

This thesis elaborates on the concept of a binary symbolic code of civil society by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith and through this narrowly-focused analysis intends to contribute to a wider debate on the role of emotionality and rationality in the public space. Alexander is one of the few who has managed to make a breakthrough with the new paradigm in the last decades of social theory development. However, institutionalization of a "Strong Program in Cultural Sociology" without adequate reflection on its epistemological foundations bears the risk of cultural sociology becoming a hidden representative of functionalist ideology instead of a critical discipline.

I identify and elaborate several key theoretical questions regarding the concept of a binary symbolic code: systemic differentiation and relative autonomy of civil sphere; relative autonomy of culture and actor-structure dilemma; the question of a position of symbolic code among other interpretive tools of cultural sociology; universality of symbolic code; normativity and the role of power relations.

Following Marek Skovajsa, I try to test the possibilities of the code in the Czech public sphere. In two case studies – of dissident discourse and the discourse of local referendums – I show that the structure of Czech civil society agree with Alexander and Smith's code of liberty and repression which they have identified in American civil society.

I show that the concept follows the rationalized ideal of modernity, however Jeffrey C. Alexander does not make use of the possibility of a critical interpretation of this concept. I would like to point out that he does not consistently distinguish between the empirical and the normative level of cultural structure studies, and, despite a declared critical approach, his analysis remains strongly consensual. He limits himself to the critique of repressive forces of the non-civil spheres against the civil sphere, and as the only possible inclusive strategy offers a translation of so far exclusionary qualities of the referents into positive characteristics of the civil code of liberty.

Contrary to this approach, I emphasize that the ideal of rationalized modernity that Alexander reveals through the symbolic code of the civil sphere still reflects hegemonic relations. Thus, I suggest deconstructing the inner structure of the civil code. Following one stream of the critique of Alexander's concept, I particularly focus on the Alexander's elimination of emotionality and irrationality from the discourse of civil society and show that these characteristics can be perceived and strengthened as positively civil, rather than being constrained to the familial or other non-civil spheres.