

Civil society and social movements in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe: a comparative approach

1 INTRODUCTION

The topic “civil society” became part of scholarly debate and was in some sense reinvented almost simultaneously by the academic community in the 1970s and 1980s, in studies of Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).¹ In those years the term reflected public activities against non-democratic regimes, against the state, and/or more precisely outside the sphere of the state. In both regions, a part of these activities attempted to compensate for or replace the state in many of the roles that the authoritarian state could not or did not want to fulfill, such as free education (“flat seminars”, or home universities in CEE countries)², public safety and social problems (violence and social exclusion in Latin America), or where the authoritarian state directly violated basic human and civil rights.

This “heroic” period—which to some degree inspired both researchers and activists in western liberal democracies in their search for the deepening of democratic processes, new attribu-

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tes of democracy (participative or deliberative), and new forms of governance—culminated in CEE during the 1989 “year of miracles” (T. G. Ash) with mass mobilizations, largely non-violent activities and in most countries the formation of some very broadly-based and weakly-organized mass movements to dismantle the regime (such as Civic Forum in the Czech Republic, Public Against Violence in Slovakia, New Forum in the German Democratic Republic, Democratic Forum in Hungary, and Solidarity in Poland).³

The end of authoritarian regimes in Latin America happened in a different way. Firstly, the wave of democratization in the region took more time and more often had some transactional features that prolonged the processes of transition (such as the position of Pinochet in Chile).⁴ Secondly, most of the authoritarian regimes lasted for a shorter period, so that the political personnel from earlier times were often still active and the renewed forms of political organization (political parties) could draw upon their former activities.⁵ On the one hand, there was not the space for broad movements that would fill up the political vacuum as in CEE countries. On the other hand, in both regions the end of authoritarian regimes was accompanied by a high level of mobilization of public and citizen participation.

The present work aims to assess the basic similarities and differences in the character of civil society in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. Was the fact that civil society in Latin America was reconstituted against neoliberal authoritarian regimes and in Central and Eastern Europe against communist regimes crucial for the character of the civil society in particular countries? Why have social movements been much weaker in Central and Eastern Europe than in Latin America? What is the role of International Non Government Organizations (INGOs) in the formation of civil society in both regions?

2 WEAK CIVIL SOCIETY: A PROBLEM FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY?

Civil society seems to be a centre-piece of liberal views on the working of a fully-fledged liberal democratic system. Nevertheless definitions of civil society abound in the literature, and the lack of consensus complicates academic discussions because argumentation is based on different understandings of the term.

My conceptual framework for the term follows the understanding of Mary Kaldor (2003: 7-11) and is based on an operational definition of it which combines the activist, neoliberal and postmodern approach. Thus, civil society is defined as a space for extension of activities and participation of citizens, in which individual citizens can influence the conditions in which they live both directly through self-organization and indirectly through political pressure in which the agenda setting reflects the topics and conflicts deeply rooted in the society. Civil society consists of associational life: a non-profit, voluntary "third sector" that not only restrains state power (against the expansion of the state, and for accountability) but also actually provides a substitute for many of the functions the neoliberal state has ceased to perform (charities, NGOs), as well as social movements and social networks. Civil society is an arena of pluralism and contestation, an arena of cross-cutting social networks with the acceptance of multiple identities, operating within the market economy (which provides economic autonomy) and rule of law (which provides security).

I use this operational definition not because of my preferences for what civil society should be and what role it should play in politics, but because I would like to use these characteristics as general criteria for comparison of civil society in Latin America and CEE countries. After defining the term, one can move to the relation of civil society with the western type of liberal democracy.⁶

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The end of non-democratic regimes in both regions was either provoked or accompanied by mass mobilization and participation of the citizenry, and often celebrated as a great victory of civil society. Most of the problems in the re-construction of democracy are often interpreted as the result of weak civil society.⁷ The term re-construction means that in some cases there was a tradition of a liberal democratic system before the non-democratic regime was installed, although in some of the countries there has never been an experience of liberal democracy. This weakness is mostly characterized by a low degree of organization of civil society which includes the low density of associations and the small size of these organizations concerning numbers of members and volunteers⁸, but it also deals with the type of networking. Because of its weakness, civil society cannot play the role of “watch dog” of democracy, and require the accountability of politicians to formulate the demands of particular social groups and to enable cross-cutting social networks. All these factors have an impact on trust: interpersonal trust, trust of the institutions of parliament, the presidency, political parties and courts, and trust of democratic procedures such as elections and generally the rule of law.⁹

However, the assumption that the density of civil associations and high degree of public participation strengthens the stability of democracy does not stand unchallenged. Analyzing the development in Latin America in the 1990s, Kenneth Roberts (1998: 7) tried to explain democratic stability in the region, arguing that “democracy may survive because popular sectors are too weak or restrained to use its levers to mobilize threats to elite interests or place substantive alternatives on the policy agenda.” This reflects the paradox that although civil society in Latin America was reborn in the 1970s and 1980s in activities against the non-democratic neoliberal regimes, the neoliberal character of the newly-defined Latin American regimes was not changed.

Partly-similar findings are present in Kurt Weyland's article (2004: 135-157), which argued that neoliberal regimes, mainly because of internationalization and globalization through the free market economy, saved democracy in Latin America and at the same time lowered the quality of democracy in the region.

In sum, neoliberalism seems to have boosted the sustainability of democracy in Latin America, both by exposing the region more to external pressures for maintaining competitive civilian rule and by forestalling internal challenges to its survival... 'Popular sovereign' ... retains the right to disregard the direct and indirect pressures of investors. But such imprudence would carry considerable cost in the neoliberal era of increasing global market integration. The citizenry can, in principle, exert its full range of democratic rights and, for instance vote for whatever candidate it pleases, but concentrated control over economic resources often leads to a clear self-restriction (Weyland 2004: 143 e 146).

Roberts wrote his remarks in the late 1990s and Weyland at the beginning of the new millennium; their analysis does not reflect the shift to the Left in the region which suggested the search for alternative policy agendas, at least in some countries.

The historical experiences of central Europe can also challenge the assumption dealing with the positive correlation of density of associations and stability of democracy. Marc Howard warns that density of associations in pre WWII Germany did not prevent Hitler coming to power and probably enabled the dissemination of his ideology among a broader public. Taking into consideration the growth of radical right movements in Europe, his idea suggests a different view of the effect of a high degree of organized society.

Indeed, the reluctance of so many post-communist citizens to participate in voluntary organizations today means that **anti**-democratic organizations and movements, just like their democratic counterparts, will also have problems organizing and mobilizing, and their efforts will be hindered by the same legacy of mistrust of organizations (Howard 2003: 150).

A similar approach focused on the Czech experience and

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support for communism can be found in Marek Skovajsa's study of the voting behavior that led to the victory of communism after WWII. He concludes that "paradoxically, the Czech regions most **immune to totalitarian temptations** were those with the **lowest levels of associative activity.**" (Skovajsa in Lewandowski, Znoj 2008: 271; original emphasis). He stresses that "what counts is the structure of the association sector and its links to the political system."

These are very important criteria for any measurement of the strength and influence of civil society and its impact on the stability or fragility and/or deepening of democracy. Using these criteria one can make both approaches that were mentioned above (Roberts, Howard) compatible. Structure means the existence of different types of organizations, such as leisure, social, based on volunteering, professional, national and international; links mean the forms and channels of communication and basic features of political culture. To understand what the structure is like and how the links work we need a brief exposition of historical roots.

3 HISTORICAL LEGACY

Central and Eastern Europe

During the communist regime there were two types of public organizations¹⁰: the official structures (trade unions, women's and youth organizations) and the "leisure time associations" (sport and tourism) that were part of the system. These organizations could not take any official position against the politics of the state (Party). Moreover, they did not formulate any specific demands and were mostly used as a source of passive loyalty to the regime (almost everybody was a member of some of these organizations) and to some extent, through official proclamations of support, as the source of the

regime's legitimacy. Vertical, that is, hierarchical top-down control was very effective.

Nevertheless, on the local level of "grass-roots organizations" mainly of a "leisure time" type, there was some space for independent activities, in some cases even based on opposition to the communist regime value system (such as the Scout movement¹¹), that enabled some cross-cutting social contacts and could be the source of revitalization of the activities after the regime change. Further, some basic skills for organizational work and accounting were gained by the activists. After the change of the political system, we can observe some continuity in these activities and in personnel dealing with "leisure time" activities, emancipation of some "hidden" organizations (the Scout movement) and transformation of others (trade unions¹²). Otherwise, there was deep discontinuity in the more "official" types of organizations; for instance, women's and youth organizations.

Other types of organizations (networks) were formed by dissenters, people who organized activities that reflected some form of civil disobedience and concentrated on programs against the state and/or outside the state. The ability to mobilize the public and to get public support and influence differed in particular countries, with the strongest impact on society in Poland (Solidarity) and Hungary. However, in most countries the dissenters formed a rather narrow group of activists with no deeper mobilization of the public until 1989.

Among the dissident intellectuals in CEE countries the perception of the concept of civil society was strongly influenced by Václav Havel's essay "Power of the powerless" (1985)¹³, which contained a strong moral appeal and which stressed individual responsibility for the decision to either "live in truth" or to "live a lie." The idea of "parallel polis" (outside the official structures of the state) and "non-political politics" (weakening of the role of basic political actors and bureau-

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cratic institutions of the state) was not only understood as a pattern of how to live in (and against) the communist regime, but in some sense also in “post democracy.” Basic activities were oriented towards human and citizen rights, help for those who were imprisoned (or their families), the demands of political pluralism (against the leading role of “communist parties”), and some social and economic questions (mainly in Poland and Hungary, where social tensions were rather strong). “Capitalism” and to some extent the “market economy” were not topics for public discussion.¹⁴

In some countries, a degree of private ownership of the means of production was allowed (mainly in Poland and Hungary, in the agricultural sector and small workshops). In others it did not work. There were attempts at economic reform from the late 1970s, trying to find methods for a more efficient economy, and a deeper interest from employees in the economic results of their enterprises. But no “capitalist option” has ever been officially proclaimed, not even by the opposition.¹⁵ It is interesting to follow the arguments of former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, who tried to legitimize economic reform by use of articles and commentaries by Lenin dealing with New Economic Policy (NEP).¹⁶

Latin America

Public organizations in most Latin American countries had a different character compared to CEE countries. Mostly, there was no network of mass officially-controlled organizations to fulfill the role of a legitimizing factor for the non-democratic regimes; nevertheless, we can find some similarities. The military took over many established civil society organizations, and after purges of Left elements subordinated them to an authoritarian capitalist agenda. Moreover, in some countries there were active violent groups with either the support or tolerance of the

state (*paramilitares*), or operating against the state (such as *Sendero Luminoso*). I do not include these groups among some sources of civil society, but I mention them to describe the environment in which the civil society organizations functioned. The violence that was present in most of the Latin American authoritarian regimes in this period (much higher than in CEE countries in the 1970s and 1980s) influenced the formation of organizations of civil society that tried to protect the civilians in these conflicts, and at the same time the organizations defending basic human rights (symbolized by *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*) and protesting against the state which participated in or directly organized the violence.

The other difference we have to mention is connected with ethnic, economic and social questions. Ethnically-based organisations and/or movements were mostly not present in CEE countries.¹⁷ In some Latin America countries ethnicity became the base for the formation of civil movements. Further, in Latin America the protests against neoliberal economic policy were present and social work with the poorest groups and socially-excluded was organized on the basis of civil society, and often volunteering.

To concluding the comparison of the historical background of the two regions, we can see firstly a strong official “non-voluntary” organizational structure in CEE that was almost entirely absent in Latin America. Secondly, in the CEE there was a rather weaker ability than in Latin America to organize mass movements oriented towards social and/or economic issues.¹⁸ Thirdly, in CEE there was a stronger orientation towards building the space of “privacy” in the sense of saving one’s own individual identity and dignity against the all-penetrating ideology in communist countries. Volunteer social work was almost unknown in CEE countries, and ethnically-based activities were also not present. The relation between civil society and the state was ambiguous in CEE: the official organizations were

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part of the state and the regime, and for dissenters the state was identified as an enemy. The same animosity or mistrust toward the state was present in Latin American movements both because of its non-democratic character and because of socially negative experience with the state even before the military came to power.

4 CURRENT PROBLEMS: RULE OF LAW

The key problem for the reinvention of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America deals with the rule of law. In fact, historically the concept of civil society is strongly connected with rule of law: "civil society as a rule of law and a political community, a peaceful order based on implicit or explicit consent of individuals, a zone of 'civility'" (Kaldor 2003: 7). The rule of law is the base for any democratic system, although it is not a sufficient condition to call the regime a fully-fledged democracy. Paradoxically, the tradition of reinventing civil society in Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s mostly did not go in the direction of the rule of law, which has been partly underestimated. There are several explanations: there was almost no experience with the rule of law before the formation of non-democratic regimes and if it existed, it was a rather short-term experience. That is, the rule of law and its procedures were not broadly accepted as "democratic values."

The underestimation of the rule of law and legal procedures opened a big space for corruption, given the strong historic connection between politics and economics in both regions. There is an additional issue which we have to take into consideration in CEE countries: there was not a capitalist social structure, and there were no capitalists at the moment of the collapse of the communist regimes. This can explain to us why "wild" forms (often described as the Wild East) of economic transition

without legal constraints or a transparent legal framework became the norm, and permitted the easy formation of a group of capitalists (such as the oligarchs in Russia).

Moreover, as is stressed by Kopecky and Barnifield (1999: 78),

the notion of civil society became an articulated political theory of opposition to totalitarianism. It was envisaged primarily as a strategy of opposition against the communist regime; but it was also presented as a programme for a post-communist society, and possibly even a 'post-democratic' one.

The impact of this understanding of the role of society and the state (politics) was the strong underestimation of the role of institutions and misunderstanding of the logic of the fragile mutual relations among the institutions of a democratic state, of the forms of mediation, of the role of political parties. Nevertheless, as a side-effect of this attitude we can see the strengthening of the position of the political parties, the growth of "partitocracy" and the decline of public political participation.

5 THE NEOLIBERAL CHALLENGE

Probably one of the most striking differences dealing with the orientation of civil society in these regions is the attitude toward the neoliberal concept of market economy and the role of the state. In CEE countries, as a result of de-communization under a neoliberal form, there has been a very low level of "socially" oriented activities based on volunteering, the almost complete absence of social movements, no mass participation in protests and no formulation of demands. On the contrary, in Latin America " ... in all cases while civil society was a reaction to an authoritarian regime it was also a response to a process of further differentiation of market and society that was brought about by neoliberal policies." (Leonardo Avritzer in Glaius et al., 2004: 55).

When interpreting this fact we have to take into considerati-

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on that the level of poverty, social inequality and social exclusion was not as high in CEE countries as in some Latin American countries.¹⁹ It was the economic transformation that brought the radical decline of standards of living in the first years and also influenced the stratification of society, with poverty as a rather new phenomenon. For many Central Europeans, unemployment became a totally new experience. The response of society to this process of differentiation was rather weak. The shift of the historical pendulum from a centrally-planned and bureaucratized communist society where a lot of higher quality services (such as health and education) could be obtained only by giving special gifts and forming special social networks to a society of the neoliberal “invisible hand of the market”, in which the main “mover” became the state and state bureaucracy (that is, politicians), shaped a very specific environment that limited possibilities for the formation of social movements.

Both regions have had one similar feature: there were many professional NGOs, mostly with the support of international organizations (the European Union in CEE countries), and sometimes with the support of the state. This led to the mushrooming of many project-oriented organizations and associations, whose activities are influenced by grants and projects proposed from above, not by identifying the problems of society from below. Such organizations generally do not react to the real problems of society, and are not based on the activities of volunteers. Their projects and proposed solutions do not reflect the real problems of society. Some authors warn that the export of civil society can lead to the abortion of local processes of change (Hann in Glasius et al., 2004: 44). And activists of social movements based on volunteering mostly watch the professionals of NGOs with suspicion, given that they sometimes have privileged access to the state or “international” grants and projects. This criticism concentrates mainly on the widespread

incorporation of the NGO activists into the “state” and “politics”, and/or on the case of the role of international organizations in “cultural imperialism”: that is, to prepare “neoliberal space” for global economic expansion.

In Latin America we can see two basic phases in this development, the first one until the 1990s when existing or newly formed NGOs were easily incorporated into the neoliberal state, and the second since the 1990s when more militant social movements “from below” were formed. That is why we can witness often negative attitudes among these different types of “civil society” in Latin America; in Central and Eastern Europe such attitudes do not have a strong presence, mainly because of the almost non-existence of social movements.

On the other hand this “imposition” in most of the Central and Eastern European countries filled the vacuum of no professional staff, and no experience with fundraising, accounting or project writing that existed there. Also it disseminated basic “standards” of liberal democratic regimes, getting on the agenda topics like accountability, conflicts of interest, human rights, minority rights, gender and the fight against corruption; as well as attention toward social questions such as socially excluded groups and the homeless. It cannot be verified whether this “imposition” prevented the formation of grass-root organizations from below, but some negative features were present, that went against the logic of a fully-fledged civil society. I have had a similar experience and strongly agree with Chris Hann (in Glasius ... 2004) who presents his own experience: “A decade after the collapse of socialism, I found that no academics in Moscow took the notion of civil society seriously. It was simply a magical phrase that it was always desirable to include in any foreign grant applications, just as a phrase about Russia’s cultural or spiritual renaissance was obligatory for grant applications within the country.”

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The lesson from post 1989 development for many NGO activists in Central Europe was the necessity to learn the “proper” vocabulary when preparing projects and starting with fundraising abroad. This was more important than defining the real problems of society. That is, development was more “from above” than “from below”. Moreover, in some cases the problems solved by activists of civil society were “virtual”; that is, society had not felt that these problems were really important (although they may have been). Research in most of the CEE countries provides some evidence of the “strong feelings of mistrust of voluntary organizations” as a result of their prior experience with “imposed” participation during the communist regimes. Another important factor is the continued use of private friendship networks that originated in the communist regimes.²⁰ The third factor is the frustration “with the new political and economic system” (Howard 2003: 146 - 148).

6 CONCLUSION

The concept of civil society was reinvented almost simultaneously in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe, and in both cases this “reinvention” was connected with the refusal of non-democratic regimes. In Latin America civil society organizations often reacted to the impact of neoliberal economic reforms that accompanied authoritarian regimes, and thus both “political” (such as human rights and liberty) and “social” aspects were present. During the process of democratization these organizations, often being part of the INGOs and/or BINGOs network, were incorporated into and accepted the neoliberal system. Later new, more radical social movements were formed. So we find the coexistence of the two types of associations in Latin America. In contrast, social issues were not part of any activities during the communist regimes, neither of the “official” organizations nor of the organizations of dissent. De-com-

munization in its neoliberal form found civil society unprepared for its social impacts, and even today social protests and social movements are often interpreted by mainstream intellectuals as “communist”.

The “internationalization” of civil society has brought new stimulus toward the development of civil society in the new democracies, at the same time as it has shaped the activities of local NGOs that often reflected more the ideas and priorities of the donors than the everyday problems of the citizens of particular states. The professionalization of NGOs has been important to channeling demands from the social sphere into politics, but it does not form the skills and habits of ordinary citizens. Volunteering is very weak in CEE countries and it could be stronger in Latin America. The result of more or less twenty years of neoliberal democracy in both regions does not paint a very optimistic picture: witness the social tensions, the decline of public participation and volunteering, increase of electoral abstention and decrease of trust, both interpersonal and institutional. Nonetheless the current crisis opens the space for alternatives, and a hope that they will not reproduce the non-democratic experiences of both regions.

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NOTES

¹ It is necessary to define the region because the concept of Central and Eastern Europe is rather vague. My analysis is concentrated on the countries that were part of the Soviet Bloc; that is, the post-Yugoslavian states and Albania are not included. The core of my analysis of the CEE is based on "central" Europe: Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. The situation in East Germany was very near to that in Czechoslovakia during the communist regime, but development after the collapse of communism followed a different logic.

² These took place during the 1970s and 1980s in the Czech Republic and other CEE countries. They were organized discussions and seminars in private flats, reading philosophical, sociological and similar texts by authors most of whose books and articles were not available in libraries. Usually there would be a professor or academic unable to find work in the universities for political reasons, but later there were also visits by professors from Western Europe. Often these seminars were disrupted or abandoned when the secret police blocked participants from entering into the flat.

³ Some of these movements had existed for some time before 1989 (e.g. Solidarity for almost a decade), but the basic characteristics and role they played during the process of dismantlement of the communist regime were almost the same. These movements unified a public that was against the communist regime, although there was no common understanding of how to shape the future. They included different political streams: from anarchists, reform communists, social democrats, liberals and conservatives to radical right nationalist groups. This was the main reason why these movements disintegrated soon after the collapse of communism.

⁴ I refer to the period in which the process of transition started. The "domino effect" that we witnessed in CEE countries was not as strong in Latin America.

⁵ Here I exclude the case of Paraguay from consideration.

⁶ There is no space here to review the large body of literature on democracy. However, see for starters the following texts, mostly used in the liberal approach: Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, Chatham, NJ, Chatham House, 1987; Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1989; and Gregory Gill, *The Dynamics of Democratization: Elite, Civil Society and the Transition Process*, Basingstoke, Palgrave 2000.

⁷ See for instance Glasius, Lewis, Seckinelgin, 2004; Zimmer, Priller, 2004).

⁸ Some sociological research shows data for the Czech Republic that is rather positive in the sense of some forms of participation (i.e. donations, petitions etc.). However there are some methodological problems of such research, because it does not take into consideration time-demanding activities and the ability to influence the "agenda setting": that is, to be able to push the problems of society into politics. For these data see Matijū, Vításková; Sedláčková, Štaif; both chapters in Lewandowski and Znoj (eds, 2008).

⁹ Trust seems to be the key category for understanding many of the problems and challenges in Central and Eastern Europe. For commentary on this problem, see Lewandowski, Znoj (eds.), 2008. Data dealing with Latin America shows similar results. See Abby Cordova, "Economic Inequality, Interpersonal Trust, and Support for Redistributive Policies in Latin America," at

http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/6/7/6/2/pages267629/p267629-3.php and also particular results of the Americas Barometer survey carried out by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP): <http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/AmericasBarometerInsightsSeries>. Weyland (2004: 146) points out the diminishing public trust in governments and politicians, the increase of electoral abstention and decline of public participation that is associated with the depth of the neoliberal reforms.

¹⁰ I do not want to use the term “civil society”, mainly for the officially organized associations; nevertheless some continuity both in physical and cultural senses is present.

¹¹ The structure of the “Scout movement” in the Czech Republic in Svazarm (Union for collaboration with the army) enabled continuity for some of the clubs (troops) for almost twenty years from the late 1960s (when it was first renewed and then forbidden again). Scout movements in the Czech Republic were strongly connected with “tramps” and “tramping” that became influential from the 1920s, and was strongly connected with working class and student youth, and reflected US westward expansion in some romantic style. The opposite value system means that they stressed a free life style, independence and comradeship, and they were critical to establishment, bourgeois and petty bourgeois life styles. The Czech Republic may be unique because of the rather atheistic composition of its inhabitants (even before communism), so the Scouts were not as influential in their connection to the Church. The Scout movement gained authority among the public also because of the activities of scouts against the Nazi regime, and its many victims who died in concentration camps. In the 1970s and 1980s, semi-organized or unorganized “tramps” often use military uniforms; the most popular were anything that was part of US army equipment, because it symbolized a protest against communism. Nothing was ever used symbolizing Soviet uniforms, because of the 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact countries. That is, the Scout movement in connection with “tramping” reflected a different symbolic tradition.

¹² It is interesting that transformation of trade unions into organizations really representing employees sometimes caused conflict with members, who still wanted trade unions to continue in “traditional communist forms of activities”; that is, cheap holidays and chocolate presents before Christmas.

¹³ Václav Havel is a Czech dramatist, famous dissident, president of Czechoslovakia (1989–1992) and president of the Czech Republic (1993–2003).

¹⁴ Most dissidents tried to operate inside the legal system. Since the late 1970s the Helsinki conference formed the space for activities dealing with violation of human rights, but to mention “capitalism” was not as easy, because in communist constitutions activities against the regimes were characterized as “high treason”.

¹⁵ I am not speaking here about individual opinions, but reading for instance Václav Havel’s essay “Power of the powerless” (1985), one finds deep criticism of consumerism in Western democracies and some vision of the “post-democratic future.” Just after the fall of communism he proclaimed as president the idea of the simultaneous end of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, but later strongly supported the “humanitarian bombing” of Serbia and Kosovo, signed the letter of “8” (leading European politicians with a Right-wing orientation), and gave support to president G.W. Bush for the war in Iraq (although both the Parliament and cabinet of the Czech Republic were against it). Recently he has signed another letter to Barack Obama formulating dissatisfaction with the US decision not to install radar and missiles in the Czech Republic and Poland.

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¹⁶ The NEP was proclaimed in the Soviet Union in 1922 as an attempt at economic recovery after the Civil War and during so-called “war communism.” It lasted only two years, until the death of Lenin. It is for further debate as to whether this period could not be the “thermidor” that would later return society back to some form of capitalism. If one thinks about Latin America, a simplified example of such capitalism could be that in post-revolutionary Mexico.

¹⁷ This may be rather surprising taking into consideration the growth of nationalism after 1989. However firstly, I do not include in my analysis the case of Yugoslavia; and secondly, “nationalism” was used in some countries as part of official politics and ideology. In Bulgaria there was a very strong anti-Turkish politics, in Romania a politics mainly against the Hungarian minority.

¹⁸ In Poland, Solidarity was formed as a trade union and advanced some social demands of workers that reflected the long-run scarcity of certain basic products in everyday use. On the other hand, the symbolic presentation of this trade union was something that was very difficult to analyze for western sociologists: crosses, photos of the Pope and candles. These were far from the common symbols of a working class movement.

¹⁹ Certainly there were deep differences among CEE countries, and higher levels of poverty and social exclusion were evident in Bulgaria and Romania.

²⁰ This is a very important problem that is connected with such problems as “civil privatism” (Habermas), social capital (Putnam, Bourdieu) and trust. There is no space for a broader discussion of it here; moreover I do not have deeper knowledge of this phenomenon in Latin America. For those interested in these problems see the very interesting volume of J. D Lewandowski and M. Znoj (eds.), *Trust and Transitions* (2008).