOs and their representatives perceive citizens? Are they seen as active contributors to collective advocacy activities or as recipients and end-users of these activities? Are they considered to be a resource or a target for the organizations' activities? Both groups from the most and from the least embedded issue areas of civil advocacy have remarkably similar attitudes: 13 of the 17 CSOs and 10 of the 14 CSOs respectively see citizens as a target of their advocacy activities; the rest of them see the role of citizens as more balanced – either both as a resource and the target or just as a primary source of inspiration and rationale for their activities. This trend of treating citizens as a target rather than a resource group of advocacy activities is clearly noticeable also in the process of agenda setting: 12 of the 17 CSOs from the most embedded advocacy areas choose their issues in response to circumstances but they do not directly consult citizens: they are inspired by the

experts in the field, they consult their fellow organizations, their members, employees or managers; sometimes they state that they have long-term goals that do not change, or that they just follow the principles and the statutes of their organization. 10 of the 14 CSOs from the least embedded areas predominantly followed those issues and cases for which they had acquired funding and/or for which funding was available from national or supranational institutions; they also followed the advice of experts, members or cooperating groups; sometimes they even asked politicians. The remaining organizations declared that citizens might be – among many other subjects – a source of their agenda setting. To conclude, a large majority of CSOs see citizens as a social group that may benefit from their advocacy activities, but they do not respect them as originators of these activities: sometimes, citizens are perceived as patients that have to be cured but are not consulted about the disease.

The different ways of treating citizens (as depicted also in preceding section) are likely to be based on slightly different reasons: What are they? Why is there such a distance and scepticism towards engaging, communicating and cooperating with the general public?

The first set of CSOs' arguments is basically that people are generally not interested in the work of CSOs, and particularly in actively working for them. These organizations feel that there is considerable distrust of the non-profit sector and that (Czech) society has been developing towards selfish individualism; that people are too busy, and that it is too demanding and expensive to win them and to make them actively interested in public issues generally and/or the particular issue that their organization deals with. Representatives of CSOs complain about the unwillingness of people to participate in public affairs. They attribute it to a number of various reasons stemming from Czech political culture: ignorance, lack of interest and motivation, laziness, passivity, pessimism about the abilities of CSOs to influence things, and the bad image that they believe the whole non-profit sector has due to negative campaigning by the political elites:

I definitely don't think (...) that the mentality of the Czechs ... even though I hate it when someone speaks about Czech national characteristics ... that the mentality is somehow shaped ... and if you can expect that some wave or some social movement for something would emerge and be successful in the United States, it does not necessarily mean that it takes root here because the Czechs are not used to getting involved that much and I think it is necessary to keep that in mind (...).

Source: Focus Group Interviews (representative of the CSO from the least embedded advocacy area)

Another set of reasons refers to the “expert knowledge” of CSOs and the highly detailed focus of the organizations: in other words, citizens do not possess the education and the expert knowledge that is necessary to understand the nature of the problems the CSOs deal with, and consequently are unable to participate in their solution. The CSOs complain that people have insufficient information, are prejudiced against CSOs in the particular area that they are active in, and that they are far too much oriented towards “populist” solutions to problems. Complaint of a similar type consists of defining the target groups of CSOs: sometimes the primary target of the CSOs - namely in the environmental sector - lies outside society and consequently there is no need to enter into a dialogue with any social groups and citizens:

“I was thinking ... as you asked who formulated [the goals] ... if the advocacy issue is environmental protection ... it is - among others - about articulating the interests of nature ... let's say ... which means that people that formulate the goals often speak in the interests of the environment and not of a particular target group... of course that metaphorically speaking the target group is the population as a whole, whose being is conditioned by the existence of a functional ecosystem ... which means that there is no such things as a specified target group that could be addressed ... which means that ... I really know that those people [environmentalists] are systematically observing public attitudes towards particular problematic issues in the area of environment but of course there is no direct demand ... simply because ... there is always someone

speaking on behalf of nature and basically this is one of the roles of the environmental CSOs: that they articulate the interest of nature in the public discourse.”

Source: Focus Group Interviews (representative of the CSO from the most embedded advocacy area)

Further argument that is used by CSOs' representatives is similar but instead of expert knowledge it builds upon the claim of universality and autonomy. CSO leaders are suspicious of politicians and, to a degree, of donors, as the spheres of politics and economy are usually seen as threats to the independence and objectivity of CSOs. Therefore, the distance of some CSOs towards citizens might be also due to the fact that civil advocacy organizations usually raise more universal issues than immediate community/business/policymaking interests. Therefore there is quite a clear sense of uneasiness of some CSOs towards the influence of donors on CSO activities:

"What I lack ... and I've actually been the leader of the CSO for a year and a half ... is the ability within the advocacy area and within the organization to choose the goals, the campaigns and the directions without restraints ... which I think ... the way that we are funded and project-oriented ... we lack the freedom to do so."

Source: Focus Group Interviews (representative of the CSO from the least embedded advocacy area)

Last but not least, we should not ignore the question of resources, which is frequently explored in the studies of transactional activism [Císař 2008; Císař, Navrátil 2012]: despite the fact that the organization-donor relationship (or even dependence) is usually downplayed by the civil society actors, the role of resources still seems highly relevant for their relationship with the citizens:

"I would say that we focus more on the authorities, not on people ... because if you want to work somehow, you have to get the money ... you can only get the

money from Europe, or from the government, or from the regional government, or from the city or local government ... so for us it is important to get the money and with the money I can realize my agenda ... I can do almost nothing without the money ... and it is the authorities that decide on the distribution of the money, not people ...”

Source: Focus Group Interviews (representative of the CSO from the least embedded advocacy area).

8. Dreams of civil society before 1989

Data from preceding sections suggest, first, that there is a disproportion between the membership in advocacy and non-advocacy organizations in the Czech Republic with the clear preference for the latter ones, second, that there is a considerable gap between organized and individual involvement of Czech citizens in civil advocacy, and third, that this gap is defined by the mutual distrust and sense of uselessness of cooperation between citizens and CSO representatives. While some of the analysts of post-communist societies see this gap simply as a sign of weak civil society and passive citizens, and attribute this situation straightforwardly to the legacy of communism and its institutions, it is interesting to trace the alternatives to the authoritarian rule that were proposed by prominent dissidents. These played the main role in the process of revival and definition of the concept of civil society in Czech context before and after 1989. What were their attitudes and thoughts on civil society? What approaches to civil society engagement they proposed before 1989 in order to find effective strategies of defence against the repression and to preserve basic rights and individual dignity? In the Czech context, the idea of civil society found most influential and explicit expression in the thinking of three authors, Jan Tesař, Václav Benda and Václav Havel, each of whom, however, pointed out a different aspect of, and saw a different use for, a shared vision of strong civic engagement. While the conceptions of the first two of them became (seemingly) superfluous after 1989, Havel's vision of the role of civil society became one of the founding myths of Czech post-communist state and had a lion's share in

influencing Czech political culture namely on the issues of civil society and political participation.

Tesař's arguments for civil society reflected on the problem of its structure(s) and displayed a fear of masses. This may be read as a Tocquevillian call for the importance of organization and structuration of activities in the civil sphere that should protect individualized masses from political demagoguery and dictatorship of (state) elites through political socialization and education. In other words, Tesař emphasises the democratizing power of civil organizations, even if he does not explicitly analyse their political role and their relation to the state. However, this was something that was much on the mind of another dissident activist, Václav Benda.

Benda's idea of the parallel polis was developed as an answer by a practical political thinker to the radical ethical demands that underpinned the policy and tactics of Charter 77 at its inception. Benda believed that in a situation when no dialogue with the totalitarian state power about human rights and economic and political freedoms was possible, there was no other way for society but to turn to "self-help" and start developing organized structures of a parallel polis that would at least to a small degree substitute for those functions that the state did not fulfil. The structured and organized civic activities that challenge the political elites and the state thus clearly point to the advocacy function of civil society, which is carried out by specialized groups of civil society representatives.

Different and much more influential perspective that basically moved the focus and desirability from the engagement of citizens within organizations aiming at political sphere towards the ethical conception of personal life was offered by Václav Havel. His critique both of post-totalitarian regime and western civilization in his early writings introduced key concepts of "living in truth" and "non-political (or anti-political) politics". The first notion reflected the corruption of inter-personal relations and of social and physical environment through some attributes of modern society in general: e.g. bureaucracy, propaganda, politicking, business, advertising, consumer manipulation, etc. This was actually Havel's way of denial of organized political participation, or, at least the denial

of its effectiveness for solving the problems of modern societies. The way out according to Havel must be sought in people reclaiming their natural identities and relations so that they can return to their “authentic selves”: what is needed is an “existential revolution” [Havel 1978: 126] – not an organized political one. The other key notion - “anti-political politics” [Havel 1989: 33-51] – is a sketch of a radical alternative to “political politics”. As Havel considered the classical politics as “the technology of power and manipulation, of cybernetic management of people, or as the art of the ends justifying the means, the art of intrigue and behind the scenes manoeuvring that is being realized through routinized institutions, formal elections and established political parties. On the contrary, he called for new anti-political politicians that shall not seek power for power’s sake but defend the “natural world”, “natural language” and “authentic human identity”. The way how to accomplish this goal is best achieved through the ongoing civic engagement of citizens through “open, dynamic, and small” community groups since “beyond a certain point, human ties like personal trust and personal responsibility cannot work”. (...) They would be structures not in the sense of organizations or institutions, but like a community. Their authority certainly cannot be based on long-empty traditions, like the tradition of mass political parties, but rather on how, in concrete terms, they enter into a given situation. Rather than a strategic agglomeration of formalized organizations, it is better to have organizations springing up ad hoc, infused with enthusiasm for a particular purpose and disappearing when that purpose has been achieved. (...) These structures should naturally arise from below as a consequence of authentic social self-organization; they should derive vital energy from a living dialogue with the genuine needs from which they arise, and when these needs are gone, the structures should also disappear.” [Havel 1978: 129-130].

Through his notions of “anti-political politics” and “life in truth” Havel treated organized expression of interests with suspicion because of its resemblance of institutional politics and clearly rejected the idea of organized advocacy activism as inadequate and potentially alienating the citizens against each other. This stereotype has been repeatedly renewed and echoed within his later texts, public speeches, interviews or plays and became a constant of his public profile

and view on politics. At least from his position of a president of the country which lasted for 12 years and during which he was respected by the majority of citizens and widely appreciated by the mainstream media, his ideas had immense impact on public life and become part of social reality - they came to underpin the thinking and the activities of opinion leaders, civil society activists and citizens and gradually become an essential building block of Czech political culture.

9. Conclusions and discussion

The paper addressed four interrelated problems. First, it attempted to look in more detail on the participation in civil society in general and suggested that there are several dimension of this participation (typically organized participation focusing on political issues) that are privileged for assessment of civil society strength and vitality but the other ones (e.g. individual participation in civil advocacy) are usually missed out from picture. Second, after assessing relatively high position of the Czech Republic on the membership in non-advocacy organizations within other European countries, the paper further explored comparatively low level of citizens' organized participation in advocacy areas of civil society. Third, it shows that the level of Czech citizens' involvement within civil advocacy is relatively high and describes complicated relations between citizens and CSOs within this dimension of civil society. We saw a clear distance of citizens towards practical (pro-)active engagement in CSOs' activities and a tendency on the side of the CSOs to ignore the citizens and to rely on technical expertise and their employees in fulfilling their missions. Both the citizens and the CSOs are active but they do not connect very well. The CSOs thus fail to perform the role of the intermediary between the individual and politics, and the citizens as a rule do not make use of CSOs when they encounter a societal problem.

These relations resulting in comparatively low membership in advocacy organizations (or, in their low social embeddedness) are typically attributed to the impact of the communist rule, political centralization and oppression. However what we discovered in the attitudes and opinions of Czech citizens

were the cultural patterns duplicating Havel's thinking since 1970's that prevailed after 1989: citizens display considerable distrust of organized civil society actors in that they rank them (negatively) next to political institutions and they do not think that CSOs represent civic interests but business ones; they easily identify themselves with charitable, social, and humanitarian issues in civil advocacy, but are far from any organized engagement there. On the other side of the gap, civil society organizations seem quite happy with such an arrangement. They welcome financial support, but not demands by, or even conversation with, the public. CSO representatives share four main types of excuse when they explain why they are not keen to engage people in their activities and keep CSO activities separate from the community: first, they doubt that Czech citizens are interested in civic activism at all, second, they argue that CSO represent expert knowledge that simply cannot be generated from people's opinions, third, they claim to represent much wider or long-term interests than is the immediate interest of the community, and fourth, in an attempt to achieve their goals, CSOs must rely more on their contacts with authorities and institutions to get adequate economic resources for action.

Therefore, it seems that while some evaluations of post-communist civil societies dominantly rests upon the assessment of membership on advocacy organizations as the privileged form of civil society engagement, this does not have to expose the full picture of contemporary Czech civil society. His paper insists that we are rather witnessing comparatively low social embeddedness of civil advocacy than anything else: apart of showing that there is a considerable proportion of citizens that engage in non-political organizations, this paper points out - alongside with contemporary studies of new forms of political participation - that many of citizens take part also in advocacy activities. They just do it more directly and from without any collective actors. Moreover, the actors' justification of the gap between individual and organized activity is fully in accordance with the long-term attitudes of new political elites which in turn disqualifies the old regime from being the only and thus undisputable cause of low social embeddedness of organized civil advocacy in the Czech Republic.

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