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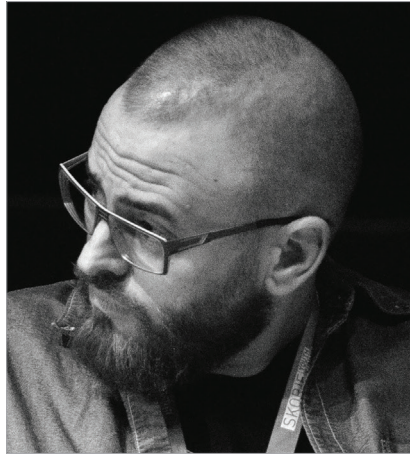
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POSTSOCIALIST CIVIL SOCIETY OR POSTSOCIALIST CIVIL SOCIETIES? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Bojan Baća

Abstract

This paper provides a comparative analysis of postsocialist civil societies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Rather than treating “postsocialist civil society” as a singular category, the analysis highlights its heterogeneous nature by comparing five regions in CEE: the Baltic States, the Visegrád Group, Former Yugoslavia, Southeast Europe, and the Post-Soviet States. Beginning with a critical review of the extensive scholarly literature on civil society and contentious politics in the region, the paper utilizes public data from leading global indexes – including the *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index*, *Nations in Transit*, *Bertelsmann Transformation Index*, and *Freedom in the World* – to examine regional commonalities and differences among postsocialist civil societies. Using normative liberal-democratic indicators, the findings highlight varying levels of development in the sustainability, viability, and democratic capacity of civil societies, alongside notable differences in political participation and civil liberties across the postsocialist landscape of CEE.

Keywords: postsocialism, civil society, social movements, contentious politics, Central and Eastern Europe

Introduction

There is a growing consensus among scholars on the need for a critical reassessment of civil societies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), on theoretical, conceptual, and empirical grounds. In recent years, a number of works have critically addressed the ways in which so-called *postsocialist civil society* has been defined and assessed, paying special attention to

the conceptual and empirical indicators used to evaluate its strength (e.g., individual participation), density (e.g., organizational composition), and character (e.g., civil/uncivil). Despite the breadth and depth of this theoretically and methodologically diverse body of work, the literature lacks both a critical synthesis and an empirically informed approach to comparing and contrasting regional differences within the postsocialist space of CEE.

In this paper, I first offer a critical overview of the literature on civil societies – and, by extension, social movements and other forms of contentious politics – in CEE.¹ Then, using publicly available data from leading global indexes – such as the *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index*, *Nations in Transit*, *Bertelsmann Transformation Index*, and *Freedom in the World* – I examine differences between regions in CEE. Countries within CEE possess vast variances in their historical trajectories, regimes of actually existing socialism, and political cultures. These nations diverge in their models of transition and Europeanization, democratization and privatization strategies, and their distinct responses to the historical events of 1989, which included both state- and nation-building for some countries. The goal of this examination is to understand the heterogeneous nature of *postsocialism(s)*, rather than treating it simply as a singular designator. As such, I compare and contrast five regions within the postsocialist space of CEE: *Baltic Countries* (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), *The Visegrád Group* (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia), *Former Yugoslavia* (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia), *Southeast Europe* (Albania, Bulgaria, Romania), and *Post-Soviet States* (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia).

Accordingly, the paper is divided into four parts. I begin with a theoretical discussion of the concept of civil society, followed by an overview of the state of research on postsocialist civil society and contentious politics. I then present empirical findings on regional differences among civil societies in CEE and conclude with a brief discussion of my main findings.²

What is Civil Society?

Sociology investigates and analyzes politics in relation to social structure – namely, “economic organization, class and status, community organization and social ties, formal organization and bureaucracy, or

small-group interaction” (Walder 2009: 394). It also maintains a dynamic approach: instead of solely exploring the interaction between politics and stable social structures, sociology also looks at how diverse processes influence and impact the political engagement of citizens (Clemens 2016). However, political sociology does not only look at how these structures and processes affect political actors and stir their political activity through and outside the channels of institutional politics, but simultaneously wonders how the political agency of individuals and collectives impinges on these structures and processes and possibly changes them over time. Therefore, politics – or, more precisely, *the political* – that is of sociological interest “is not simply confined to what takes place within government, political parties, and the state”, but refers to “understanding of politics as a potentiality of all social experience [...] in the broadest possible sense as the contestation and transformation of social identities and structures” (Nash 2010: 2, 4). Sociological inquiry may identify politics anywhere and everywhere in a society – from the micro to the macro level – but it is important to note that it refrains from uncritically viewing political phenomena and related processes in *a-* or *trans*-historical terms; rather, it investigates its manifestations within historically, geographically, and culturally contingent settings (Kurasawa 2017). Whereas elite-centered institutional politics tend to play out similarly across time and space in liberal democracies, the differences produced by contingencies within societies conversely become mostly visible in situations when official state institutions cannot address grievances and contain discontent of the people who, in turn, engage in direct and/or collective actions to achieve their objectives.

In that regard, the study of popular politics through routinized and institutional(ized) trajectories of political participation depends on the context in which political contestation unfolds, since variations in social relations, cultural values, symbolic frames, political regimes, institutional frameworks, geographic locations, and, ultimately, historical trajectories, among other structural variables, affect the ways in which people articulate their interests, advance their claims, (re)affirm their identities, or, simply put, fight for common goals. For instance, the emergence and proliferation of social movements – as probably the most studied manifestation of popular politics in the social sciences – has been identified as a *historical* category closely tied to high-capacity parliamentary democracies and, by analogy, has been understood as a symptom of democratization processes throughout the world (Tilly 2006: 186–188; Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 11;

Tilly and Wood 2012: 124–144). With the emergence of social movements correlating with the development of the bureaucratized and centralized nation-state – and the accompanying processes of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization – social movements first emerged in Western Europe around the mid-nineteenth century, as the “sustained, organized challenge to existing authorities in the name of a deprived, excluded or wronged population” (Tilly 1995: 144). Social movements thus became the staple of popular politics in a historically contingent societal configuration that eventually came to be known as *civil society*. Put simply, a combination of democratic polity and civil society gave birth to social movements.

Civil society is an autonomous arena for individual and collective *voluntary* participation in public life outside direct state control (Cohen and Arato 1992: 29–174; Habermas 1996: 329–387).³ As a normative ideal, civil society is an indispensable element of the development and consolidation of democracy, since it “increases the political efficacy and skill of democratic citizens”, “empowers the powerless to advance their interests”, and “mitigates the principal polarities of political conflict” (Diamond 1999: 21; see also Shils 1991). Scholars draw attention to the political dimension of civil society with respect to its role in ensuring the quality of democracy, as it is seen to *counterbalance* state power – and to a certain extent, market forces – by facilitating associational life; maintaining the public sphere; promoting diverse (and often conflicting) interests; preventing abuse and misuse of state institutions; making the state apparatus more transparent, responsive, and effective; and, eventually, securing the conditions for democracy (Clark 1991; Diamond 1994; Gellner 1994; Hulme and Edwards 2013).⁴ Alexander (2006), however, adds a crucial symbolic dimension to this rationalist, and often procedural, understanding of the concept by framing civil society as a *solidarity sphere* that emerges not simply out of self-interest or power relations, but rather through universalistic *moral* feelings for others – that is, out of empathy and sympathy. As such, civil society is structured by a binary moral code and set of dichotomies, some of which have proven extremely important for studying postsocialist civil society and assessing its character: civic/ethnic, civil/uncivil, and political/a(nti)political (Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Stubbs 2007; Piotrowski 2009, 2015). Such dispositions are not merely products of the market, the state, the family, or religion, but achieve an existence of their own apart from the “non-civil spheres” of the economy and polity. These two spheres, nevertheless, tend to

colonize civil society and reconfigure it in accordance with their internal logic. Civil society often reacts to this “domination of one sphere over another” by “demand[ing] certain reforms”. Whatever the motives of this transgression may be, the key lesson here is that active involvement of citizens “mend[s] the social fabric” of a society (Alexander 2006: 34). Civil society, in other words, is a space in which people can exert their political agency independently, directly, and as the “bearers of sovereignty”. And this power of citizens to transform social relations, political structures, cultural codes, and economic institutions through collective and/or direct action is of sociological interest. While citizens’ motivation may stem from moral concerns, civic responsibilities, political beliefs, or ideological convictions, in the final instance, contention is generated by their actions aimed at counteracting state power outside routinized, institutional venues of participation.

Civil society, by involving citizens in public life, creates a “common polis” which they have a responsibility to preserve (Putnam 1993). Therefore, the basis of popular politics is autonomous “civil power”, a power that is, firstly, independent of the political power held by various social groups, political organizations, and regulative institutions and, secondly, codified in symbolic practices and communicative institutions – ranging from civic associations to public opinion – that can, if successful, “[bend] state power to civil will” (Alexander 2006: 150). This power, however, is expressed not only through regulative institutions (such as voting, political parties, democratic offices, and the law), but also through *communicative institutions* “that translate general codes into situationally specific evaluations and descriptions” (Alexander 2006: 70) – namely, through civil society organizations, institutions of public opinion, mass media, voluntary associations, citizens’ initiatives, social movements, etc. Civil power, therefore, constitutes the essence of citizens’ political subjectivity, grounding itself in the order of rights and morality. It is this “conviction that inspires a social movement and the reference to institutions which protect liberties” (Touraine 2007: 102). When civil power is translated into action, it produces a “social energy” (Hirschmann 1984) that transforms subjectivity into an agency that questions social institutions (Castoriadis 1991) and uses contentious practices to interact with these institutions, and often the state itself, on an equal footing (Rancière 1999, 2010). Social movements – as the most innovative political subjects in civil society (Cohen and Arato 1992: 492–563; Habermas 1996: 370–373) – were, therefore, not born within the formal institutions

of democratic (capitalist) states but have rather emerged *vis-à-vis* the state (and the market) out of the *vibrant* associational life of a *strong* civil society characterized by civil power. This emergence is important for the postsocialist space – as well as to understand civil society as also being a political society – because during the transition it was civil society that provided citizens access to political power outside the structures of representative democracy and, as such, had the potential to transform itself into a revolutionary project (Anderson 1976; Gramsci 1971). This was particularly true for rudimentary forms of civil society in the countries of actually existing socialism. Those who were oppressed, subordinated, or marginalized by the state were organizing in the only space available to them – civil society.

In the scholarly literature, the “social energy” produced by civil power which changes the *status quo* is based on the civic competence/autonomy often attributed to *active citizens*: the virtuous members of society who do not see voting as the principal duty and responsibility toward their political community but instead remain proactive in public life *in-between* elections. In recent years, different terms have been used to describe how and to what extent these citizens exercise their political subjectivity outside conventional political channels in order to enhance democratic practices or simply right wrongs. For instance, Schudson (1998) speaks of “monitorial citizens” who surveil powerful institutions and organizations and turn to political action when these abuse/misuse power; Norris (2011), on the other hand, talks about “critical citizens” who are dissatisfied with established (political) institutions and work to improve and reform existing channels of democratic participation; Mouffe (1993) envisions “radical citizens” who share political commitment to fight injustices experienced by various marginalized groups; while Isin (2009) points to “activist citizens” who purposively operate outside institutional channels and, in the process, produce new sites of social enunciation, new forms of civic participation, and new modes of political being. The *strong* civil society of contemporary democracies is, therefore, characterized by different motivations for political actions, venues of civic engagement, and levels of political involvement in public life. In all of these accounts, the engagement of socially conscious and politically empowered citizens who articulate their interests, identities, and ideas at the grassroots level, or who engage in collective action to advance their causes is identified as a characteristic of a *civic* type of political culture that is typical of the affluent democracies of North America and Western Europe (Almond and Verba

1989; Johnston 2011). The suggestion is that civic culture strengthens democratic structure, a phenomenon also identified as the congruence of political structure with political culture. In turn, this compatibility empowers the political agency of citizens.

In summary, a constitutive element of democratic regimes with a vibrant civil society underpinned by a strong civic culture, is a socially conscious and politically empowered citizen who has developed the capacity for networking and taking collective actions to influence decision-making. In such conditions – in which “regulatory institutions are the gatekeepers of political power” and “civil power [...] opens and closes the gate” (Alexander 2006: 110) – local citizens’ initiatives could easily grow into nationwide social movements. Keeping in mind that social movements are a property of a specific historical trajectory of the so-called *core countries*, Tilly (1999: 3, 6) emphasized how not only the genealogy of social movements, but also existing definitions of these movements are tied to “a historically circumscribed form of political interaction” in North America and Western Europe. In other words, Tilly inferred that textbook examples of social movements will proliferate as the dominant form of unconventional political participation only insofar as a “high-capacity, redistributive, relatively democratic state” is actively present.⁵ Tilly also pointed to different manifestations of popular politics in other socio-political settings, in particular, postsocialist countries. As such, the empirical reality of civic engagement and social struggles within these countries cannot be easily conceptualized within the narrow frame of reference provided by the historical experience of the West.

Understanding Postsocialist Civil Society and Contentious Politics

I argue in this paper that the “postsocialist condition” cannot be understood simply as a period *after* socialism, but as a complex matrix of externally sponsored, top-town processes of transition to the democratic polity, market economy, and civil society. This condition was a period of ambiguous *in-betweenness* – between the state socialist past and liberal democratic future that was essentially, in Gramsci’s (1971: 276) words, a period during which “the old [was] dying and the new [could not] be born”. Understood as a state or “condition” of liminality – an *interregnum* – “transition” can be used to describe complex structural

changes that occurred in the nexus of state–market–society after 1989: *political* transition, *economic* restructuring, *societal* transformation, and *cultural* adaptation. In that regard, postsocialist societies today can also be described as *post-transitional*.⁶ As such, this unique historical experience brought into being postsocialist civil societies with shared features that are, nonetheless, distinctive from those in the old democracies, postauthoritarian regimes, or even the postcolonial world.

As Tilly and others (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tilly 1999; Tilly and Wood 2012; Tilly and Tarrow 2015) demonstrate, conceptual boundaries and empirical indicators in social movement studies have been informed predominantly by the historical experience of affluent Western democracies. For that reason, social movement studies remain an overly parochial discipline to this very day (Poulson et al. 2014; Sheoin 2016). With social movement scholars disinterested in CEE, the postsocialist space became the exclusive property of *transitologists*, whose research was saturated with ideological biases, eventually resulting in the identification of postsocialist civil society as the “least understood” component within the field (Ekiert and Kubik 2014: 46). Postsocialist civil society was, subsequently, entrapped within the functionalist approach, liberal gaze and underpinning universalism of transitology, investigated through simplistic assumptions of social change based on a flawed modernization theory that treated the entire region as homogenous (Blokke 2005). Moreover, the teleological perspective of democratization theory was “underpinned by an almost Fukuyamaesque triumphalism” that approached the region with an “implicit assumption that the establishment of a flourishing civil society is a given” with the introduction of political pluralism and market economy (Killingsworth 2012: 147).⁷ However, it became apparent early on that there was no universal path from state socialism and planned economy to liberal democracy and market economy, but rather a number of divergent national and regional pathways, each the direct outcome of path dependency and path shaping (Stark 1992). In this context, differences between postsocialist civil societies in CEE were virtually neglected, particularly regional differences.

After the collapse of actually existing socialist regimes, “civil society” became “one of the more fashionable concepts” in CEE (Schöpflin 1991: 240). Its importance did not come out of the blue but was instead an outcome of decades-long discursive exchanges between Western academics and East European dissident intellectuals. These dissenting voices were “praised for having developed the ‘ferment’ of what was

later recognized as a civil society in Eastern Europe”, and, due to the prominence of dissidents’ work in the old democracies, their normative conceptualization of civil society became “the exchange ‘currency’ of the East–West intellectual dialogue” (Gagyí and Ivancheva 2013: 8). Namely, these intellectuals were (re)presented in the liberal democracies as the voice of civil society in the authoritarian regimes of CEE, as those who created an autonomous space of freedom from the oppressive party-state that was, unfortunately, denied publicity under state socialism and, as such, was pushed into the obscurity of non-public, essentially private spheres of underground publishing, friendship networks, and clandestine gatherings.⁸ Within these spaces of deliberation, civil society came to be understood in apolitical and ethical terms as “the force that protects society from the state and the market” (Piotrowski 2012: 120). Therefore, two defining features of the dissidents’ normative conceptualizations of civil society were its *anti-political* and *moral* character. What differentiated this nominally socialist understanding of civil society from its liberal counterpart was its aversion to institutional/party politics and suspicion of collective action (Celichowski 2004; Navrátil 2013: 35–38). Consequently, on the eve of collapse of socialist regimes, civil society came to denote not only an alternative to the oppressive state, but also to prescribe civic autonomy from the state’s interference in daily lives.⁹

While interesting for intellectual history, the heuristic and analytical value of this conceptualization was deeply problematic, mainly due to the dissidents’ insistence on civic *disengagement* from political life, which effectively narrowed the conceptual and socio-political boundaries of civil society by expunging contentious politics (Baća 2017c, 2018b). Conversely, during the postsocialist transition, contentious politics came to be associated with “uncivil society” (Kopecký and Mudde 2003), while civil society retained the aura of a domain uncorrupted by politics and came to be synonymous not only with liberal values, but “with all things virtuous, progressive, democratic, and just” (Stubbs 2007: 215). Since the seed of civil society was planted by dissident intellectuals, and its prospects for blossoming looked promising during 1989–1991, the scholarly gaze began to shift to more formal aspects of transitional political life and economic restructuring that would create conditions favorable to civil society building.

As structural reforms were set in motion, this dissident-*cum*-transitological understanding of civil society in the region was expected to “catch up” with the concept as defined by its Western neighbors. Moreover, relying

on the historical experience of the old democracies, Western observers expected this embryonic civil society, at the level of empirical reality, to develop *vis-à-vis* a new democratic polity. As such, they *sanitized* their approach, using levels of civic engagement and membership in civic associations as indicators of the strength of civil society. The presence of such indicators represented “healthy” development and pointed to democratic conditions, thus marking a clear “symptom” of transition toward liberal democracy (Petrova 2007; Pietrzyk-Reeves 2008). What was puzzling is that, in theory, the democratization of institutions should have created an environment conducive to the emergence of popular mobilization and social movements, but these were somehow suspiciously absent in CEE (cf. Císař 2017; Flam 2001; Glenn 2003). Consequently, when it became evident that people were withdrawing from public life during the period of postsocialist restructuring, a highly influential “weak postsocialist [or postcommunist] civil society” thesis was developed (Howard 2003; see also Mendelson and Glenn 2002; Petrova and Tarrow 2007) that, until relatively recently, informed much of the research on postsocialist civil society and, in effect, pushed social movement scholars away from looking for social movement phenomena similar to the paradigmatic cases described by Western literature in this space of extremely weak associational life and mass civic disengagement (cf. Císař 2017; Flam 2001; Gagyí 2015a, 2015b). Namely, conventional survey instruments demonstrated that, compared to the Western European average, the postsocialist space exhibited significantly lower levels of social trust and confidence in various civil and public institutions (Howard 2003; Pehlivanova 2009; Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1997; Sztompka 1998), as well as low community engagement and participation in voluntary associations (Howard 2003; Nalecz and Bartkowski 2006; Novak and Hafner-Fink 2015; Wallace, Pichler and Haerpfer 2012). Most importantly, participation in protest activities was extremely low, if not almost non-existent (Bernhard and Karakoç 2007; Greskovits 1998: 69–92; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Novak and Hafner-Fink 2015). Compared to those in other regions of the world, civil societies in CEE were ultimately portrayed as associationally passive and organizationally anemic. Over time, it became somewhat common wisdom to claim that, when compared to the Western European average (both old democracies and post-authoritarian countries), postsocialist societies experienced significantly lower levels of civic engagement (Howard 2003; Karakoç 2013; Kopecký and Mudde 2003; Marchenko 2014) and unconventional

political participation (Bernhagen and Marsh 2007, Hooghe and Quintelier 2014, Kostelka 2014).¹⁰ This assumption was reinforced when research demonstrated that postsocialist civil society remained structurally weak even after some countries in CEE underwent a Europeanization process (Lane 2010), remaining among the least organizationally dense in the world (Bernhard and Karakoç 2007). The conclusion was that postsocialist civil society, as a single entity, lacked civic engagement, which has been shown to be strongly correlated with levels of social trust, political skills, civic learning, active citizenship, and overall democratic values (Dekker and Van den Broek 1998; Mackerle-Bixa et al. 2009; Sissenich 2010); in a word, it was weak.

Scholars pointed to the lack of two fundamental elements for active citizenship and functioning democracy: informal civic education and grassroots pressure mechanisms. Namely, postsocialist civil society had emerged without two key ingredients that strengthen civil society: first, civic engagement as a source – or, better yet, school – of social capital, democratic habits, and civic skills that are necessary prerequisites for a stable democracy (Putnam 2000: 338), and second, active voluntary organizing in order to create political “leverage” and directly influence the political process (Skocpol 1999: 70). The suggestion was that postsocialist civil society remained weak due to a lack of experience with pluralism and/or coalition-building, a result of state socialism, wherein citizens remained voluntarily locked in private spheres and friendship networks which served as zones of comfort. Whatever aspect of civil society was placed under scrutiny – social trust, associational life, civic engagement, or even confrontational forms of civic activism – the picture remained grim. In other words, the state socialist legacy of civic disengagement from public life and the political apathy induced by the postsocialist transformation were interrelated and mutually reinforcing. With no clean break from the socialist past and a transition period that undermined voluntary participation in public affairs, the notorious “weak postsocialist civil society” thesis emerged and was widely accepted as truth in the years that followed.

Since the structural transformations implemented in CEE were not conducive to civic participation, postsocialist civil society had to be built “from above”; or, better yet, “from beyond” – through externally-sponsored institutional engineering. Social movements, as a model of popular politics typical of the old democracies, may have grown “organically” within these socio-political contexts, but international donations in CEE had artificially

created conditions favourable to a different form of social organizing – the so-called *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs).¹¹ During the transition process, the postsocialist state proved to be weak, so foreign donors seized an opportunity to build a non-profit but competition-based network of civic organizations that would eventually, through external mentorship and capacity-building, become more efficient and effective than state institutions in numerous domains of social, political, and cultural life. In the context of low-capacity postsocialist states, resources provided by Western governments and foundations offered an unprecedented opportunity structure for the creation of a network of (relatively influential) professionalized civil society organizations. Ultimately, an outcome of foreign assistance was a well-developed non-profit “third sector” populated predominantly by professionally-managed advocacy organizations disinterested in participation and mobilization, which, instead of voicing the grievances of the local population, focused on addressing concerns of their donors and providing expertise to the state (Aksartova 2006; Baća 2017c; Carothers 1999; Fink-Hafner 2015b; Flam 2001; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Kopecký and Mudde 2003; McMahon 2001; Petrova and Tarrow 2007; Piotrowski 2012).¹² In other words, in the context of the “weak postsocialist civil society”, the process of NGO-ization created a strong *civic sector*. Rather than fostering the (voluntary) participation of citizens in public life, this process created an enduring structure of professionalized, bureaucratized, clientelist, salaried, and competitive organizations interacting directly with the state.

Therefore, if we factor in NGOs, the picture of postsocialist civil society becomes somewhat different than the one portrayed by survey instruments. A multi-dimensional quantitative study by Foa and Ekiert (2017: 423) demonstrated that the “weak postsocialist civil society” thesis was based on an essentially flawed methodological bias that resulted in scholars’ focusing “exclusively on surveyed membership in voluntary associations, at the expense of other dimensions of civic life and types of data”, thus “[neglecting] the myriad ways in which citizens organize to defend their interests, reaffirm their identities, and pursue common goals in postcommunist societies”. This limited data illuminated just one dimension of civil society while simultaneously obscuring other aspects of postsocialist civil societies, which showed that countries in CEE did not lag behind their Western neighbors (Bernhard et al. 2017). These findings have also been supported by numerous qualitative studies that exposed the richness of social movements and contentious politics in the postsocialist

space (see Biber and Brentin; Ekiert and Kubik 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Horvat and Štiks 2015; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Mujanović 2017; Pleyers and Sava 2015). In other words, since most influential research on postsocialist civil society was based on survey data that illuminated individual attitudes instead of the actual behavior of respondents, the numbers of existing associations – not to mention the forms these took and the ways in which they advanced claims – were not captured. These findings were particularly important in relation to the conceptual narrowing of civil society to a civic sector that, in turn, changed how the relationship between nominal civil society and the state was observed – as non-contentious and cooperative interaction. Simply put, external donor-funding created “dense and comprehensive organizational structures [that] operate in a friendly institutional and legal environment, and have some capacity to influence policy making on the local and national levels” (Ekiert and Kubik 2014: 55). Accordingly, it can be argued that while some authors claimed that postsocialist *civil society* was weak in terms of participation and mobilization, others pointed out that its *civic sector* came out of the process of transition as quite strong in terms of organizational density and political capital.

In a socio-political context characterized by low levels of civic participation, Petrova and Tarrow (2007: 79) examined the actually existing challenger–authority relations in CEE and eventually came to the conclusion that civic activism in the postsocialist space occurred through what they labeled *transactional activism*, which was comprised of “the ties – enduring and temporary – among organized non-state actors and between them and political parties, power holders, and other institutions”. As an organizational platform that fostered this type of activism, NGOs influenced the state through non-contentious, cooperative, direct-contact activities with decision-makers through lobbying, expertise, and advocacy, rather than by relying on participation and mobilization. In a nutshell, the process of NGO-ization placed postsocialist civil society on a path of dependent development: the professionalization of associational life became not only the most efficient way to influence the state but also replaced some of the state’s basic functions in the socialist period (e.g., service provisioning), thus making NGOs *the* mode of civic organizing. Unlike social movements in the old democracies that pursued their interests in the streets, these organizations abandoned participation and contention, instead engaging in strategic networking, inter-organizational transfer of

information, know-how and other resources, as well as problem-solving activities with policymakers. In short, in societies characterized by mass withdrawal from public life, NGOs served as a perfect (funded and thus sustainable) platform for mediating between civil society and the state outside party structures (and, to some extent, kinship networks). In the process, potentially contentious topics were channeled through institutionally mediated venues of participation.

Nevertheless, the reduction of civil society to a civic sector – and its dependence on external sources of funding – had detrimental effects on civil society. Simply put, there is an overwhelming consensus that NGO-ization removed incentives for civil society building “from below”, on participatory grounds and through the “organic” creation of a new democratic (counter)cultures (see Aksartova 2006; Baća 2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2020; Gagyi 2015a, 2015b; Gagyi and Ivancheva 2013; Henderson 2002; Mendelson and Glenn 2002; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Kopecký and Mudde 2003; McMahon 2001; Narozhna 2004; Piotrowski 2012; Stubbs 2007, 2012). The postsocialist civic sector was once even referred to as a “virtual civil society” that existed “mainly in reports and boardrooms of major NGOs and governmental offices in the West” (Kopecký and Mudde 2003: 158). However, more important was the depoliticization of activities happening in the civic sector: the focus on educational, advocacy, and self-help activities, deeply embedded in the (neo)liberal agenda, pushed NGOs away from more radical demands and subversive actions that would challenge existing power relations.

Moreover, the dominant normative understanding of civil society excluded not only instances of the so-called “uncivil society”, but also radical and subversive repertoires of contention, whose most prominent manifestation were disruptive social uprisings in the streets (Ekiert and Kubik 2017; Kopecký and Mudde 2003a, 2003b; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Piotrowski 2009). Despite claims that non-participatory political culture and demobilized civil society were distinctive features of CEE, some scholars identified the strong presence of protest events by impoverished people against unresponsive governments (Baća 2018b; Císař 2013; Ekiert and Kubik 1998, 1999; Greskovits 1998: 69–92; Szabó 1996; Vanhuyse 2006). As such, these demonstrations were predominantly motivated by a growing disappointment with the new elites, due to the increasing socio-economic cleavages that had resulted from the post-1989 transitions and “shock therapies” (Baća 2017c, 2018b; Ekiert and Kubik 1998, 1999; Klein 2007; Szabó 1996).¹³ In some cases, protest politics proved to be

highly consequential, including the toppling of authoritarian regimes during the so-called “colored revolutions” (Bunce and Wolchik 2011). Unlike these political uprisings, mobilizations around socio-economic issues were sporadic and episodic. They did not result in “stable formations after the time of contention, especially after the economic demands of the protesters were met” (Piotrowski 2015: 7), and, therefore, social movement scholars remained disinterested in CEE.

Building on this body of work – in particular, some of the rare, early studies of social movements and contentious politics in the postsocialist region (Beissinger 2002; Ekiert and Kubik 1998, 1999; Flam 2001; Glenn 2003; Kopecký and Mudde 2003; Szabó 1996) – a new, empirically-grounded yet theoretically ambitious, research agenda began to emerge relatively recently. A growing number of scholars began to question the dogma of postsocialist, (post)transition societies as weak in participatory terms and yet transactionally strong.¹⁴ These scholars’ work stopped solely relying on data from opinion surveys and official NGO registries, in favor of qualitative, in-depth case studies, as well as quantitative historical and comparative research designs to explore the actually existing practices of contestation in CEE. By shifting their focus from NGOs as dominant organizational platforms, these authors began to uncover empirically important and theoretically relevant movement- and protest-related activities. Scholars studying the region argue that the most common type of activism in the region tends to emerge from small-scale, short-term, and often low-key citizens’ initiatives without any organizational structure involved, which effectively renders these endemic forms of contention invisible to social movement scholars who were traditionally focused on highly visible mass mobilizations and NGO activities (Baća 2018b; Císař 2013, 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Mujanović 2017; Pleyers and Sava 2015). These insights led some authors to question whether concepts that had previously informed research in the region – most notably, “social movements” and “contentious politics” – possessed enough heuristic, analytic, and conceptual bandwidth to “capture” all forms of contentious practices that took place in postsocialist civil societies. According to these accounts, the defining features of political activism in CEE were its *liminality*, *hybridity* and *ambiguity*, which challenged the dichotomies present in civil society and social movement studies: formal/informal, participation/transaction, coordination/spontaneity, contention/compliance, private/

public, civil/uncivil, everyday/political, and resistance/resilience (Baća 2017b, 2018b, 2020; Fábíán and Korolczuk 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017). Therefore, when accounting for civil societies in CEE, authors who studied contention in the region drew from both social movement studies and resistance studies to identify contentious practices that often lie *in-between* these dichotomous categories. In short, what the state-of-the-art research illustrated is a problem with studying postsocialist civil society that stems not only from methodological limitations, but also conceptual shortcomings in dominant theoretical paradigms and interdisciplinary approaches. Research also demonstrates differences between countries and regions within CEE, something which remains unexplored in a systematic and holistic manner. To appropriately interrogate and understand postsocialist civil *societies* – particularly their regional commonalities and differences – a comparative approach is necessary.

A Comparative Analysis of Regional Commonalities and Differences Among Civil Societies in CEE

In order to compare regional commonalities and differences in CEE, this paper analyzes data from four (bi)annual global indexes that use a range of indicators to assess civil society in CEE: USAID's *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index* (2003–2018), Bertelsmann Stiftung's *Transformation Index* (2006–2020), along with Freedom House's *Nations in Transit* (2005–2020) and *Freedom in the World* (2013–2020). The time period of focus for analysis was chosen because data for this time period exists for virtually all countries in the region. Throughout analysis, original methodologies, including scales of measurement, were maintained to allow future scholars to compare data presented here with the original data. Nevertheless, based on historical, geographical, and political criteria, the 21 countries of CEE were grouped into five regional categories, with regional averages calculated as the annual mean of the countries within each group: *Baltic Countries* (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), *The Visegrád Group* (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia), *Former Yugoslavia* (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia), *Southeast Europe* (Albania, Bulgaria, Romania), and *Post-Soviet*

States (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia). Although there are variations among countries within some regions, these regional groupings will serve as comparative categories to identify commonalities and differences between civil societies in postsocialist CEE.

Table 1. Country and region average across four indexes for period of analysis

Region–Country/Index	<i>CSOSI</i>	<i>NIT</i>	<i>BTI</i>	<i>FIW</i>
Baltic Countries	2.46	6.20	9.69	53.46
Estonia	2.06	6.20	9.90	56.00
Latvia	2.64	6.17	9.39	51.38
Lithuania	2.70	6.23	9.78	53.00
Visegrád Group	2.66	6.20	9.56	52.25
Czechia	2.64	6.28	9.98	56.25
Hungary	3.05	5.80	8.79	47.25
Poland	2.24	6.39	9.66	52.38
Slovakia	2.69	6.31	9.81	53.13
Post-Soviet States	4.45	3.45	5.32	24.84
Belarus	5.74	1.64	2.73	12.63
Moldova	4.10	4.55	6.81	34.88
Russia	4.45	2.30	4.45	16.25
Ukraine	3.49	5.30	7.28	35.63
Southeast Europe	3.56	5.37	8.43	45.08
Albania	3.86	4.98	7.71	39.88
Bulgaria	3.26	5.52	8.81	46.75
Romania	3.58	5.61	8.78	48.63

Former Yugoslavia	3.81	5.07	8.31	41.89
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.78	4.47	7.63	35.25
Croatia	3.27	5.28	9.06	49.63
Kosovo	3.86	4.16	7.70	28.25
Montenegro	4.11	5.23	8.10	43.00
North Macedonia	3.72	4.73	7.54	37.13
Serbia	4.24	5.56	8.46	46.38
Slovenia	3.67	6.03	9.71	53.63

As *Table 1* demonstrates, the biggest differences between countries within a region are among the Post-Soviet States, while all other regions exhibit minor – albeit, in some instances, visible – variations among countries.

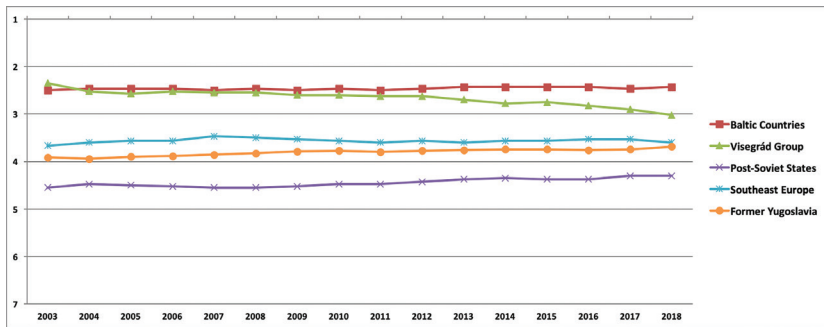
Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index

The *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index* (CSOSI) uses a seven-point scale, with 1 representing the highest and 7 the lowest level of sustainability. It utilizes seven dimensions to measure the civic sector's overall sustainability: (1) *legal environment* governing the civic sector, (2) *organizational capacity* of the civic sector to pursue its goals, (3) *financial viability* of the civic sector's access to various sources of funding, (4) *advocacy* through which the civic sector exercises its capacity to influence public opinion and public policy, (5) *service provision* through which the civic sector exercises its ability to provide goods and services, (6) *sectoral infrastructure* that the civic sector uses to access various support services, and (7) *public image* of the civic sector within broader society. These dimensions are not considered distinct steps of development but are rather analyzed simultaneously to acquire a multifaceted assessment of the civic sector in each country.

For that reason, the CSOSI scores are clustered into three basic “tiers” representing the level of development, and thus viability, of the civic sector: (1) *sustainability enhanced* (1.00–3.00), which entails enhanced development and viability of the civic sector through practices and policies in a friendly socio-political and socio-economic environment;

(2) *sustainability evolving* (3.10–5.00), which entails development and viability of the civic sector that is somewhat affected by practices and policies, but more so by external factors (e.g., stagnant economy, passive government, disinterested media, inexperienced activists); and (3) *sustainability impeded* (5.10–7.00), which entails a civic sector that is significantly impeded by practices and policies, but the overall progress of the sector is mostly hampered by external factors such as a contracting economy, authoritarian polity, media censorship, and/or a low level of capacity of the civic sector itself.

Figure 1. Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (2003–2018)



As Figure 1 demonstrates, postsocialist civil society in CEE, as a whole, is not significantly impeded by a complex combination of negative practices, policies, and external factors. Rather, the civic sector in CEE is somewhat affected by practices and policies, but mostly by external factors, such as a stagnant or contracting economy, passive or hostile government, disinterested or reactionary media, and inexperienced or disinterested activists. An analysis of the trends demonstrates that its sustainability is evolving in the right direction, with the visible exception of the Visegrád Group, which shows a gradual decline to the lower tier, thus indicating a worsening external environment for the development and sustainability of civil societies in this part of CEE. While the sustainability of civic sector in the Baltic States remains high, its neighboring region of the Post-Soviet States remains in the worst position in terms of viability and development, bordering on the lowest tier of the index, where hostile policies and weak practices are not as significant as the overall negative socio-political and socio-economic environment for the normal functioning of civil society.

Conversely, civic sectors in the Former Yugoslavia and Southeast Europe regions remain in the mid-tier, indicating that development and viability of the civic sector is somewhat affected by practices and policies, but mostly by external factors. These regions have the prospect of moving to the top tier of “enhanced sustainability” in the long run, demonstrating that practices, policies, and external conditions that positively affect development and viability of the civic sector have been improving over time.

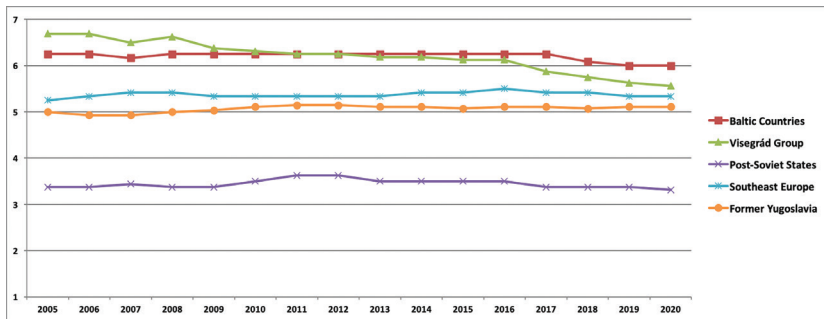
Nations in Transit

Similar to the CSOSI, the *Nations in Transit* (NIT) report uses a seven-point scale, but with the index operating in reverse order, where 1 represents the lowest and 7 the highest level of democracy. The NIT report provides numerical ratings in seven categories that broadly represent the institutional underpinnings of liberal democracy: (1) national democratic governance, (2) electoral process, (3) civil society, (4) independent media, (5) local democratic governance, (6) judicial framework and independence, and (7) corruption. This paper focuses exclusively on the “civil society” category which examines the democracy level of the civic sector and assesses the legal and political environment that affects the vibrancy, organizational capacity, and financial sustainability of the civic sector. The “civil society” category also examines participation of civil society actors in the policy process. Furthermore, adopting a normative approach, the NIT report focuses not only on independence of civil society from state structures and the vibrancy of the associations and collective actors that comprise it, but also on the civil society’s capacity to maintain liberal democratic values, resist anti-democratic actors, and influence policy and media.

NIT report scores are clustered into five “tiers” representing the level of democracy of civil society: (1) *consolidated democracies*, which are further broken down into two democracy scores: a) democracies that embody the best policies and practices of liberal democracy, where civil society is independent, vibrant, and sustainable and where all political and civil rights are protected by the state (6.01–7.00), or, b) democracies that closely embody the best policies and practices of liberal democracy, but face certain challenges associated with corruption (5.01–6.00); (2) *semi-consolidated democracies* (4.01–5.00) that hold high standards for electoral process but, nevertheless, exhibit some weaknesses in their

defense of political rights and civil liberties: civil society is independent and active, but faces some pressures from the state and, thus, has limited organizational capacity and financial viability; (3) *transitional/hybrid regimes* (3.01–4.00) that are characterized by fragile democratic institutions and minimum standards for electoral process, in which civil society is independent and in development, yet faces challenges to political rights and civil liberties, pressure from the state, and other structural limitations to operations and sustainability; (4) *semi-consolidated authoritarian regimes* (2.01–3.00) that fail to meet even the minimum standards of electoral democracy: the independence, infrastructure, and sustainability of civil society is seriously impeded, especially by the state that is hostile to organizations that challenge its policies; and (5) *consolidated authoritarian regimes* (1.00–2.00) that entail closed societies without genuine political competition and pluralism, in which violations of political, civil, and human rights are consistently present, and where civil society faces excessive government restrictions and repression.

Figure 2. Nations in Transit (2005–2020)



As Figure 2 demonstrates, when we speak about the level of democracy of civil societies in CEE – with a visible exception of the Post-Soviet States where civil society has characteristics of that in transitional/hybrid regimes – all other civil societies in CEE have characteristics of consolidated democracies. They are generally independent, vibrant, and sustainable, with political and civil rights protected by the state, yet face certain challenges associated with corruption. However, while the civil societies of Former Yugoslavia and Southeast Europe are locked in their positions, the Visegrád Group is on the decline, dropping one spot

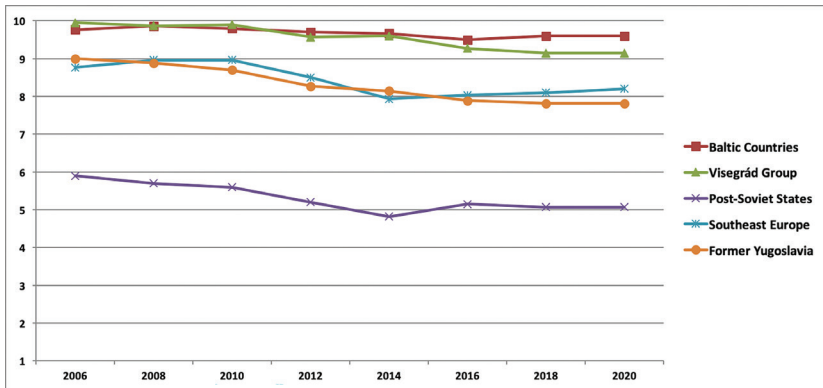
from the highest tier, and civil societies in the Baltic Countries are on a gradual decline in terms of the level of democracy of their civil societies. Simply stated, even in the most democratic parts of CEE, corruption and tightening political factors are constraining the democratic capacity of their respective civil societies.

Bertelsmann Transformation Index

The *Bertelsmann Transformation Index* (BTI) is a biannual global report that uses a 10-point scale: with 1 representing the lowest and 10 the highest level of transition toward liberal democracy and market economy. It offers numerical ratings for 17 criteria that are aggregated into three categories used to evaluate political and economic movement toward these goals: *political transformation* (5 criteria), *economic transformation* (7 criteria), and *governance* (5 criteria). This paper focuses on the “political participation” component that measures both institutional and non-institutional political participation in countries in transition.

As part of the “political transformation” category, indicators for “political participation” are used to determine whether a country is classified as a democracy or autocracy. However, unlike in the NIT report, the BTI classification of a country as an autocracy or democracy is not determined by the aggregate political transformation score, but rather by minimum thresholds in each component of the “political participation” component: (1) *free and fair elections* (<6.00), where a score below 6 implies that free elections are not held or are marred by serious irregularities and restrictions; (2) *effective power to govern* (<4.00), implying that democratically elected leaders *de facto* lack the power to govern; (3) *association/assembly rights* (<4.00), implying that the freedom of association or assembly does not exist, or civil society organizations are suppressed; and (4) *freedom of expression* (<4.00), implying that freedom of expression or media freedom does not exist, or severe restrictions are in place.

Figure 3. Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2006–2020)



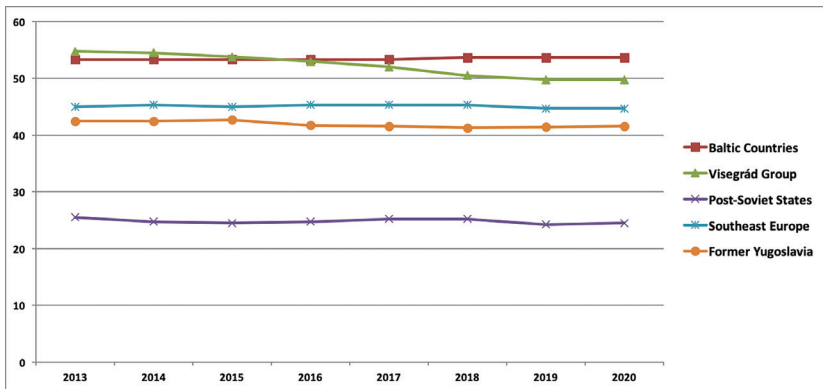
As Figure 3 demonstrates, the Post-Soviet States once again severely lag behind the rest of CEE, demonstrating many characteristics of the autocratic regime, thus implying severe issues with the electoral process, freedom of association or assembly, and freedom of expression or the media. On the other hand, political participation in the other two clusters – the Visegrád Group and the Baltic Countries on one side, and Former Yugoslavia and Southeast Europe on the other – demonstrate characteristics of democracy. However, declining trends indicate that the situation has been deteriorating in recent years. Whereas the second cluster has been gradually declining over the past decade due to the rise of so-called *stabilitocracies*, the Visegrád Group has been on the decline in recent years, attributable to illiberal democracies.

Freedom in the World

Freedom in the World (FIW) is an annual global report that uses 100-point scores to assess political rights and civil liberties enjoyed by individuals and collectives, where 1 represents the lowest, and 100 the highest level of liberal democratic values. While both laws and actual national practices are factored into scoring decisions, greater emphasis is placed on practical implementation. This paper focuses on civil liberties, comprised of 17 indicators. The highest overall score that can be awarded for civil liberties is 60 (or a score of 4 for each of 15 questions).

The civil liberties questions are grouped into four categories: *freedom of expression and belief* (4 questions), *associational and organizational rights* (3 questions), *rule of law* (4 questions), and *personal autonomy and individual rights* (4 questions). Within the FIW report, the status of the country – “free”, “partly free”, or “not free” – is determined by a combination of an overall score awarded for political rights and the overall score awarded for civil liberties, after being equally weighted. Here, only the “civil liberties” component is utilized to determine whether a country falls into the designation of “electoral democracy”, meaning that it possesses an overall civil liberties score of 30 or higher.

Figure 4. Freedom in the World (2013–2020)



As *Figure 4* demonstrates, although the Visegrád Group appears on a recent decline, it remains among the top scores, along with the Baltic Countries. These regions are followed by Former Yugoslavia and Southeast Europe in the next tier, with the Post-Soviet States in the last, scoring below 30 points. Thus, the civil liberties score of the Post-Soviet States is characteristic of a non-electoral democracy. Overall, just as the previous three graphs have done, this figure clearly demonstrates that, according to normative liberal democratic indexes there is no singular designator of postsocialist civil society in CEE. Instead, we must recognize the presence of three distinct postsocialist civil societies within CEE, each demonstrating different levels of development in terms of sustainability, viability, and democratic capacity of respective civil societies, as well as of political participation and civil liberties.

Conclusion

This paper offered a critical overview of scholarly literature on civil society and contentious politics in CEE in order to identify several common misconceptions about the so-called *postsocialist civil society*. Using public data from leading global indexes, including the *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index*, *Nations in Transit*, *Bertelsmann Transformation Index*, and *Freedom in the World*, it presented a descriptive statistical overview of regional differences and commonalities in civil societies across CEE. This analysis demonstrated that instead of one singular entity, the scholarly community should recognize the presence of three distinct *postsocialist civil societies* in CEE. According to normative liberal democratic indexes, in terms of development of sustainability, democracy, political participation, and civil liberties, the Baltic Countries and the Visegrád Group rank first, Former Yugoslavia and Southeast Europe second, while the Post-Soviet States rank third. This finding demonstrates that some regions in the postsocialist space of CEE do not lag (significantly) behind their Western neighbors.

Embracing the view that there was no universal path from state socialism and a planned economy to liberal democracy and a market economy, and that path dependency and path shaping led to a range of divergent national and regional trajectories across CEE, the findings presented in this paper demonstrate that these divergent pathways have significantly influenced the development of civil society. Ultimately, these diverse trajectories have resulted in three distinct stages of civil society development across the region. The findings of this paper reveal several distinct realities of postsocialist civil societies in CEE, thereby demonstrating the limitations of the longstanding notion of the “weak postsocialist civil society”. It is no longer analytically useful to treat postsocialist civil society as a monolithic entity. Instead, we must recognize various *postsocialist civil societies*, with different levels of civic engagement, non-institutional political participation, social activism, associational life, social trust, civic skills, and overall democratic values within the heterogenous space of CEE.

Endnotes

- ¹ The concept of contentious politics denotes “what happens when collective actors join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities, and opponents around their claims or the claims of those they claim to represent” (Tarrow 2011: 4). Understood as such, contentious politics “involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors’ interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests of programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 7). Only when such actions are sustained collectively and thus “based on dense social networks and effective connective structures and draw on legitimate, action-oriented cultural frames”, can we speak of *social movements* (Tarrow 2011: 16; see also Della Porta and Diani 1999: 20–22; Tilly and Wood 2012: 35–37).
- ² This paper was written in the first half of 2020 and forms part of a pentalogy of papers on postsocialist civil society and social movements developed during my postdoctoral research. Four companion pieces have since been published (see Baća 2022, 2023, 2024a, and 2024b).
- ³ What constitutes civil society is still open for debate. However, despite the theoretical preferences or ideological convictions of scholars who tend to narrow or stretch the conceptual boundaries of civil society, contemporary interest in civil society focuses predominantly on associational life and civic engagement. The lowest common denominator among academics and activists is that civil society refers to uncoerced associational life distinct from the family relations and institutions of the state and market (Chambers and Kopstein 2006).
- ⁴ Therefore, throughout the paper, I am discussing civil society as a societal realm distinct from state institutions, economic relations, and the intimate sphere of the family. Yet, as I will show, civil society is no way completely isolated and immune to influences coming from these spheres.
- ⁵ As Gagyí (2015b: 19) pointed out, 1968 was “the inspirational moment” of both American and Western European scholarship on social movements, precisely because “the affluence of post-war Western societies made it possible for the first time in history for entire populations to participate in material welfare”. This context of affluence and, consequently, the emergence of “new social movements” can hardly be generalized throughout space or time.
- ⁶ Some can be also designated as “post-conflict societies”, especially Yugoslav successor states.
- ⁷ Translational explanations did not take into consideration the complexity of social, political, economic, and cultural transformations taking place in the concrete historical and geographical conditions at the local, national, and regional levels.

- ⁸ Gagyi and Ivancheva (2013: 9) show that “what is nowadays called ‘the 1989 concept of civil society’ was named differently by each prominent dissident: ‘anti-politics’ (Konrád), ‘independent life of society’ or ‘life in truth’ (Havel), ‘parallel polis’ and ‘second culture’ (Benda), ‘new evolutionism’ (Michnik), etc.”.
- ⁹ Especially because civil society under state socialism in the 1970s and 1980s was equated with the dissident movement and “was originally understood as a self-organizing alternative society (a ‘parallel polis’, as Václav Benda put it in 1978) in opposition to totalitarian rule” (Rupnik 1999: 60). Flam (2001: 3), on the other hand, argues that, in reality, these civil societies were nothing more than “dissident subcultures”.
- ¹⁰ Howard (2003: 63) pointed out that “for all types of organizations except labor unions, the postcommunist mean is much lower than the means of [older democracies and postauthoritarian regimes]”. Moreover, this was also the case for more conventional forms of political participation, such as voting.
- ¹¹ While these are known in the West as “non-profits”, they are more commonly referred today as “civil society organizations” (CSOs).
- ¹² This is essentially a process of the professionalization of collective actors within the third sector, whereby groups moved from grassroots mobilization to rank-and-file organizations that were economically dependent (Piotrowski 2015: 9). During the 1990s, US-based foundations provided most of the funding, but during the 2000s EU funds became an integral part of the process of Europeanization. Many civil society actors in CEE saw the EU accession process as a political opening, which they could use to try to influence domestic policies.
- ¹³ The findings of these authors demonstrated that strikes and other socio-economically motivated protest actions accounted for the largest political mobilization in CEE, and were most commonly initiated by trade unions and professional organizations. They did not occur often, but, when they did, they tended to have more participants than other forms of protest.
- ¹⁴ Namely, the official NGO registries rendered visible just one model of associational life, but simultaneously obscured others, thus giving, at best, a partial view of postsocialist civil society. Therefore, focusing on ideal types in the research on postsocialist civil society led to systematic privileging of formal actors and some forms of action, while neglecting important activities that took place in less structured form(at)s.

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