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SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN UNDERSTANDINGS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CROATIA

Andreja Sršen[1*]

[1]PhD, Andreja Sršen, University of Zagreb, CROATIA, asrsen@hrstud.hr

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to raise some questions about the concept of civil society in the context of ongoing research on social reconstruction and social development in dominant understandings of civil society in Croatia. Civil society development in Croatia over the last two decades was faced with specific national frameworks. Through an examination of the role of 'new social movements' in Croatian society in the mid 1990's, and the role of non-governmental organizations in contemporary Croatia, certain problems on social reconstruction and social movements are examined. This paper provides a more elaborate explanatory framework that addresses problems such as the role of civil society in Croatia and the kinds of causal impacts of civil society with a particular focus on those of social movements. Civil society organizations in Croatia are mostly associations, played a significant role during the Homeland War of 1991–1995 in solving war-related problems, assisting in overcoming crises related to refugees. The outcomes of the research results and insights from the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society Project* (2011) will be used in the paper and shall provide insight into both the strengths and the weaknesses of the civil society in Croatia.

Keywords: Civil society, social movements, Croatia, non-governmental organisations, social development.

1   INTRODUCTION

Civil society is often seen as a promoter of values such as democracy, tolerance, peace and non-violence. This paper provides a more socio-political understanding of 'civil society' by examining social movements in relation to civil society in Croatia. The concept of civil society is nowadays widely used in Croatia. There is limited tradition of civil society in Croatia — its development has been hindered by half a century of communism and totalitarian ideology coupled with a lack of experience with the concept of freedom of association (Bežovan, 2001, p.1). For the last decade, mainstream development discourse has adopted the notion of 'civil society' as a promoter of positive attitudes to social issues, contributing to the public good. From labor unions with influence over government policy in areas like healthcare to groups and organizations focusing on social policy, Croatian civil society is dynamic and effective. From the late 1990s onwards, the policy and institutional framework, as well as the general socio-political environment of civil society have improved. After 2000 and that year's elections, the new government declared its commitment to cooperate with civil society and expressed readiness to create legislation favorable for its development (Bežovan, Matančević, 2011).

This paper deals with the issue of civil society organizational features (including organizational structure and leadership and relationships with other agents of democratization) and the new social movements. Some new social movement theorists emphasize a change in the contrast to old social movements (Eyerman, 1984; Gamson, 1975; Tilly, 1978). Nowadays, new social movements are produced by new contradictions of society, contradictions between individual and state. The many approaches to the explanation of the phenomenon of social movements suggest that no one of them is able to explain everything, but all the approaches may be correct in their local sphere. They either stress attention to specific types of social movements and consider them as universal or put all the attention on a single aspect of the phenomenon of social movements as the consequences of new elements of civil society. Because social movements are the consequences of new elements of civil society, which are not included into the social order, they are always unconventional and always make a new social reconstruction. Civil society, in a theoretical way, is normally in a state of change, but social structures tend towards stability. That is why social movements almost

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always exist in the public sphere called "civil society". If the disparity between civil society and social order is large, then social movements are strong. Actions undertaken by civil society organizations to effect change in society are generally over time replaced with new ones. With the development of communication technologies, creation and activities of social movements became easier. In thinking strategically, civil society organizations try to identify the nature and causes of social problems and then choose specific targets that are deemed the most likely people or organisations to resolve those problems. One of the keys to a successful strategic approach is in maintaining effective communication with members of the public. To achieve this, civil society, development agencies and other important public subjects should strengthen the mechanisms for dialogue. This study's theoretical contributions yield a more balanced understanding of democratization by exploring theoretical question of how social movements lead to political as well as social transformation in the area of "civil society".

2 CIVIL SOCIETY IN POLITICAL DEMOCRATIZATION

Civil society development in a particular country is dependent upon specific historical circumstances. The concept of civil society in Croatia was re-discovered in the late 1980s and the 1990s (Bežovan, 2004). Civil society and social movements in Croatia in the 1990's, despite their profoundly democratic and spontaneous character, began to be expressed in and through specific national frameworks. The situation in Croatia in the 1990's was, in some ways, very complex because of the response to the refugee crisis produced by the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina. That situation produced a new social construction in political movement driven by 'humanitarianism'. The specificities of a conjunction between post-socialist transition, territorial disputes, war, and large scale forced migration in a post-Yugoslav context, must be addressed as a specific example of the globalization of social welfare, in terms of the role of supranational agencies in regulation, distribution, and provision (Deacon and Hulse,1994). We can trace some civic initiatives in the late 19th and 20th Centuries, which have established foundations for some cultural, educational and social institutions, and in this way contributed to the modernization of society (Bežovan, Zrinščak, Vugec, 2005). There is a lack of research on civil society in that period, which could otherwise have given deeper insights into determinants of the later processes (Bežovan, 2004).

2.1 Civil society development: indicators, sub-dimensions and dimensions

In this part of the paper an analysis of the policy-relevant findings of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index Project[1] Europe will be presented with some important questions and challenges ahead for Croatian civil society, although the impact of civil society on influencing policies is still a relatively new area of development in Croatia. (Fioramonti, Heinrich, 2007). The *Index Project* is a diagnostic tool for assessing the current state and health of civil society at a national level, and aims to provide a basis for dialogue among civil society stakeholders so they might set goals and develop an agenda for the future development of civil society (Bežovan, 2001, p.3).To interpret the current condition of civil society holistically, a broad understanding of the concept of the 'state of civil society' will be used as Fioramont and Heinrich (2007) suggested. This covers the structural and normative manifestations of civil society, and also encompasses the conditions that support or inhibit civil society's development as well as the consequences of civil society's activities for society at large. It has been suggested that four dimensions are important aspect of the state of civil society: structure, environment, values and impact. The structure dimension looks at civil society's make-up, size and composition, and examines the actors within the civil society arena. The environment dimension examines a variety of factors influencing civil society, (including: political, legal, institutional, social, cultural and economic factors), the values dimension addresses the principles and values adhered to, practiced and promoted by civil society, and finally, the impact dimension measures the impact that civil society has on people's lives and on society as a whole.

As mentioned above civil society development in a particular country is dependent upon specific historical circumstances, therefore in Croatia, as a former socialist country, civil society is sometimes said to have a poor tradition. The first looks at the ways at non- governmental organisations in Croatia, often appealing through 'civil society' for their legitimacy, which have grown up in response to the humanitarian crisis caused by large numbers of refugees and displaced persons and, in particular, at the narrowness of focus of these

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[1] This research project and its outputs are of a particular relevance to the TSI FP7 project, as an important building block of the knowledge on civil society in Croatia. Importantly, the CSI has put on the agenda the question of conceptualization and definition of civil society and civil society organizations in the academic and policy community, and has promoted the concept of civil society in the general public (Bežovan,Matančević, 2011).

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NGOs. Civil society organizations became in the early 1990s gradually more willing to form partnerships with government authorities on particular issues. These modernization processes were progressive social forces, groups and individuals, who found an external ally in the European Union and its agencies. By this time civil society organizations were active most notably as humanitarian organizations in the context of the war and specific social problems and needs. Civil society became characterized by the presence of foreign organizations, humanitarian work and a high level of solidarity. By the second half of the 1990s, civil society faced negative public perception in terms of negative attitude towards civil society organizations. Lack of understanding of the idea of civil society among political elites slowed down the creation of political preconditions for building civil society, as well as the regulatory framework for registering and work of civil society organization (Bežovan, Matančević, 2011, p.15). The process of accession to the European Union has resulted in the Europeanisation policy toward civil society. The principles of openness, participation, consultation and others have become an integral part of the public discourse on civil society. Civil Society Index (CSI) study, implemented between 2003 and 2005, indicated important features and developmental trends present in Croatian civil society at the time. Low levels of networking, geographical disparities, lack of trust, inadequate representation of civil society in the media, inadequate cooperation with the government and poor impact on public policymaking were all identified as weaknesses which threatened to undermine the effectiveness of the sector. The CSI methodology uses a combination of participatory and scientific research methods to generate an assessment of the state of civil society at the national level. The CSI measures the following core dimensions:(1) Civic Engagement; (2) Level of Organisation; (3) Practice of Values; (4) Perceived Impact; (5) External Environment (Bežovan, Matančević, 2011, p.11). Civic Engagement is one of the core components of the CSI's definition of civil society as it describes the formal and informal activities undertaken by individuals to advance shared interests at different levels, from recreation to social and political interests.[2] In this research, civic engagement is divided into socially-based engagement in activities of a generally social or recreational nature, important for the building of social capital and political activities through which individuals try to advance shared interests of some political nature, such as participation in demonstrations, boycotts or signing petitions, aiming at impacting policies and/or bringing about social change at the macro level (p.18). Civic Engagement was assessed on the six sub-dimensions (see Figure 1; p.19). The lowest scores were assessed on the indicators of the extent of socially-based and political engagement (14.8% and 19.3% respectively), while the diversity of socially-based and political engagement seemed to be rather strong 79.9% and 78.9% respectively (see Figure 1. Bežovan, Matančević, 2011, p.18-19).

Figure 1.

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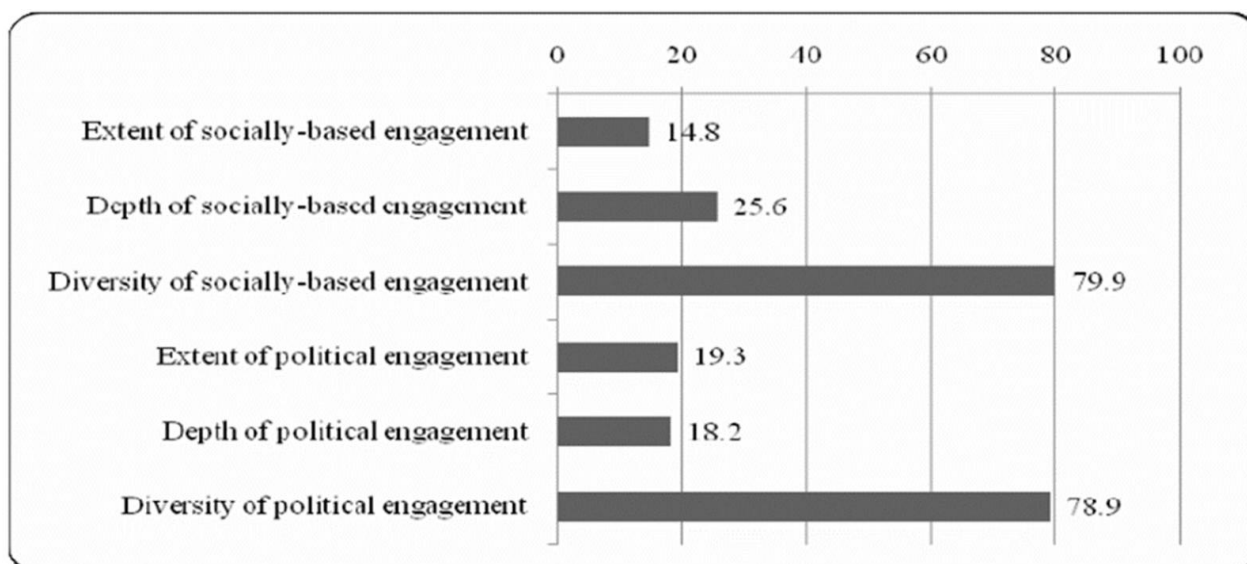
[2] The score for this dimension is 39.4%.The extent of socially-based engagement sub-dimension analyses the level (extent) of citizen participation, both as members and/or volunteers, in socially-based organisations and activities. The depth of socially-based engagement sub-dimension assesses how frequently or extensively people engage in civil society activities. CIVICUS – Civil Society Index Analytical Country Report for Croatia. (Bežovan, Matančević, 2011, p.18-19).

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The CSI research found that 78.9% of members of the different socio-economic, ethnic, age, gender and other groups are members of organisations of a political nature such as women, people of minority ethnicity, older people or people from rural areas (p.22-23). These findings confirm that public sphere operates best where citizens, as individuals or in groups, are informed about the social, political and corporate affairs that affect their interests, and enter into public discussion about the policies and activities of those in power whose decisions affect the public interest. This on-going discussion provides the feedback and direction needed for healthy governance in terms of good impact of civil society.

3   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Because social movements have led to so many dramatic changes in societies around the globe, scholars have spent a great deal of time trying to understand where they come from and who participates in them. Some characteristics of social movements are that they are "involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; are linked by dense informal networks; [and they] share a distinct collective identity" (De la Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 20). Social movements can be thought of as organized informal social entities that are engaged in extra-institutional conflict that is oriented towards a specific policy goal or be more broadly aimed at cultural change. Some of the earliest works on social movements were attempts to understand why people got caught up in collective action, and to early scholars these works were rooted in theories of mass society. The study of social movements as specific social processes with specific patterns emerged from this field of study. Sociologists can use the theory of the four stages of social movements as an analytic tool for understanding how collective action occurs in specific society conditions.

One of the earliest scholars to study social movement processes was Herbert Blumer (1969) who identified four stages of social movements. The four stages he described were "social ferment", "popular excitement", "formalization", and "institutionalization" ((De la Porta & Diani 2006, p.150). Since his early work these four stages have been renamed by scholars but the underlying themes have remained relatively constant. Today, these four social movement stages are known as Emergence, Coalescence, Bureaucratization, and Decline.

Within the first stage "Emergence", social movements are very preliminary and there is little to no organization. Instead, this stage can be thought of as widespread discontent (Macionis, 2001; Hopper, 1950). Potential movement participants may be unhappy with some policy or some social condition, but they have not taken any action, and if there is any it is most likely individual action rather than collective action.

At the second stage "Coalescence", social movements have overcome some obstacles which many never overcome. Rex D. Hopper (1950), in examining revolutionary processes, states that at this stage "unrest is no longer covert, endemic, and esoteric; it becomes overt, epidemic, and exoteric. Discontent is no longer uncoordinated and individual; it tends to become focalized and collective" (p. 273). This is the stage at which the movement becomes more than just random upset individuals.

The third stage is known as "Bureaucratization" and in this stage, social movements have had some success in that they have raised awareness to a degree that a coordinated strategy is necessary across all of the social movement organisations. Social movements in this stage can no longer just rely on mass rallies or inspirational leaders to progress towards their goals they must rely on trained staff to carry out the functions of organizations. Finally, the last stage in the theoretical framework of social movement life cycle is "Decline", or "Institutionalization". According to this stage decline does not necessarily mean failure for social movements though, Miller (1999) argues, there are four ways in which social movements can decline: repression, co-optation, success, and failure. While the theory of the four stages of social movements offers some useful insight into some movements, it is important to consider that the stages of development are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Sidney Tarrow (1994) is right to observe that modern society is very much a movement society. He was one of the first political scientists to recognize the relevance of social movements as political actors. He develops some of the hypotheses elaborated in his earlier research, confronting them with the most important social sciences literature in the field and with empirical studies on past and present social movements. The main questions he addresses are (a) the conditions under which the „power in movement" arises; (b) the common dynamics in the careers of social movements, from the enthusiastic births to the disillusioned ends; and (c) the consequences of social movements, especially what remains after the decline of mass mobilization. As noted it is difficult to distinguish between a social movement and an interest group if wi insist that social movements must operate outside political institutions, and this is especially true for movements that focus on

parital change. A variety of theories have attempted to explain how social movments develop, and all the approaches may be correct in their field, but each approach stresses attention to specific types of social movements. The four stages of social movement development mentioned above can also help scholars to understand the ways that social movements affect society in its social movement`s change and social reconstruction.

4   CIVIL SOCIETY MOVEMENTS IN CROATIA

Broadly speaking there were several waves of activism in Croatia at the interface of peace, human rights and social justice. Some of them were dealing with the issues of the networking of individuals, groups and projects around the "Anti-war Campaign in Croatia in the late 1980s, the others were dealing with the issue of technocratic 'Non-Governmental Organizations', to an extent, of external donor funding and some waves of activism in Croatia relates to inter-linked activist initiatives and movements including the student and trade unions protest. Sociology of activism which is not based, exclusively or primarily, on active participation in any or all of the movements discussed, cannot be automatically dismissed as worthless.

Civil society movements in Croatia in the mid 1990's had to pay attention to the former existing Yugoslav federation. By that time non-government organisations in Croatia face the continued interpolation of 'former Yugoslavia' as a territorial, and geo-political configuration. Today, the greatest number of associations in Croatia are connected with sport, culture, the economy, technical matters and social issues. There are also health, humanitarian and ecological associations, and those which advocate child, youth and family protection. Blumer (1969) and Tilly (1978) have described different stages social movements often pass through. Movements emerge for a variety of reasons and at that point, they can take a number of paths, including: finding some form of movement success, failure, co-optation of leaders, repression by larger groups (e.g., government), or even the establishment of the movement within the mainstream. In Croatia, nongovernmental organizations (see Figure 2), labor unions, religious groups, and other civic organizations remain active and extremely effective compared to civil society in many Balkan countries.

Figure 2.

(source; Croatia.eu; avaliable at : http://www.croatia.eu/article.php?lang=2&id=46)

They are financed from the State Budget, EU funds, various donations and membership fees. The best known associations in civil sector in Croatia are: Caritas Croatia, a Catholic humanitarian organization which helps people in need or trouble, founded in 1934.; GONG, founded in 1997, to encourage citizens to participate actively in political processes, monitor elections and educate citizens on their rights and duties; B.a.B.e., founded in 1994 to promote and protect women's rights and to promote gender equality; Green Action (Zelena Akcija), an NGO for environmental protection, founded in 1990.; Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, which was for many years the leading association promoting human rights founded in 1993, it operated until 2003 as a representative of the International Helsinki Federation, and from then on as a national non-governmental organisations, and finally, Transparency International Croatia primarily deals

with suppressing national and international corruption and increasing government accountability.[3] In 2013, these groups pursued initiatives on everything from the environment to a successful referendum to define marriage as between a man and a woman. However, the latter effort, spearheaded by a conservative group allied with the Croatian Catholic Church, reflected a broader conservative turn in Croatian civil society toward stances and policies on issues such as gay rights, sexual education, and abortion that are at odds with European ideals and norms on minority rights. Due to this shift, Croatia's rating for civil society declines from 2.50 to 2.75.[4] The impact achieved by civil society organizations (CSOs) is one of the most important questions and challenges ahead for Croatian civil society. When the definition of civil society is refined to include only those groups whose purpose is to promote development and social change, it may be narrowed down to two broad sub-sets of organizations which are active in:

1. Strengthening participatory democracy and improving governance by
   * Representing the diversity of social interests to government through advocacy and policy dialogue and broadening the base of decision-making;
   * Monitoring policy implementation, holding governments to account and fighting corruption;
   * Promoting human rights and fighting exclusion and inequality.
2. Delivering social and economic services and project implementation. (TASCO, 2010:4).

Dryzek (1996) argues that every society has an endemic state imperative — such as "accumulation" (securing continuous capitalist development) or "legitimation" (keeping social and political order) — subject to change in different temporal environments. A closer look at what is going on in society reveals that there are not only discourses at the level of the general public but that society is full of discourses that do not reach the public level (Leo d'Anjou, p. 260). It is difficult to assess the extent to which the formal inclusion of civil society in policy dialogue in Croatia results in improved and more responsive policy, as well as in increased public participation in decision making. Limited civil society organizations capacities, in particular the frequent inability of civil society organizations to respond to invitations to participate in consultative processes initiated by government, are a major constraining factor. On the other hand, civil society organizations complain, not without reason, that the government does not understand the democratic principle underlying public participation in policy making and that it approaches civil society's involvement in a purely instrumental way (TACSO: 2010). Civil society in Croatia as a set of social relations is no more inherently progressive than other forms of social relations, notably those derived from the state and formal political processes.

6 CONCLUSION

To sum up, a closer look at the socio-political environment reveals that in spite of some important improvements in the legal and policy environment in recent years in Croatia, the framework is not always assessed by civil society organizations representatives as appropriate in practice. In terms of improving civic participation in Croatia, government authorities in public sphere are encouraged to develop sustainable programmes for volunteers, in a way that they can contribute meaningfully to the mission of promoting and advocating certain core values to the public. In this sense, the media is recognized as an important actor for civil society development in Croatia. According to findings of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index Project (2011) the importance of the education system in promoting civic engagement and civility is also seen as essential. The public politics of EU view civil society and its participation in decision-making as key to effective participatory democracy, recognizing the importance of consultation and dialogue with civil society organizations in all its forms. Here I will merely signal three problematic areas that seem to be in need of more investigation: (a) the relationship between civil society and the international scene (donor organizations, foreign governments, international bodies)needs to be scrutinized, (b) there is no consensus on how the optimal relationship between the economic system in Croatia and civil society should be institutionalized; (c) In order to gauge the functioning of civil society it is not enough to examine its internal characteristics; one needs to consider also civil society's relationships with the other domains of the polity and the international context. This analysis suggests that a positive and respectful relationship between civil

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[3] Croatia.eu; avaliable at : http://www.croatia.eu/article.php?lang=2&id=46

[4] Reprort for Croatia from Freedom House.Freedom 2014 SCORES: (1 = BEST, 7 = WORST) DEMOCRACY SCORE 3.68%; NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE: 3.50%; ELECTORAL PROCESS: 3.25 %;CIVIL SOCIETY:2.75 %; INDEPENDENT MEDIA: 4.00 %; LOCAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE: 3.75%; JUDICIAL FRAMEWORK AND INDEPENDENCE: 4.50%; CORRUPTION: 4.00%. (see report for Croatia at: https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2014/croatia#.VG831jSG-y7).

society organizations and the state is a crucial factor to ensure civil society organizations long-term sustainability.

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