

Abstract (EN)

Civil society is made up of committed individuals, non-governmental non-profit organizations, their employees, volunteers, and other supporters, as well as relations among these actors. Civil society activities include community development, advancement of leisure and professional interests, services to vulnerable groups, as well as efforts to intervene in the political process and to support certain legislation and systemic change. This work focuses on the latter, i.e. the ways how civil society actors influence the political process. In the introductory chapter I present an overview of the current research of civil society and political activism in the Czech Republic and other post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In this chapter, I identify five central propositions that can be formulated on the basis of existing scientific discussion and I subject them to a critical assessment. In addition, I argue that against the backdrop of the discussion, two streams of literature can be distinguished which differ in their assessment of civil society's quality in Central and Eastern Europe. I try to clarify the reasons for these contradictions. In the second chapter I offer an overview of social movements theories, thus completing the theoretical basis for the empirical part of this thesis. Indeed, many questions about how civil society actors enter the political process can be explored by the prism of social movement theory. The following three chapters are empirical case studies that address the three research questions, which are formulated in the introductory chapter. The first of them, i.e. the third chapter of this work, builds on the concept of transactional activism and seeks to elaborate and clarify the conceptualization of horizontal transactional relationships between organizations. This new conceptualization is subsequently operationalized and empirically tested using the technique of social network analysis. The chapter shows, among other things, the way how different operationalization of horizontal transactional ties between organizations strongly impacts the results of analysis and interpretation. It also makes the argument that it is important to complement social network analysis, which is more technical in its nature, by insights from qualitative interviews. The fourth chapter then focuses on analysing the mechanisms through which organizations can achieve their goals in the political process. This chapter is based on Jasper's calls for researchers of civil society to accentuate the role of civil society actors and their agency instead of the more usual focus on analysis of available resources and political context of activism. Therefore, I primarily focus on the key strategic decisions of the representatives of a selected civil initiative, using process tracing as method. In doing so, I try to deliver empirical evidence to substantiate how these decisions contributed to the final success of the initiative. In the fifth chapter I analyse one selected organization over a longer period and follow the process of professionalization within it. I focus on the different levels of professionalization, namely professionalization at the level of funding, the level of human resources and the level of public

communication. I show how these different levels interact. The sixth chapter takes the form of a methodological excursion and introduces in more detail the process tracing method, which is still relatively little known in the Czech sociological community, and which I apply in this dissertation in Chapter four. I justify its placement before the very conclusion of the thesis by the fact that it is a relatively detailed chapter with ambitions to offer a comprehensive overview of the process tracing method. To include it elsewhere would, in my view, threaten the overall fluidity of the text. The final chapter not only summarizes and integrates the findings of the previous chapters and the dissertation's contribution to answering the research questions, but also offers a few thoughts on what self-reflection is currently occurring in Czech civil society. Interestingly, I argue, this self-reflection strongly touches on the need to build a stronger circle of supporters, i.e. constituency base, and strengthen the links of organizations to their grassroots. Thus, the reflection thematically returns to the academic discussions that have been developed in the civil society literature in the CEE countries for at least fifteen years. Thus, we find ourselves at a moment when academics can offer a range of ideas to civil society actors.

Keywords (EN)

Civil society, political process, advocacy activism, social movements, process tracing, Reconstruction of the State, Auto*mat