polish sociological review 1(161)'08
ISSN 1231 – 1413

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Weak Civic Engagement? Post-Communist Participation and Democratic Consolidation*

Abstract: The aim of this article is to analyze the problem of civic and political participation in the post-communist context from the perspective of contemporary democratic theory, the concept of democratic consolidation, and the thesis of the "weakness of civil society in post-communist countries." It argues that the institutional approach to democratization and participation does not provide a full answer to the question of how democratic systems become consolidated and thus it needs to be supplemented by the cultural approach. The analysis of the patterns of democratic participation in post-communist countries, however, is further complicated by their background conditions, the burden of the communist past, and the model of democratization that they have undergone. Although it seems that a participatory, civil-society centred type of democratic politics would revitalize and strengthen democracy in post-communist countries, two questions—addressed in this article—arise. First, whether contemporary democratic theories shed enough light on the processes involved when it comes to a democratic change and democratic consolidation in the post-communist context, and second, whether a weak civic sphere is a major impediment to the development of a truly democratic system.

Keywords: civic engagement, civic sphere, democratization, democratic consolidation, post-communist societies.

Introduction

In his widely-cited article and book *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*, Marc Morjé Howard (2002, 2003) addresses the question why over a decade after the collapse of communism citizens of post-communist Eastern and Central European countries are less likely to join voluntary associations and engage actively in civil society practices than people from other countries, especially Western democracies and post-authoritarian democratic states. Applying a comparative perspective, the author tries to explain why citizens of post-communist countries avoid active participation, mistrust the institutions of civil society, and in general, why the pattern of "weak civil society" prevails. On the basis of surveys that he carried out in Russia and Eastern Germany, Howard concludes that there are three factors responsible for weak civic engagement in post-communist democracies: the legacy of the communist mandatory membership of state-controlled organizations, the persistence of private networks of family and friends, and the overall disappointment with the democratic transformation after the collapse of communism (Howard 2003: 102–121). Although

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Howard rightly points to a number of specific features of the countries under question, such as, the nature or the very existence of political opposition and the implications this has for regime change, the simultaneity of political, economic, social, and sometimes even national transformation, and the so-called communist legacy which comprises of attitudes, behaviour practices, and ways of thinking that developed under communism, he simply assumes that citizens' participation in ECE should be greater and links it with democratic consolidation and democratic stability pointing out that civic engagement in both old democracies and consolidated post-authoritarian democracies is much higher than in ECE. But the level of civic and political participation, as well as the conditions that facilitate such participation, vary considerably throughout former communist countries—even if we talk only about those countries which have achieved a minimum of procedural democracy. Howard assumes that these differences "are relatively minor when seen from a larger comparative perspective" (2003: 5) and thus he overlooks the whole problem of socio-economic development that preceded the emergence of democratic institutions in Western Europe (cf. Inglehart, Welzel 2005). Moreover, to compare post-communist civil societies with those of well-established old democracies and former authoritarian countries does not tell us much; these three groups of countries travelled along completely different road to democratization. In most Western democracies the institutions of civil society had developed before universal suffrage was introduced and in post-authoritarian democracies civil societies have not been completely eradicated as they had been in communist regimes. Furthermore, Howard is looking at the period of the transformation when the economic difficulties that post-communist societies had to face were becoming more and more severe due to radical economic change and the collapse or the reduction of the state welfare system. Civic engagement requires such scarce resources as time and money which are necessary for active civic participation, and the thesis that civil societies in the post-communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe are weak and perhaps have become even weaker needs to be examined in more detail and treated with a degree of caution. An investigation of this kind should also pay attention to the problem of trust and social capital in post-communist societies and the correlation between low levels of social capital and relatively low civic engagement in theses societies.

The aim of this article is to provide a theoretical analysis of both the importance and the difficulty of active participation in ECE democracies by engaging in the discussion of the usefulness of democratic theory to deal with this issue and the ways it can be further developed. The first part of the article briefly discusses some developments in contemporary democratic theory that bring the value of active citizenship to the fore and looks at their experience of the post-communist democratization. It also examines three major approaches to democratization: the institutional, the elite-centred, and the cultural. Each of these provide different answers to the question of the importance of active citizens' engagement in transition countries. The second part of the article focuses on the relationship between the level of democratic consolidation as presented by Freedom House and the development of civil society in post-communist democracies. It poses some questions to Howard's thesis of "the weakness of civil society in post-communist Europe" and stresses the peculiarity of

the post-communist democratization (the so-called "democratization backwards") as well as the conditions that have a major impact on the development of active and responsible citizenship in these countries. The main argument that being advanced concerns the relationship between participation (both civic an political) and democratic consolidation. This article emphasises that political stability and perhaps even democratic consolidation have been achieved in the post-communist countries of ECE despite their relatively low levels of civic engagement and weak social capital and trust. There is no doubt that robust civic sphere of numerous associations, activities and networks of cooperation is valuable as such and does contribute to the quality of democracy. Its development in post-communist societies, however, requires social and mental changes and can be, at least partly, facilitated by successful political and economic reforms that lead to democratic consolidation and economic prosperity.

Democratic Theory

Normative democratic theories stress the importance of active participation, but they rarely focus on the problem of participation in countries undergoing democratization. It is inevitable that when applied to the post-communist transformation and its goals democratic theory needs to place more emphasis on the conditions that are built into the post-communist context. These include the legacy of the communist past and more importantly the specific cultural, social and attitudinal background of democratization.

Radical democrats, by whom I mean proponents of a broadly conceived normative democratic theory that includes participatory, deliberative, associative and republican conceptions of democracy (Cunningham 2002, Estlund 2002), do not undermine representation, but they have no doubt that it needs to be on the continuum with participation. They call for more thriving public spheres where organized public deliberation could take place. Many accounts of democracy have focused on the relationship between the public sphere, deliberation, and legitimacy, but participatory democratic governance seeks more than this; it calls for and tries to incorporate directly the citizens' voice into the formulation of the state's policies and thus to give voice to the society's least advantaged groups. Civil societies are particularly important in this respect as they argument social power and this can provide a check on economic power and produce state responsiveness. Associations that perform democratic functions provide a number of opportunities for democratic participation, which is *democratic* due to the fact that "every individual potentially affected by a decision has an equal opportunity to affect the decision" (Warren 2002: 693). Participatory democrats who are preoccupied with the erosion of democratic vitality in the "thin democracy" (Barber 1984) emphasize that democratic participation has an intrinsic value, and the central ideal of democratic politics they advocate is the active involvement of citizens and achieving political consensus through dialogue.[1]

[1] See especially Pateman (1970), Barber (1984), Macpherson (1973), Gould (1988).

Participatory governance is supposed to involve reforms that "rely upon the commitment and capacities of ordinary people to make sensible decisions through reasoned deliberation and empowered because they attempt to tie action to discussion" (Fung, Wright 2003). It is a project which combines the values of participation, deliberation, and empowerment. "Strong democrats," such as Benjamin Barber, emphasize that the liberal view of citizenship creates weak and private citizens whose role is confined to regular voting and making their preferences clear. Barber argues that a participatory democratic process strengthens the role of citizens and re-establishes their sovereignty over other roles (Barber 1984, 208). Moreover, participation is valuable and indispensable in democracy for it fosters human development, enhances a sense of political efficacy, reduces a sense of estrangements from the power-centre, fosters concern for and knowledge of collective problems, and thus contributes to the formation of active and responsible citizenry interested in public affairs. Participation in various associations within civil society—it is assumed—has both a democratic and a social function.

Proponents of wide democratic participation have expressed four criticisms of liberal politics: first, it has disregarded any sense of community and the public good; second, it has opened doors to free riders; third, it has led to the dominance of private and group interests, and fourth, it has undermined the role of the public sphere. This kind of politics is at odds with classical republican politics which seeks freedom of the community through citizens' public virtue and civic consciousness, their concern with the common good, and active citizenship. The main thesis of radical democrats, who have revived interest in republican ideals, seems to concern the extent, value and the role of citizens' active participation which has been undermined by such twentieth century democratic theorists as Joseph Schumpeter, Robert Dahl, Gabriel Almond, Giovanni Sartori, or William Riker (Schumpeter 1942; Dahl 1956; Almond and Verba 1963; Sartori 1965; Riker 1965), and by political liberalism in general. Their quest is a more robust democracy within the established liberal democracies based on political equality which allows every individual to benefit from collective self-rule. The debate is often described in terms of two different visions of the public sphere, which are present in republicanism and liberalism. The republican public sphere is the centre of democratic will-formation and the medium of self-government, whereas the liberal public sphere is situated outside the political sphere and only helps to rationally resolve political problems. On the liberal and pluralistic side, participation by most people must be limited to the act of voting (Dahl and Tufte 1973). Democratic republicanism is thus juxtaposed with liberal proceduralism.

Post-communist democracies, in comparison to most western democracies, are less stable, less accountable, and are in the process of developing democratic political and legal cultures and civil societies. One can argue that these differences are in fact obstacles to the development of deliberative or more participatory politics in those democracies. In particular, the lack of a flourishing civic sphere[2] may be perceived as

[2] By civic sphere I mean a broader space than is usually described by the term civil society; while the latter term is most often understood in terms of civil associations and nongovernmental organizations, I use civic sphere as denoting also the public sphere and all individuals' activities that they perform as citizens.

the main impediment to a broader, civil society-centred model of democracy. Expectations of radical democrats are certainly too high when applied to post-communist democratization (perhaps they are also high in other contexts).The discussion that follows will thus focus on some of the major approaches to democratization that seek to establish what the conditions of successful democratic change are and, specifically, what is the role for civic engagement that they presuppose.

Approaches to Democratization

The following question arises: what does a successful transformation to democracy depend on and what factors play a major role in facilitating the conditions for the development of truly democratic politics and democratic values? There seem to be at least three ways of addressing this question. The first one focuses on the role played by opposition leaders who either fight for or negotiate desirable democratic change as counter-elites of the dominant antidemocratic establishment. On this reading, the introduction of democracy into Central and Eastern European countries was an elite's project and preceded the integration of democratic values and culture among the masses. The elite-centred approach implies that the emergence and endurance of political institutions is determined by the behaviour of elites, particularly their institutional choices. Supportive social forces and sets of values are not seen here as indispensable for the whole project to succeed.

The institutional approach assumes that the success of a democratic change depends on the enactment of suitable institutional arrangements and their proper functioning (Welsh 1994; Elster, Offe, Preus 1998); moreover, it implies that living under democratic institutions and rules brings about prodemocratic values that emerge among the public. Consequently, institutional choices not only do play a central role in the transition from post-communism to democracy, but they also facilitate desirable social change. For example, Dankwart Rustow argued that a civic culture that supports democracy cannot emerge in a non-democratic system; when a democratic mass culture emerges, it results from "habituation" to previously established democratic institutions. People learn to appreciate the institutions and internalize their norms (Rustow 1970). Democratic values, such as trust in institutions, participation, and commitment to the democratic ethos are likely to become rooted in the attitudes of ordinary people if they regard their experience of democratic institutions as satisfying in terms of legitimate and efficient government. It would appear that what we need to do according to this approach is to analyze how human attitudes, behaviour, values, and skills interact with the institutional transformation, in order to see how far, after constitutional democracy had been introduced, people have become habituated to the new set of norms and values. This approach also suggests that satisfaction with democratic institutional arrangements fosters greater commitment to democracy (Waldron-Moore 1999). High levels of democracy should strengthen social activism and reinforce its effect on political involvement. If people are given new opportunities they will make use of them as they do in the economic sphere.

Both the elite-centred approach and the institutional explanation tacitly assume that there is a strong positive correlation between institutional development and democratic consolidation; democratic culture and democratic citizenship arise as their end product.

Undoubtedly, the main goal of post-communist countries at the beginning of their political and economic transformations was to create liberal and democratic institutions, such as the division of power, the rule of law, free and fair elections, democratic accountability, freedom of association, free media, and constitutionally guaranteed civil and political rights. But this process was not influenced by a participatory concept of democratic politics, and some authors argued that, after the collapse of communism, a mild form of authoritarianism based on a strong executive and a free-market economy would provide the stability that is necessary for the further implementation of western type liberal-democratic institutions and procedures. For example, John Gray (1996: 213) concluded that "post-Communist states should build institutions that constrain democracy rather than to exalt it." Contrary to this view, those ECE countries which became leaders of democratic transformation and consequently members of the EU undertook simultaneous liberalization and democratization, creating western type liberal-democratic institutions and achieving a relatively high level of democratic stability. What Gray might have had in mind while formulating his conclusion was perhaps a concern that too radical a democratic model based on the widespread participation of citizens in the decision-making process would not be desirable in the countries, which had not had much experience with democracy and liberal political culture. If so, such standpoint would pose a dilemma for the institutional approach to democracy and would open the question about the desirability of other, broader conditions of change.

This question is addressed by the cultural approach to democratization which assumes that political changes are dependant upon cultural factors (G. Almond, S. Verba, R. Inglehart), and civic, participatory culture is indispensable for the consolidation of democracies. In their pioneering study, *The Civic Culture*, Almond andVerba brought to the fore the importance of attitudes that citizens hold about democracy. The cultural explanation argues that prodemocratic mass values are conducive to the emergence and survival of democratic institutions. In their book based on the findings of the World Values Surveys, Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel provide evidence that a society's mass values have a strong effect on its subsequent democratic performance; there is a causal link between democratic values and democratic institutions (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 149–172). The authors prove that socioeconomic development (modernization) leads to the rise of self-expression values (civic and political liberties, individualism, tolerance, freedom of choice) as opposed to traditional or collective values and consequently to the demand for democratic institutions and successful democratization. Thus, as the authors hypothesize, "cultural factors shape levels of democracy more strongly than democratic institutions shape culture," which implies that "given levels of self-expression values influence subsequent levels of democracy more strongly than previous levels of democracy influence given levels of self-expression values" (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 177). Mass support for democ-

racy does not result from pre-existing democracy—it leads to democracy. If, however, prodemocratic values are conducive to effective democracy and active participation, and they support successful democratization rather than result from it, the question which needs to be addressed is this: what are the chances of democratic consolidation and the development of flourishing civil societies in those countries where democratic institutions have been introduced despite the lack of democratic culture and socio-economic development?

Another question that arises on the basis of these approaches is how human attitudes, civic activities, behaviour patterns, values, and emotions interact in post-communist countries with their institutional transformation. None of the above mentioned approaches to democratization—when applied to post-communist democratic change—provides a full answer to this question. But each of them touches upon an important dimension of post-communist transformation. It is true that political elites have played a major role in deciding what institutional arrangements and what direction of change should be applied in countries emerging from communism. But their attempts have not been easily translated into wide support and cooperation of citizens whose role as active participants within the process of change was limited. They have been treated as consumers of new political goods whose opinion did not have a significant impact on those goods' production. The division of labour between new political elites and citizens is in accordance with Schumpeter's model of democracy, but in the case of post-communist democratization it has a negative impact on the development of responsible citizenship and civic attitudes:

> A fundamental presumption of democracy is that citizens will feel that collectively, and sometimes even individually, they can intervene in public life to affect the course of their governance. Hence, in a democracy the individual's assessment of whether or not he and his fellow citizens have any influence in politics becomes in effect an assessment of whether or not a definitive feature of the regime is intact (Madsen 1978).

The institutional explanation is valid in the sense that the type of democratization which was available for post-communist societies involved a radical institutional change, and by necessity it was "democratization backwards." As Richard Rose and Doh Chull Shin (2001: 331) explain, unlike first-wave democracies, post-communist countries under democratic transformation (along with other so — called third wave democracies) "introduced competitive elections before establishing basic institutions of a modern state such as the rule of law, institutions of civil society and the accountability of governors." This is why post-communist democracies are often regarded as "incomplete democracies." To say that a democracy is incomplete implies that a desirable end goal of its democratic transformation has not yet been achieved. In post-communist countries, this end-goal, by which democratic theorists usually mean consolidated democracy, cannot be achieved in a similar way as it was achieved during the first and perhaps even the second-wave of democratizaiton simply because their initial conditions are not as supportive of democracy and democratic culture as they were in older democracies. But even if we put it this way, we imply that there is an ideal state of democratic development that should be achieved and consequently that we can specify what conditions need to be met if a democratic order is to be

consolidated. In fact this issue causes a lot of confusion. There is no clear answer to the question of how to measure democratic consolidation and a simple comparison with well-established democracies does not provide much help. On the other hand, the Freedom House index, which provides a good source of information on the democratic performance of young democracies, does not explain either the low satisfaction with democratic institutions in post-communist countries which have been rated as consolidated democracies, eg. Hungary, or their low level of political and civic participation (Goehring 2005).

The cultural approach to democratization has been proved empirically by Inglehart and others and its strongest point is the link it provides between successful democratization and the background social and cultural conditions of a given society. If, however, prodemocratic values are conducive to effective democracy and active participation, and they presuppose successful democratization rather than result from it, the question still remains: what are the chances of democratic consolidation and the development of flourishing civil societies in those countries where democratic institutions have been introduced despite the lack of democratic culture and socio-economic development. If the sequence suggested by Inglehart and Welzel: socio-economic modernization, value change, and then democratic institutions, has been distorted does it mean that the reversal of this cycle would not result in effective democracy in the long term? It can be concluded that if participation is strongly associated with human development and abilities to "make decisions and actions based on autonomous choices" (Inglehart, Welzel 2005: 47), the establishment of liberal-democratic institutions in ECE countries might be sufficient to provide political and economic stability, but they are not likely to become participatory-deliberative democracies in the near future. Interestingly, the discourse on civil society that developed in Poland in late 1970s and early 1980s along with the development of democratic opposition and the "Solidarity" movement, which had no counterpart in other countries of the region, focused less on civic, democratic participation and more on leavening some shared values, such as truth, respect for human dignity, and solidarity with fellow citizens, which sought to undermine the communist state's authority. But at the same time, the word democracy was associated by that discourse with a self-governing republic rather than with a procedural representative democratic system.

Why does Participation Matter in Post-Communist Democracies?

A civil society argument states that the development of a flourishing civic sphere would be a sign that the post-communist condition has been overcome, and civil society has become a repository of values, norms, and institutions that are supportive to democratic government. If we assume that there is a strong relationship between good governance and civil society then the former is desirable as a sign of a healthy democratic order. Active civic involvement is also supposed to be a school of democratic skills and responsible citizenship. A participatory-deliberative model of democracy stresses that procedures and liberal institutions are necessary but not sufficient for

truly democratic practices to emerge. Only active participation and a robust civil society can make a polity truly democratic. Participation, both civic and political, is valuable in itself and associations of civil society are the repositories of democratic practices and impulses in society. They are the means of learning basic democratic principles and of respecting democratic values. A robust associational life may enable more democracy in more spheres of life while forming and deepening the capacities and dispositions of democratic citizens. Associations enhance democratic skills and support capacities of individuals for self-government, they provide a collective forum for making decisions and organizing collective action outside the mechanisms of the state and the market (Warren 2000: 21–31). As Paul Hirst, one of the main advocates of associationalism argues, "if human actors are given the greatest possible freedom to associate with one another in voluntary bodies to perform the main tasks in society, then the affairs of that society will be better governed than if they are left to either the isolated activities of individuals or to the administrative organs of a centralized state" (Hirst 1996: 44).

There is also a strong link between accountability and participation, and between participation and trust. Decentralization of power allows ordinary citizens to participate at various levels in the decision-making process: "The state must be democratized by making parliaments, state bureaucracies and political parties more open and accountable" (Held 1996: 266). At the same time new forms of civic involvement, such as women's movements or ecological groups are there to ensure that democratic procedures bring about accountability and thus responsiveness of governments.[3] But the desirability of civic engagement in post-communist democracies does not easily correspond with its feasibility; the state versus society approach that is well rooted in post-communist countries cannot make sense of civic engagement and cannot lay the basis of reasoning about how to foster civic development.

After communism collapsed it was relatively easy to introduce new institutions and legal mechanisms, and much more difficult to create immediate social conditions necessary for the new system to work. Among those conditions is the shift from *homo sovieticus* to a citizen of a democratic state based on a free-market economy (Pietrzyk-Reeves 2006). One of the most difficult aspects of the transformation is a new type of citizenship and a new democratic ethos. The axiological basis of the new system involves values, motivations and attitudes that form civic competence of the citizens. As long as citizens do not acquire this competence the transformation to a democratic civil society cannot be complete. Paradoxically, institutional performance as well as the performance of political elites that to a large extent depend on human capital and civic competence often have a negative influence on the formation of social capital, trust, and citizenship skills in post-communist countries. If the interest in public affairs and the sense of public duty is to be resurrected in post-communist societies some mental and attitudinal changes need to take place. And this is the most difficult and enduring part of the transformation—the development of a civic culture in which,

[3] Of course, a more straightforward link can be made between accountability and democratic consolidation, but it is in a consolidated democracy that various levels of control through citizens' activities become available.

as Gabriel Almond specifies, "there is a substantial consensus on the legitimacy of political institutions and the direction and content of public policy, a widespread tolerance and plurality of interests and belief in their reconcilability, and a widely distributed sense of political competence and mutual trust in the citizenry" (Almond 1989: 4).

Civic culture can only develop with civic engagement, both civic and political participation of citizens in a democratic polity.[4] By civic participation I mean membership in civil society associations and organizations and various forms of social activity that are not related either the political or the private sphere. Political participation concerns those forms of citizens' activity that are closely related to the political sphere: voting in elections, political party membership and discussing politics (which is the most basic type of democratic participation). These two types of participation do not have to come together, but they are intertwined in the sense that, as many democratic theorists have argued, civic participation can be seen as a school of democracy i.e. of political participation. However, on the other hand, low political participation (e.g. low voter turnout in popular elections, low party support) does not automatically suggest low civic engagement i.e. low membership of civil society associations, organizations and social networks of cooperation. It can be argued that the creation of stable and transparent institutions is necessary for the emergence of a culture of honesty and civic morality among citizens (the institutional approach), but for these institutions to function effectively there needs to be some supportive cultural background already in existence and this is one of the biggest difficulties of the transformation in post-communist Europe, closely related to what Rose and Shin call "democratization backwards." The development of civil society seems to be one of the most plausible ways to overcome this difficulty, but it is certainly not just a means of achieving successful democratization, but an end in itself.

In western democracies, the state played a significant role in creating an independent space for civil society and the economic sphere was at the heart of civil society. The socio-economic structures that developed under communism turned out to be the major impediment to the process of democratization and the logic of the development of post-communist civil societies has no counterpart in Western Europe. Whereas democratic institutions and a market economy could have been designed and introduced relatively easily on the debris of communism, social and cultural change remained a slow and gradual process. The development of a civic sphere depends on favourable political and economic strata, but it occurs in the social sphere and involves the attitudes and engagement of citizens. It also requires relatively high level of interpersonal trust and social capital. Civil and political rights even if they become a reality do not immediately create active and responsible citizens. Many commenta-

[4] The 1999 European Values Survey brings an interesting comparison of civic participation across European countries. The percentage of people who declare that they belong to at least one association for West European countries is 29,8 (average) in comparison to 18,3 (average) for Eastern European countries. In post-communist ECE the highest membership of associations was in Slovakia—47% of all respondents declared that they belonged to at least one association, in the Czech Republic—30,8% and in Slovenia—27%. It was much lower in Hungary—14,6, Lithuania—13,8 and Poland—12,4. (Quoted in Badescu, Sum and Uslaner, 2004: 337) See also Letki, 2004: 669–670.

tors (e.g. Rau) talk about the spectacular success of civil society in the region and the dominance of civil society as a normative concept, but as I have already emphasized the switch from "ethical," "parallel" civil society to democratic civil society was not an easy process (Linz, Stepan, 1996: 272–273). The trust and social capital that have been eradicated under the communist rule are now regarded by many scholars as crucial factors contributing to the development of a participatory civic community (Putnam 1993, 2004; Field 2003). According to Putnam, trust and reciprocity that can be learned through membership of associations form social capital which is fundamental to the development of accountable democratic institutions as well as economic activity. Low levels of trust and social capital in post-communist societies might be seen as being largely responsible for their weak civic engagement. However, as some researchers indicate, "interpersonal trust is unrelated to change in level of democracy but long-term experience of democracy has a positive effect on interpersonal trust. (…) interpersonal trust appears to be a product of democracy rather than a cause of" (Muller and Seligson 1994). In their excellent discussion of the relationship between trust and democratization in post-communist ECE countries, Natalia Letki and Geoffrey Evans show that initial democratic and market reforms had a negative impact on trust in these societies, but it can be expected that high institutional predictability and accountability will bring raise of trust and social capital (Letki, Evans 2005, 523).

The relevance of these findings for our analysis is twofold: the increasing levels of social trust and the development of norms and networks of cooperation in ECE societies should have a positive impact upon civic engagement of their citizens, but, interestingly, it seems to be institutional performance and democratic consolidation that contributes to higher levels of social trust and thus participation in post-communist societies, which is contrary to Robert Putnam's thesis on the causal link between trust, participation and the quality of institutions.

Conclusion: The Model of Post-Communist Democracy and Participation

The central question of this article which I would like to address in more detail in this last section concerns the (necessary?) link between democratic consolidation and strong civic engagement. My discussion of the new developments in contemporary democratic theory and the whole range of approaches to democratization demonstrates that their applicability to the post-communist context is often problematic due to the complexity of post-communist democratization. They do, however, shed some light on the problems of democratic changes in ECE, especially if we combine various approaches to get a better picture of the given context. Thus even if the thesis of weak civic engagement in post-communist countries, so strongly posed by Howard, is true and obvious, its consequences for democratic consolidation might not be so obvious.

Is the model of democracy that has been introduced in post-communist countries likely to be successful without active citizens' engagement in both the civic and political spheres? Can it perform its functions effectively in the context of an under-developed civil society? An obvious answer to these questions seems to be 'yes': the formal, pro-

cedural model of democracy can and does function relatively well even in the absence of citizens' active and political participation. What matters in a Schumpeterian type of democracy are democratic procedures and the competition between political elites as well as a low level of conflict. Low turnout is not regarded as a danger or an obstacle to democratic stability. Democratization of various spheres is not seen as necessary. Citizens' competence lies in their ability to change the government if they are not satisfied with its policies and performance. What needs to be guaranteed is the quality of political elites and political leaders (experts) and an independent and well-trained bureaucracy. On that model there is (or should be) a clear division of labour between representatives and voters; citizens are active in their private sphere/economy, but not in the political sphere (Schumpeter 1976: 265).

I have already discussed the reasons why, contrary to the Schumpeterian model, political participation in the countries undergoing democratic transition should be seen as particularly important. Its decline signifies alienation, the dominance of party politics, and a formal model of democracy. Also, democracy has often been seen as a kind of society, which goes beyond certain legal and constitutional procedures and includes reciprocal relationships between people. This view, however, is problematic for two reasons. First, it is extremely difficult to find unquestionable criteria that could be used to assess whether a society is fully democratic or not. Second, "democratic society" can be conceived either in terms of a pluralism of views and opinions guaranteed by a legal framework, or in terms of popular participation and the common will, or perhaps in terms of common (liberal?) values, culture and principles about politics. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan's definition of a consolidated democracy might be of help here:

> Attitudinally, a democratic regime is consolidated when a strong majority of public opinion holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life in a society such as theirs and when the support for antisystem alternatives is quite small or less isolated from pro-democratic forces (Linz, Stepan 1996: 6).

One of the major obstacles in the process of making a society democratic in the light of the above definition is the impact of the socio-economic structures that evolved under communism on the process of political democratization (Mokrzycki and Cirtautas 1993). The lack of democratic control exercised by the society has brought about corrupt practices and an overall distrust in the political process. Surveys conducted in ECE indicate that the majority of citizens express their support for democracy as a desirable form of government, but at the same time they are dissatisfied with the performance of their democratic institutions such as political parties, parliaments, governments as well as courts (eg. CBOS 2005).[5]

According to Freedom House *Nations in Transit* 2004–2006 index the most advanced post-communist states in the process of democratization: Hungary, Slovenia,

[5] It can also be argued that economic reforms and the new opportunities for economic activity and entrepreneurship that have become available allowed many people to become involved in the newly created market sphere rather than in the civic sphere, in, as it were, the pursuit of private interests rather than the common good. It would, however, be interesting to examine how many of these people, after having achieved some economic success decided to actively participate in the life of their communities, establish or join associations and participate more actively in politics.

Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia have now become consolidated democracies scoring 1–2.5 on the 1–7 scale (1 is the highest and 7 the lowest score in democratization) (2006). In the civil society category some of them (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary) have scored 1.25 for the last few years, though it needs to be stressed that what was looked at by the authors of the reports was not the actual citizens' involvement and civic spiritedness, but legal and institutional mechanisms that facilitate the functioning of associations and other civil society initiatives. It can be said that a flourishing civil society and active civic and political involvement of citizens is not a necessary condition for democratic consolidation if the model of democracy that develops is legitimate and procedural, if democracy functions as a set of constitutional arrangements and they perform their functions in the right way. Yet in the long term the relationship between civil society and the state, the influence that civil society has over the state might be decisive in determining the success of democratic development in ECE countries. If the social dimension, which comprises civic and political culture, associations, and social self-organization is underdeveloped, the institutional (governmental and administrative) level becomes dominant, yet it does not mean that there is a strong link between weak civic engagement and unsuccessful democratization. The latter depends also on economic success and prosperity which, on the other hand, can contribute to wider participation and the rise of associations that protect their members' interests rather than their common values. One of the lessons which post-communist democracies can learn from so-called first wave democracies is apparent: a well functioning market economy and prosperity are supportive of democratic institutions and democratic culture. As some authors have demonstrated, consolidated democratic institutions and experience of how democracy works have positive influence on citizens' willingness to participate in politics and thus contribute to the development of civic democratic culture (cf. Letki 2004). This institutional approach to democratization in ECE, despite the simplification that it involves, demonstrates that institutions matter for democratic consolidation, but what we can learn from the cultural approach is that the initial cultural conditions, social change and the civic spirit also matter for the overall success of democratization processes. These developments have different patterns in different ECE countries and in some of them the levels of participation are higher than in others, but the end-goals of their transformations remain the same.

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