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## **The Contextuality of the Concept of Civil Society—from Particular Meanings to the Common Vector of Emancipation**

*Abstract:* This article is about the evolution of the concept of civil society which has been taking place in response to the changing socio-political context. This process can be observed from two different perspectives. On the one hand, the concept is clearly contextual—it is always embedded in the problems of particular times and particular societies. On the other hand, the observed changes have a common vector. This can be seen in the parallel vicissitudes of the concept and its designates—social emancipation in modern times has been turbulent and erratic. One of the main advocates of this perspective is Amartya Sen (2002). This perspective also helps us to view contemporary civil societies as located on the aforementioned vector. This article tries to reconstruct it using a taxonomical analysis of aggregated data from the International Social Survey Programme 2004: Citizenship. The diversity of attitudes and patterns of civil activity in contemporary democracies is certainly multidimensional but the main axis is apparently defined by the post-industrial social formation and post-materialistic orientation.

*Keywords:* civil society, social and political activity, contextuality, emancipation, cross-cultural research.

### **Introduction**

The evolving meaning of the concept of civil society has rendered this concept a key to many doors. Where exactly these doors have led to has always largely depended on the historical context and the political views of those who tried to turn the key. Hence it bears the marks of many different times and many different civic cultures. We cannot isolate the meaning of the concept of civil society from the specific biographical experiences of its authors.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean to say that we are talking about a concept lacking a sound, common denominator. On the contrary, it has always connoted society's political agency. In this article I endeavour to characterize both this common denominator and the specific meanings of the concept of civil society which, as history has convinced us, usually acquired contextual meaning. In the first part of this article I give a brief sketch of the history of the idea which, though in no way aspiring to a historiography of civil society, outlines nevertheless the most important stages of the concept's peregrination together with its rooting, always, in the current problems of specific times and specific societies. This review will also portray the more

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<sup>1</sup> As Jerzy Szacki pointed out, despite its heterogeneous political roots, “the notion of civil society cannot be [...] ideologically or politically disambiguated. Although it is historically related to many orientations, it is not basically identical with any of them” (1997: 62).

general process whereby wider and wider social circles acquire real political agency. In the second part I take a closer look at the contemporary designates of the concept of civil society and try to determine whether we may view it as yet another stage in the process.

### The Historical Contextuality of the Notion of Civil Society

The notion of civil society is so closely linked to European political tradition that its vicissitudes may be seen as converging with occidental political history. The sources of them both are usually traced to ancient Greece and Aristotle's *koinonia politike* is thought to be the prototype of the modern concept. But even earlier evidence of political agency can be found. According to Tukidides, Pericles used the following words to portray the role of citizen in democratic Greece in his funeral speech in honour of the first victims of the Peloponnesian war:

Our public men have, besides politics, their private affairs to attend to, and our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, regarding him who takes no part in these duties not unambitious but as useless (...).

Due to the experience of war and the parallel moral decay of Athenian politics, Socrates—*nota bene* an active participant in the warfare—and his intellectual successors, Plato and Aristotle, witnessed a different version of the democratic landscape. In their opinion, this form of governance was a degenerated form of *politeia*, and this observation was accompanied by the longing for a form of political community in which unity and civil virtue were the order of the day.

Civil society as an element of political thought re-emerged in the Justinian codifications (Kowalewski 1987) which remained lost in oblivion in the West for half a millennium until the times of Irnerius. Its genuine modern revival began during the Italian *Trecento*. Machiavelli rendered a good portrayal of the political agency of the inhabitants of northern Italy in his report of the negotiations between members of the Florentine Signoria and Prince Gualtieri. When the prince ordered the townsfolk to assemble at the square in front of Santa Croce church (the one where Machiavelli's remains are still housed), they apparently argued:

Sire, you are seeking how to surrender to yourself a town which has always been free. For the power which we once conferred upon the king of Naples was an alliance, not a form of serfdom. Have you considered, Sire, how deeply appreciated and rooted is the name of freedom in towns like ours? No rule, or time, or bribery will overcome the sense of freedom! Consider, Sire, how much force must be applied to maintain obedience in such a powerful nation<sup>2</sup> (Machiavelli 1990: 115–116).

These words convey the quintessence of aware, civic agency which has nothing to do with feudal serfdom.

The struggle for primacy which continued between the imperial and papal authorities is an important backdrop for the idea of *societas civilis*. In order to legitimize its

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<sup>2</sup> Prince Gualtieri's reply contains a symbolic anticipation of struggle between an empowered, self-aware society and a state authority which resorts to power. Machiavelli's prince "announced that his intention was not to deprive the town of its liberties but, on the contrary, to revive them because only quarrelling towns are slaves whereas accommodating towns are free" and said that, under his rule, "not only would [Florence] not lose its freedom, it would regain its rights" (Machiavelli 1990: 117).

independence, imperial governance needed more than a powerful army, it needed appropriate apologetics to match the apologetics of the enemy. The work of Marsiglio of Padua who argued that the secular legislation expressed the will of the people (1998: 211) brings back the concept of civil society to philosophical discourse thanks to the revival of the Stagirite's idea. We must not forget, however, that at the time of his intensive political writing, Marsiglio was in the service of the Ghibelin leaders including Matteo Visconti and that he later joined the court of Louis IV of Bavaria himself. This is why the Paduan scholar is thought to be the greatest Ghibelline apologist who, in adopting the ancient conceptual apparatus in his *Defensor pacis*, "[...] strove to define a new type of political relations which were independent of the Church" (Draus 1993: 13). Slightly earlier, Dante Alighieri, Marsiglio's contemporary, banished from Florence by the propapist Black Guelphs, proclaimed ideas of independence which were equally revolutionary for the secular authorities. In his "monarchy" he presents theological and historical arguments against the claim that all monarchic power is derived from the Church.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the *signum temporis* was the gradual division of the secular political sphere and the sacred sphere, particularly from the legal aspect. This does not mean, however, that civil society was just a rhetoric figure. In those days towns became enclaves of their inhabitants' empowered activity as is attested to not only by Machiavelli's quoted political panorama of Northern Italian towns but also by the etymology of the words *citoyen* and *citizen* (Dziubka 2001). Initiation of the long process of separation of secular and sacred also laid the foundations for the further development of the various facets of individual independence. Liberation of legislation from religious doctrinal assumptions and liberation of the Church from secular authority were both important because it was now more difficult for each of these spheres to treat the other one instrumentally (cf. Taylor 1994).<sup>4</sup> Some writers believe that lack of such division is what is hampering the development of civil society in Muslim countries (cf. Lewis 1994; Eisenstadt 2006).

The next pivotal stage in the development of the idea under discussion took place in the homeland of the *Magna Carta Liberatum* against the backdrop of the rivalry between crown and parliament, that is yet another controversy concerning

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<sup>3</sup> Although the whole book is devoted to this issue, Dante does not deal with it directly until Part III. There he writes: "The present question, which we shall now discuss, centres on the great luminaries, the Pope and the Roman emperor, and the question of whether the Roman Monarch derives his authority [...] directly from God or from some vicar or divine minister—by whom I understand a successor of Peter" (2002: 75–76). He then enters into direct polemic with the advocates of papal supremacy: "So those, with whom we shall conduct our dispute claim that the authority of the Empire depends on the authority of the Church, just as an auxiliary craftsman depends on the principal architect" (2002: 78). Finally, drawing upon arguments harking back both to Aristotle and the Bible, he concludes: "we have therefore demonstrated with the help of arguments leading to the absurd that imperial authority does not depend on the Church [...] the Monarch's earthly authority is directly derived from the wellspring of universal authority, that wellspring which, being in itself pure simplicity and unity, spills over into many streams due to its surplus goodness" (2002: 96, 98).

<sup>4</sup> Space is too limited to go into the details of the role of churches in the functioning and development of an autonomous civic sphere (this subject merits separate discussion) but it is worth drawing attention to the role which Protestant churches played in the development of civil society in Western Europe and the United States of America and also to the fact that the churches fostered the development of enclaves of independent opinion in the communist bloc (especially in Poland).

the legitimate origins of authority. This controversy was also concerned with political empowerment which emerged as a fundamental problem of the so-called English Revolution. The feudal order in England was transformed during the initial phase of capitalism and therefore the need to "establish a market interaction society, that is a community of partners with equal rights" (Ogrodziński 1987: 33) became a historic necessity. The main thinkers of this period, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, were also biographically involved in the turmoil of their times. The former was connected with the family of William Cavendish, an adherent of Charles I. Already in the advent of civil war Hobbes fled from England and kept in touch with the royalist emigration. This was a time of intensive work on the political philosophy crowned with the publishing of the *Leviathan*. The secular thrust of this work forced Hobbes to flee yet again, however, this time from France to England, under the protective wings of the hardening rule of parliament and Cromwell. This passage didn't have to imply any change of ideas, however, because Hobbes was not an advocate of monarchic governance, but of powerful government in general. In this case, therefore, civil society was simply society organized into a state capable of protecting individuals from their own destructive nature. In this context, Hobbes' two escapes from war and danger can be seen as an allegory of his fears of a situation where the authorities are unable to contain human passion. In this tradition, *civil* has much affinity with *civilized* and civil society is a society where there is law and order. It must be added that the emergence of this new connotation was also related to colonial progress when social order was thought to be civilized when it had European provenance.

John Locke, the precursor of liberalism, has traditionally been viewed as the author of a rival political theory to Hobbes' one because although it adopted the same conceptual categories, it proposed different conclusions. The family origins of the two already predestined them to adopt opposite views. Thomas Hobbes' father was an Anglican minister whereas John Locke's father was a petty land owner who served as cavalry captain in the parliamentary army. The latter was also connected for the greater part of his adult life with the family of Lord Shaftesbury, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, who shifted his political loyalties several times<sup>5</sup> but finally became the leader of the radical Whigs. According to Locke, the social contract on which authority was based did not confer inalienable prerogatives to this authority. The contract itself was necessary only to the extent that it guaranteed property rights. Locke was much less optimistic as far as human nature is concerned. The basic difference in Locke's view of the relations between state and society was that he claimed that authority did not have absolute legitimization—governance had to be legitimated by continually renewed consensus. According to Ogrodziński (1987), Locke's stance justified the Whigs' policy during the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

Locke's conceptualization was pivotal for the meaning of the concept under discussion. If the social contract on the basis of which governments are nominated is not

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<sup>5</sup> He was first a member of the Short Parliament, then a follower of Charles I, only to join Oliver Cromwell's Council of State shortly after. He soon left the Council and a few years later, during the Stuart Restoration, once again took the side of the Royalists (he was even appointed Lord Chancellor in 1692). Toward the end of his life he once again changed his views and lived in exile in Holland.

made once and for all and can be dissolved and then made again, then society must be viewed as an entity which is external with respect to the state. This is the approach from which Anglo-Saxon liberalism originated and which conferred real agency upon society for the first time.<sup>6</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau went a bit against the grain in that he believed civil society to be a source of depravity and injustice but on the other hand we must bear in mind that for him *civile* meant as much as civilized, i.e. state-related, as opposed to a natural state. This approach still equates civil society with the state and we must see its meaning through the prism of the reality of the French state under the rule of Louis XIV and Louis XV, both of whom have been portrayed as synonyms of regal extravagance and oppression of the commoners. English thinkers viewed society from the post-revolutionary perspective whereas France was still waiting for its revolution.

According to John Keane (1993) the further development of thinking about civil society which consolidated its separation from the state can be viewed from the perspective of four distinct waves. Wave one is represented by Adam Ferguson who was very sceptical of chaotic market economy which was the scene of “gratification of sheer vanity, meanness and ambition.” In this approach civil society and state are still closely linked due to historical realism but there is now a noticeable need to develop independent civic associations within it as a means of protection against despotism born of the decline of civic spirit. Wave two is represented by Thomas Paine whose ideas correspond with the revolutionary relapse of his stormy life (he took part in both the American Revolution and the French Revolution). Paine clearly alluded to Locke but his liberalism was much more advanced. He believed that society was the wellspring of all prosperity whereas the state was a necessary evil. He claimed that individuals “owe their success to the assistance they receive from one another. Commonality of interests defines their relations and dictates laws. These laws which are sanctified by common custom are more powerful than governmental acts. So in fact society itself takes care of most of its affairs whose regulation has traditionally been left to governments” (Paine 1998: 163). His enthusiasm for society’s self-organization was accompanied by considerable scepticism with respect to all forms of governance: “Monarchy, aristocracy, democracy—these are merely products of the mind, thousands of which, not three, can be conceived” (ibid.: 160). Paine’s ideas are an excellent sign of the times of revolutionary turning point when society actually, albeit with various success, tried to take hold of power. The third post-revolutionary wave brought a revival of longing for a state which would curb the social upheaval. The distinction between civil society and the state has now definitely been recognized but evaluation of the former is much more ambivalent. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who represents this phase located civil society between the family sphere and the state sphere and made it a site of conflict among particular interests. It is the state which reconciles the contradictions into a higher-order, ethical whole and defends its self-defined universal interests (Keane 1993: 19–20). One must not forget, however, that Hegel’s state is now an organicistically perceived nation state (Nowicki 1987). One can see

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<sup>6</sup> We must remember, however, that not everyone enjoyed full citizenship which was restricted by census and did not in fact apply to society as a whole.

the association with another idealization—with the views of Aristotle's who criticized the actual order of the *polis* with its continual, often illegible interplay of interests and postulated organicistic order and political unity instead. Wave four reinstates civil society's ethically superior role vis-à-vis the state although it treats democratic rule with considerable reserve. According to Alexis de Tocqueville (1996) who represents this wave, the people-appointed state may become the worst form of despotism. This caution is usually interpreted as anticipating twentieth-century totalitarianism. As usual, current historical experiences had a significant effect on this view. From the point of view of the observer from post-revolutionary France, the socio-political reality of the United States of America must have seemed exotic and fascinating. Despite considerable individual freedom, political ideas did not stir up such passion and despite considerable particularity of human strivings people were very capable of associating and social drive was extremely strong. The French lawyer therefore observed that stable democratic order can be guaranteed by the fragmentation of civil society, the existence of many independent associations and diverse means of citizen participation in public life (e.g. local governments, juries). A certain degree of participation is necessary because it teaches civic ethos. Tocqueville's approach is quite similar to the contemporary one, largely because it emphasises the importance of the third sector, i.e., independent associations.

The vicissitudes of the idea of civil society in the nineteenth century deserves a few more comments. Anglo-Saxon social philosophy with its extremely empirical slant was more concerned with current social reality than the pursuit of universal ideas. Within a relatively brief time it shifted from Hobbes' typically Cartesian rationalism to the proto-scientific ideas of Smith for whom Newton rather than his own predecessors was the model. Besides, British and then American socio-political reality usually preceded changes on the continent and this is why social philosophical concepts were so often related to changes in England (Ogrodziński 1987). Civil society was no exception. Meanwhile, German thought was deeply affected by Ferguson's work. This is important for two reasons. First, as a representative of late British enlightenment, Ferguson was already very critical of the new socio-economic formation and second, in the German translation of *An Essay on History of Civil Society* the term was translated as *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, denoting the bourgeois nature of this type of society (Keane 1993). Together with the socio-economic transformations of the nineteenth century, this anticipates the crisis in thinking about civil society. As Dahrendorf wrote,

for many *citoyen* and *bourgeois* were like the coin's obverse and reverse. But in fact they are not. Two coins could be minted at more or less the same time but they were still two different coins and one could quite easily go out of circulation well before the other one (1993: 68).

Two definitions of this term are symptomatic in this context, both the one we find in Hegel's philosophical system and the one coined by Marx which draws upon Hegel's one where civil society "is not the condition of individual freedom but the cause of his enslavement, a source of human misery and alienation" (Draus 1993). Economic freedom which had many protagonists among the thinkers of the British enlightenment, was already an object of crushing criticism. The main reason was that

the face of capitalism changed radically within just one century. In the eyes of the Marxist in those days Mandeville's bees were drones at best.

### The Twentieth Century and New Political Contexts

The twentieth-century renaissance of thinking about civil society once again introduces this concept to the specific context of the time. The dramatic modernization of European countries confronted emancipation with a completely new set of enemies, authoritarianism and totalitarianism, i.e. state which—equipped with the new arms of propaganda, modern bureaucracy and mechanized army—took its revenge on nineteenth-century *laissez-faireism*. Antonio Gramsci, the Italian communist who was persecuted by Mussolini's regime, is attributed with the resurrection of the old idea. Gramsci claimed that the political image of the country could be changed in the sphere of freedom which existed apart from the state but also apart from the market. In the days of powerful relations between the government and the market, fed by nationalism and interventionism, the only area where it was possible to overcome the state's ideological domination was the area of public opinion and ethical action. According to Gramsci, this was the only place where relative political pluralism existed, enabling successful struggle for hegemony (Gramsci 1977; Bobbio 1997). This also implied further constriction of the meaning of the concept in parallel to the constriction of the realm of civil liberties which took place during the great wars.<sup>7</sup> As historically paradoxical as it may seem, half a century later the ideas of the Italian communist became one of the main sources of inspiration or the anti-communist opposition in Central-Eastern Europe (Pełczyński 1988).<sup>8</sup> The activities of the democratic opposition, especially in post-1976 Poland, were rooted in the assumption that only an empowered society acting jointly can deprive the alienated government of its power. Michnik wrote, "In my opinion, the road of tenacious struggle for reforms, the road of evolutionary expansion of the range of civil freedoms and human rights is the only road for the dissidents of eastern Europe. [...] independent public opinion, not the totalitarian authorities, is the proper target of this evolutionary program" (1984: 82–83). Moreover, the most significant social class at the time, that is the workers, were to play the leading part in the democratic transformation.<sup>9</sup> In other words, according to this approach, democratization was a function of the effectiveness of the awakening of political empowerment among average citizens. Metaphorically speaking, the goal

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<sup>7</sup> Ogrodziński writes that "reemergence of the term [civil society] in the semantic field of twentieth-century social sciences is associated with a certain shift, a specific degradation and narrowing of its meaning. It now becomes a third sphere of social life (alongside politics and economics) and refers to the question of cultural hegemony, the public sphere or becomes a freedom-related slogan" (1987: 29).

<sup>8</sup> The ideas of another leftist intellectual, Edward Abramowski, which inspired the Polish opposition, mainly that part which was associated with KOR and later the intellectual resources of "Solidarity," were another important source (Giełżyński 1986). Abramowski's ideas (e.g., "the self-governing republic") converge in many ways with Gramsci's ideas which they preceded.

<sup>9</sup> "Pressure exerted by the worker communities is the necessary condition of evolution of collective life toward democratic forms" (Michnik 1984: 85).

was to encourage the inhabitants of the country to mature to the role of a society of active citizens.

The renaissance of the concept in the twentieth century made it an oppositional idea and linked it to the new wave of democratization. Michael Walzer (1997) even called it a “battle cry.” In western democracies its previous demise was caused by the fact that there was no longer any need to distinguish between civil society and society *tout court*. In truly democratic systems political empowerment (agency) is guaranteed. This does not mean, however, that the idea of civil society can only arouse the interest of dissidents. As before, the idea has been entangled in the main ideological disputes of our times. We find echoes of it in contemporary Hegliism in the service of liberal democracy, that is in the work of Francis Fukuyama (1996). He declares that “there is no democracy without democrats.” He also thinks that the key to recognition that capitalism and democracy are a historical necessity, the crowning glory of people’s search for an optimal social system, lies in the human need of esteem. Other writers are far less willing to declare that history is coming to an end, especially vis-à-vis recent civilization clashes. According to Benjamin Barber, civil empowerment is threatened by both religious fanaticism on the one hand and neoliberal economy and corporate globalization on the other hand. He writes that, “the autonomy of civil society and its cultural and spiritual domains, as well as of politics” (1997: 378) has been threatened. He also claims that state domination is not a valid alternative for market domination, but one should rather point to “a many-sectored civil society in which the autonomy of each distinctive domain [...] is guaranteed by the sovereignty of the democratic state” (1997: 378). In other words, the oppositional battle cry have been once more adapted to new functions by the advocates of change of the world political-economic order.

### Contemporary Models of Civil Society

The bulk of the evidence suggests that the journey of the idea of civil society has not yet come to an end and that the idea’s greatest value is its widespread emancipative overtone. As I tried to demonstrate in the first part of this article, in the past civil agency strove to liberate itself from religious dogma, break free of the cage of feudal relations, discard the yoke of despotic monarchs, free itself of the danger of chaotic rule of the crowd, the traps of rapacious capitalism, the prison of the totalitarian and authoritarian state and the silent dictate of global corporations. Fromm thought that this trend was the “inevitable outcome of the process of individuation and the development of culture” (1998: 224). If we accept that these changes are in fact a process, then it is worth trying to describe the direction it is taking. Even today, the meaning of individual political empowerment depends on the broader context, be it social (when we are talking of structure and especially of social inequality), political (when we are talking of the operation of state institutions) or cultural (when we are talking of the axio-normative sphere). Different historical traditions and ongoing changes in different countries are altering the meaning of individual and group actions.

Norms, both legal and oral, are slightly different and the possibilities of channelling political ambitions are also different. We may therefore say that there are various models of civil society, that is specific domains of civil agency which manifests itself in the public activity of members of society. However, when we cease to focus on ideological projects and focus instead on actual empirical variants, we are more inclined to speak of patterns of civic participation.

Considerable diversity of the level and form of citizen activity can be seen in contemporary societies. This diversity is the result of a combination of at least two overlapping diversities, sequential and parallel. Sequential diversity results from the convergent nature of the development of democracy—there are certain universal patterns of society maturation within democracies. Parallel diversity is horizontal, so to say. Every ground on which democracy has been adapted offers a slightly different specific culture and history. Hence, rather than being strictly sequential, changes outline parallel paths. Let us now take a closer look at those path fragments on which selected democratic countries were situated in the early twenty-first century (35 different countries will be analyzed and these countries can be viewed as a sample of about half of the democracies which are now in existence<sup>10</sup>).

There are at least several typologies of the forms of civil activity (Verba 1967; Gliński & Palska 1997; Dalton 2002). In my analyses which purpose was to characterize civic cultures I adopted thirteen indicators, drawing upon these typologies. These indicators refer to various aspects of individual activity in the public sphere. When selecting them I was guided on the one hand by the need to provide an exhaustive account of the different types and on the other hand by the need to ensure that these types were sufficiently distinctive and substantively interpretable. The final list appears to fit these criteria well. The first indicator is level of participation in parliamentary elections (turnout), often viewed as the litmus paper of legitimization. Actually this belief is often incorrect if only because voting is compulsory in some countries (e.g., Austria and Italy) but also because electoral mobilization is the function of many different factors. The second indicator is conventional political activity (other than voting), that is such activities as attending political meetings or rallies, direct contact with politicians or other public persons, collecting or donating money for social or political causes, and a general interest in politics and regular discussions about politics. The third indicator is unconventional civic activity, mainly relating to protest (demonstrations, boycotts, signing petitions). The next one is attitude toward the state and its representatives in terms of both opinions concerning those in power and suspicion of the institution of state or evaluation of the fairness of elections and the level of corruption. In addition to opinions concerning society-state relations, I adopted four other indicators of attitude: declared willingness to demonstrate civil disobedience (another facet of unconventional participation), sense of influence on politics (knowledge and agency), social trust and tolerance. It is worth elaborating this last indicator a little further. Its components are the proportions of individuals who accept that (i) one of the basic functions of the democratic state is to protect

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<sup>10</sup> Dahl (1998) writes that shortly after the end of the cold war there were 65 democratic countries in the world. There are not many more today.

minority rights, (ii) the right to assemble should be given even to those who incite others to overthrow the government and (iii) religious radicals. The last two components may seem controversial in the context of the reality of western democracies but they involve tolerance of exotic beliefs which may be an important difference in the degree of freedom of speech which is permissible in different countries, a difference attributable to different historical experiences. The reliability of this indicator (Cronbach alpha) is about 0.6 and is therefore sufficient enough to conclude that the indicator is consistent. The substantive importance of this indicator may be related, for example, with Giovanni Sartori's (1998) position and recognition of minority rights and individual freedom as the most important actual condition of democracy.

The list of indicators is supplemented with several variables concerning participation and activity in five types of organization: political parties, trade and branch unions, religious organizations, hobby-related organizations (sports, clubs) and all other organizations (NGOs in the narrow sense, i.e., charities, educational NGOs etc.). Patterns of participation in associations are a well-known sign of culturally specific civic sectors in various countries. For example, the continental and Anglo-Saxon models are known to differ considerably (Gliński 2005).

The presented analyses are based on aggregated data from the *International Social Survey Programme 2004: Citizenship*<sup>11</sup> and also on data on voting turnout in the various countries. Most of the indicators (except turnout and participation in organizations) were constructed using PCA (principal component analysis) and all the indicators were standardized prior to submission to taxonomical analysis. This way, the deviations for every aspect of activity contributed proportionally to the identification of the different types of civic culture.

In order to identify the various civic cultures I applied cluster analysis using the UPGMA method<sup>12</sup> and the square Euclidean distances. This approach combines consistency of the emergent groupings with relative ease of interpretation of the results. These results are presented in Figure 1 (dendrogram). The values on the vertical axis show the average sum of squared distances between the various dimensions of activity in the countries belonging to linked clusters. For example, if the difference between societies for each of the thirteen dimensions was one standard deviation then the total distance between them would be 13. This measure of distance generally prefers large single deviations to many smaller deviations. Together with the rather long list of indicators this has the advantage of allowing us to identify types even on the basis of one large difference and that is enough to conclude that the patterns differ. The order in which countries are presented on the horizontal axis says nothing in itself about level of participation. For example, the United States of America and Bulgaria form the two extremisms of overall civic activity. This cannot be directly read from the dendrogram.

The structure of the dendrogram hints that several major demarcation lines can be drawn among the thirty-five analyzed democratic societies. The most general one divides these societies into four groups, two of which include developed democracies,

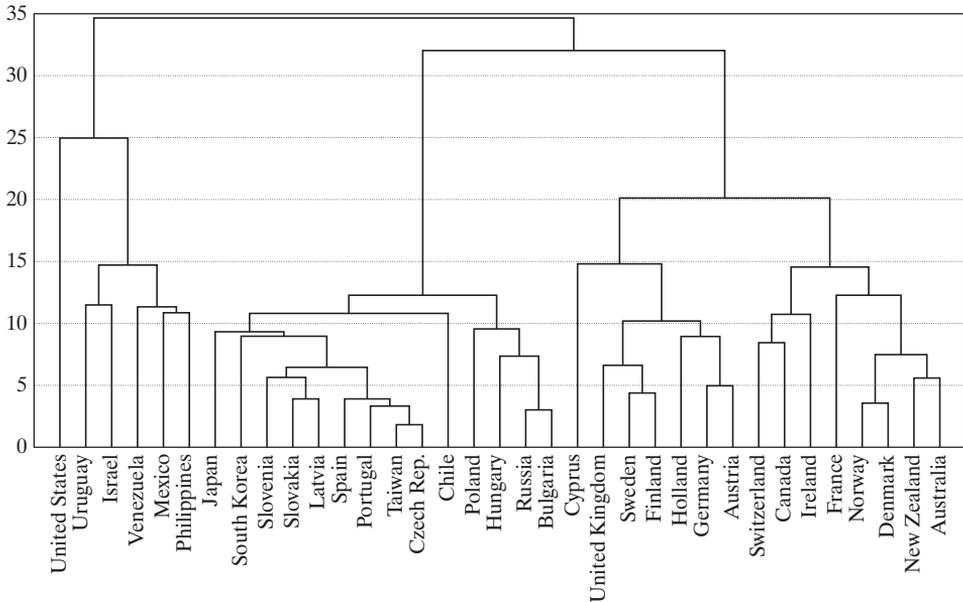
<sup>11</sup> I operationalized the variables with ISSP'04 items no. 14–15, 17–29, 31, 35–40, 43–46, 55–56 and 59.

<sup>12</sup> Mean non-weighted between-group connections.

one—societies which were dominated by a powerful state just a few decades ago, and one which encompasses the remaining countries which depart slightly from the main pattern. For the purpose of interpretation we shall call the civil societies in the different types of countries (a) stable, (b) active, (c) withdrawing and (d) young.

Figure 1

**The Process of Cluster Identification in the Analysis of Thirteen Dimensions of Civic Activity (UPGMA method)**



The largest cluster includes relatively withdrawn civil societies although their level of withdrawal varies. This type encompasses countries whose citizen participation in public life is well below the average. Voting turnout is usually about 60% and only a few percent are active in civic organizations. Even fewer are political or trade union activists. On the average, 40 percent declared interest in politics, only one person in ten signed a petition in the year preceding the study and only one person in twenty took part in a demonstration. This low level of activity is accompanied by low social trust—one person in three on the average trusts other people. Nearly all the societies belonging to this type were recently subject to authoritarian governments which made sure that citizens did not interfere too much with their affairs. This usually leads to a social vacuum at the state-work-family interface. The recently regained political agency has still not been turned into a permanent cultural pattern. Still relatively few inhabitants have been socialized in conditions free of restrictions imposed by the regime. Most of the remaining people are not in the habit of taking advantage of their opportunity to influence the country's affairs or else have invested their interests in the market game. Lack of interest in politics can also be interpreted as the need to take a rest from ideological pressure.

The most passive people live in Bulgaria, Russia, Hungary and, to a slightly lesser extent, Poland. Voting turnout is particularly low, as is willingness to demonstrate civil disobedience and to take part in protests and non-profit organizations. As far as the remaining countries are concerned, Chile stands out. Under many aspects Chile resembles “young” societies (other Latin American countries also fall into this type). Japan is another country which stands apart to a certain extent. In this case, the experience of a powerful state can be related to times of post-war militarism but in practice we must consider in particular this country’s cultural and structural uniqueness rooted in the days before the Meiji reforms.

The second type encompasses mature European democracies (such as Germany and the United Kingdom). Here, citizens are moderately involved in public life. We may call these countries stable civil societies. Most of the activity dimensions in these countries oscillate around the mean for the thirty-five analyzed democracies. Turnout is usually about 75 percent, one citizen in three or four is willing to demonstrate civil disobedience, one in forty is an active political party member, one in four belongs to a hobby association and about a half are interested in politics. These societies depart from the average in several ways, however. First, in each of them citizens have more than average trust in the institution of state. Citizens are satisfied with their governments and are loyal. This should not surprise us, however, because the standard of living (measured by means of HDI or GNP) is high and social security is usually considerable. On the other hand, tolerance of considerable political differences is rather low—only one person in twelve would allow extremists to speak in public. This too comes as no surprise considering Europe’s turbulent political past. The cluster analysis was also sensitive to such differences between Central European countries (Germany, Austria, Holland) and Northern European ones (United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland). Tolerance of extremism was much lower whereas loyalty toward the government and conventional participation were much higher in the former group.

The last type includes the most active societies. These are represented by clusters of the former British dominions (Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand) and several European countries (Norway, Denmark, France, Switzerland). There are several significant differences between this type and the previous type. Social trust is even higher and attitude toward the government is usually even more positive. Although citizens are “on friendly terms” with their own country, they do not limit themselves to conventional ways of influencing politics. One citizen in three has collected or donated money for social or political causes and one in three has signed a petition or boycotted products in accordance with his or her beliefs. More than one adult citizen in three is a member of an association relating to his/her own interests and over 20 percent are active in other NGOs. The third sector is extremely powerful and only parties and religious associations attract less attention compared with other countries. Sense of impact on politics is also much higher than average. In other words, developed, active civil societies can be observed in these countries. These countries are usually richer than countries with stable civil societies and the average HDI exceeds 0.95. It is also noteworthy that the political experience acquired in the first half of the twentieth cen-

tury is slightly different in most of these countries compared with countries belonging to the previous type.

In this context it is worth analyzing the structure of the cluster grouping less politically mature societies. Many of these societies were only recently hostages of the authoritarian state<sup>13</sup> but the differences among them clearly reflect their cultural uniqueness. The societies of Venezuela, Uruguay, Mexico, Israel and the Philippines are “young” civil societies living in relatively young states. They did not become politically independent until the nineteenth or twentieth century, prior to which they evolved through the migration and mixing of groups of various origins. They are exceptionally tolerant (toward both minorities and extremisms) and declare high willingness to demonstrate civil disobedience. Party participation and activity are also high, as are participation and activity in religious organizations (all four combine them with US patterns). To complete the picture, these societies have little trust either for the government or for other people. They are not the most passive ones but their pattern of participation differs from the patterns found in post-industrial countries and hence the association with “youth.”

In between the “young” and “active” types we have American society which needs to be treated separately. American citizens are usually the most active ones of all—as many as 13 percent belong to political parties and other forms of political participation, both conventional (except voting turnout) and unconventional, are also high. More citizens than any of the other 34 countries have contacted politicians directly (nearly one in four) and as many as 70 percent are interested in politics. Several features distinguish American society from other “active” societies, however. First, many more people than in other western countries are active in religious organizations and churches—as many as 40 percent (compared with 7 percent in Sweden or France). American people are also much more sceptical of the institution of state, more prone to civil disobedience and more tolerant of even highly different groups. The spirit of Thoreau is obviously alive and Paine’s point of view is still timely.

### **The Principal Determinants of the Emancipation Vector**

In the most developed countries the patterns of civic activity are still undergoing major changes which are thought to be the harbinger of the future shape of democracy. Contemporary theories of individual participation in the public sphere pay most attention to new forms of participation and social capital. All the contrasts between more mature and less mature civil societies essentially converge on these issues. Claus Offe (1995) says that as far as individual-state relations are concerned, the emergence of a new social-liberal paradigm has been observed in the west since the nineteen-seventies. This paradigm involves liquidating the separation between the state and the private sphere as manifested in the development of so-called new social movements

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<sup>13</sup> Most of them emancipated during the so-called Autumn of Nations and the subsequent wave of democratization at the turn of the nineteen-eighties and nineties which affected not only Central-Eastern Europe but also such countries as Taiwan, Chile, South Korea and the Philippines.

(for example the alter-globalist movement). What this means in practice is, e.g., the weakening of old types of social organization such as trade unions and the birth of new, informal methods of exerting pressure on the authorities. Russell Dalton (2002) also thinks that old forms of participation are no longer good measures of public involvement (as illustrated, e.g., by the slogan of the 1968 student revolt “elections—an idiot trap”). In his presentation of changing patterns of participation in post-industrial societies he points out three causal factors: (a) people are much more educated (and therefore public opinion has a higher level of awareness), (b) conditions of life have improved (and therefore people have different needs and different interests) and (c) social networks and institutional loyalties are weakening (and therefore people are eschewing traditional, conventional political behaviours). Citizens are now paying attention to actions which require greater activity but also offer the opportunity to articulate beliefs and opinions more independently. This phenomenon is illustrated by the high indices of unconventional political participation which can be observed in “active” civil societies as well as by the active participation in organizations belonging to the civil sector in the narrow sense. It is particularly noteworthy that the increasing importance of individual and group protest is not accompanied by confrontational attitudes toward the state, as can be seen in Figure 2. Here the government and politics are perceived much more favourably than in the remaining countries suggesting that mature, post-industrial civil society treats the state neither as the supreme warranty of law and order nor as a necessary evil but tames it instead. Open articulation of beliefs is not restrained by fear of the accusation that one is acting against the common good. For example, during the year preceding the study, 70 percent of New Zealanders signed a petition and one third engaged in a conviction-based boycott yet only Scandinavians think more highly of their politicians.

The level of interpersonal trust is also highest in these countries although Ronald Inglehart (1999) thinks that more than just general level of development is responsible. Standard of living, education and post-materialistic values all contribute to the trust which breeds cooperation and cultural traditions are still an important factor. Analyses conducted by Inglehart suggest that when these factors are controlled, social capital is highest in Protestant and Confucian countries and lowest in Catholic<sup>14</sup> and Islamic countries. Drawing as it were upon Weber’s tradition, Inglehart concludes: “Our findings suggest that cultural factors play a much greater role in the functioning of democracy than the literature of the last two decades would suggest” (1999: 119). One should add that the countries to the right of the dendrogram are also the countries with the lowest level of corruption measured with the CPI.<sup>15</sup> Lipset and Lenz explain this in terms of the nature of culturally determined ties (2003). Japan is an interesting case in this context because, although it is one of the most developed countries in the world, it presents a pattern of civil behaviour which is relatively closer to the pattern observed in post-communist countries than the one observed in mature western democracies.

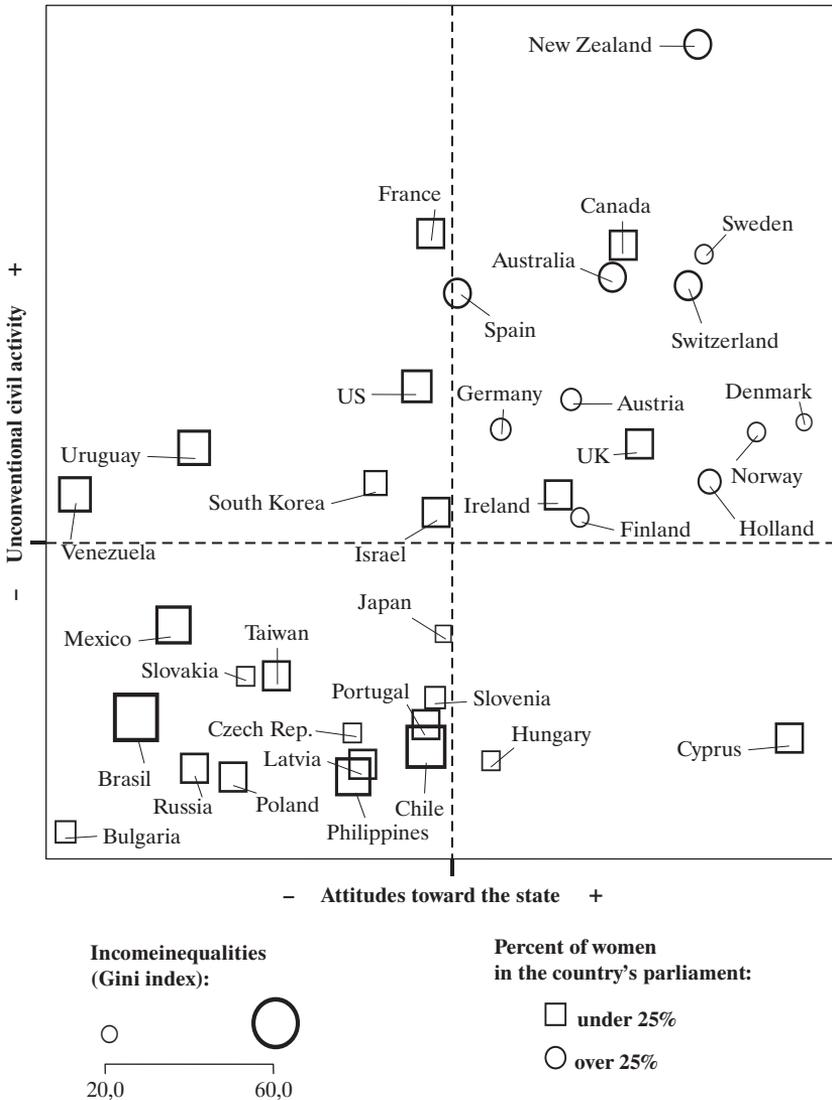
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<sup>14</sup> Inglehart observes that Ireland, which appears at first to break out from this pattern, developed as a part of the United Kingdom until 1922.

<sup>15</sup> The Corruption Perception Index (developed by Transparency International).

Figure 2

**The Relationship Between Attitude Toward One's Country and Unconventional Civil Activity in Selected Countries (taking into account indices of inequality)**



Japan was just before Estonia but behind Chile and Botswana as far as corruption is concerned (Lipset & Lenz, 2003).

The existing level of inequality also has a certain effect on the pattern of behaviour of civil society. It may be argued that relatively low income differences (represented by the Gini index in Figure 2) enable inclusion of a larger number of social categories in public life. Countries with very high levels of material inequality do indeed have lower unconventional activity, i.e., most people's behaviour is channelled by more

basic needs. The pattern is more complex here, however, because even the most egalitarian societies demonstrate less interest in direct participation. The most active societies (the top right quadrant of Figure 2) have a moderate level of inequality. Political egalitarianism seems to be a much more significant factor. In the same part of the figure we find all those countries where women are relatively well represented in the legislative bodies (no fewer than 25 percent). In the remaining countries, politics are a very masculine domain. As we can see, developed civil societies draw consecutive, formerly marginalized groups and categories into public life. Actual, active empowerment is progressing although this is not an easy process. One of the main theoreticians of this process is Amartya Sen (2002). Sen has no doubt that there is one common emancipation vector. He argues that distinctiveness of the concepts of freedom and development is quasi-distinctiveness from the civic perspective. Development as he sees it means the widening of the range of individual agency and the opportunity for unrestricted self-realization. This range is limited by political freedoms on the one hand and material conditions of life on the other hand because lack of freedom may be due, to an equal extent, to normative restrictions and restricted practical possibilities of action. Hence, Sen argues, the greatest developmental challenge today is to “re-citizenize” weaker social and political categories in various ways, especially poor people, racial and ethnic minorities and women.

It seems that both the short historical outline presented at the beginning of this article and the subsequent analyses have convincingly demonstrated that we may look at the different levels of citizen empowerment from at least two different perspectives. One perspective follows the vector of actual emancipation whose direction is currently defined by the postindustrial social formation and post-materialistic orientation (its sequential nature in Figure 2 is marked by the clusters of countries in the two diagonal quadrants). We may trace the origins of the parallel element of these differences (which we may associate with the remaining dispersion) by taking the opposite direction—toward the past and particular social vicissitudes. Both perspectives demonstrate the continual descriptive utility of the concept of civil society, far beyond the battle cries. They also attest to the fact that when using them it is good to be very sensitive to the concept’s historical, economic, cultural or even biographical context.

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