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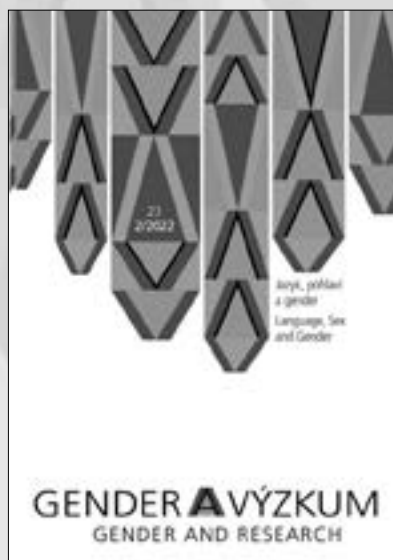
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Populism and Growing Welfare State Agenda: Elections of 2013 and 2017 in Czechia*

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Abstract: Although previous studies show that welfare policies are important for populist voters, few studies have analysed in depth the social policy proposals of different types of populist parties. Since the Czech Republic is one of the few countries with a strong centrist-populist party that has been in power, this article concentrates on the Czech case and compares this centrist-populist party to the largest right-wing populist party and the main non-populist parties. We argue that the centrist and rightist Czech populist parties have developed different types of welfare agendas. The centrist-populist party supports encompassing and universalist policies (which it links to economic efficiency and administrative improvements); in contrast, the right-wing populist party supports the protection of those in need while preserving the principles of merit and economic incentives.

Keywords: Czech Republic, centrist populism, right-wing populism, welfare state, election programmes

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Introduction

The link between political populism and the welfare state has been attracting increasing research attention. However, most studies focus on the demand side — i.e. the voters (e.g. Greve, 2019; Mudde, 2007; Spruyt et al., 2016). Previous supply-side studies have concluded that populist parties are placing increasing emphasis on welfare issues (see below). Given the electoral success that Czech populist parties have had in recent years, it is important to investigate their welfare agendas. Consequently, this article contributes to the discourse on populism by analysing the welfare ideology of a strong centrist-populist party, showing

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how it differs from a right-wing populist party and non-populist centre-right and centre-left parties.

Scholars argue that populist parties emerge when voters do not think the main parties represent their views. When social-democratic and democratic left-wing parties start implementing austerity policies, left-leaning voters are likely to turn to both left-wing and right-wing populist parties (e.g. Afonso, 2015; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016; Ramiro, 2016; Swank & Betz, 2003; Schumacher & van Kersbergen, 2016).

While there has been an increasing number of studies on left-wing and right-wing populist parties, little has been written about centrist populist parties. Yet, centrist populist parties have become important political players in many countries. In the Czech case, the centrist-populist ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) has become one of the largest parties, leading the government from 2017 to 2021 and representing the junior partner in the coalition government from 2014 to 2017. According to Heinisch and Saxonberg (2017) and Saxonberg and Heinisch (2022), many Czech voters have social-liberal values, but they have not had any viable social-liberal parties to vote for, which left an opening for a centrist-populist party like ANO to emerge. They define social liberalism as support for a generous welfare state and centrist socio-economic values combined with a preference for private rather than public provision of welfare services, cash rather than services and market solutions rather than welfare issues.

In the 2013 Czech elections, two populist parties came into the Czech Parliament: (1) the centrist-populist party ANO, which received 18.7% votes in and joined the coalition government, and (2) the right-wing populist party UPD (Dawn of Direct Democracy, later SPD or Direct Democracy Party), which received 6.9% of the votes.¹ After the 2017 elections, ANO became the leading government coalition party, with 29.6% of the votes. Together with Social Democrats, it formed the government with the tacit support of the Communist party. Meanwhile, SPD has remained an opposition party, although it increased its votes to 10.6% in 2017. Thus, the Czech case shows that centrist-populist parties can become the largest parties under some circumstances, making it imperative to better understand what kind of welfare appeals such parties make.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse whether ANO and UPD's/SPD's welfare agendas helped them get voters' support. Rather than concentrate on the demand side, which would require an article in itself based on survey data, this article concentrates on the equally important supply side, conducting a qualitative content analysis of the election manifestos of four Czech political parties from the election years 2013 and 2017. We include two populist parties: the centrist-populist ANO and the right-wing populist UPD/SPD. We compare the key aspects of welfare state agendas of the populist parties with two traditional centre-left and centre-right parties in the Czech Republic.

¹ Regarding the classification of the Czech populist parties, see the following section.

The article is structured as follows: In the next section, we theorise about two key welfare dimensions: (1) the populist parties' welfare state objectives and (2) their deservingness criteria. Based on this discussion, we develop several hypotheses. Then, we explain our data and method of analysis, and in the fourth section, we present the findings. In the final section, we discuss the results and conclude the article.

Political populism and welfare state

The welfare state as a political card for populist parties

This article follows previous studies in defining populism as (1) a frame that sees people as a homogenous and pure entity (Mudde, 2007), (2) who suffer under a corrupt elite (Mudde, 2007), (3) during a period in which they claim a serious societal crisis exists (Rooduijn, 2014).

Supporters of right-wing populist and left-wing populist parties tend to come from the portions of the working class that are the losers of modernisation and globalisation processes (Betz, 1994; Kriesi et al., 2006; Kriesi, 2014; Spruyt et al., 2016). Meanwhile, centrist-populist supporters mostly come from the middle class (Heinisch & Saxonberg, 2017). Regardless of left-right orientation, populist voters tend to be concerned with the welfare state performance, although for different reasons. While losers of modernisation are interested in the redistributive programmes/functions of the welfare state, typical users of public social insurance schemes and public services comes from the middle class (e.g. Hill, 2003). Or, from the perspective of old versus new social risks challenges (e.g. Taylor-Gooby, 2004), the losers of modernisation support consumption/redistribution-oriented welfare, while the newly educated middle class supports social investment programmes (Abou-Chadi & Markus, 2019; Enggist & Piggera, 2021).

Some scholars also find that political disaffection with government policies increases support for populist parties (e.g. Mudde, 2007; Greve, 2019). Other studies conclude that contemporary populist parties in Western Europe want to maintain a generous welfare state, at a time when many mainstream parties advocate austerity measures (Afonso, 2015; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016).

These factors imply that populist parties have incentives to emphasise their welfare agendas. Centrist-populist parties declare themselves to be non-ideological (Pop-Eleches, 2010) and address a broader spectrum of voters than right-wing populist or left-wing populist parties by advocating generous social policies for distinct groups in different policy fields.

Studies have shown that disaffection, coupled with a lack of trust in traditional political parties in Central European post-communist countries, predicts support for populist parties (Havlík, 2019a; Hlousek et al., 2020). Pop-Eleches (2010) argues that protest voting is crucial for understanding the post-communist

electoral dynamic: In third-generation elections, which occur after at least two different ideological camps have governed in the post-communist era, voters face a shortage of untried mainstream alternatives and turn to populist parties, which typically come from the centre. Thus, populism may be a more general feature of certain political systems, particularly in contexts in which trust in political elites is low, such as in European post-communist countries, where confidence in traditional parties suffered because of political scandals, or where there is a general antipathy towards centralised and big governments (van Hauwaert & van Kessel, 2018, p. 70). Consequently, the anti-political technocratic discourse has become a common feature of Central and East European party systems.

Some populist parties claim that they can achieve better results for society by managing the state as a business, guaranteed by a non-party, non-political, competent administration. For this reason, some scholars have labelled these populist parties technocratic populist parties (Bušíková, 2019; Hanley & Vachudová, 2018; Havlík, 2019b; Vachudová, 2019). Others have labelled them entrepreneurial populists, claiming that the leaders do not base their arguments on the notion that they are the best-qualified technocrats; rather, they claim that since they are able to run a business efficiently, they would also be able to manage the state efficiently (Brunnerová, 2019; Hloušek et al., 2020; Heinisch & Saxonberg, 2017; Saxonberg & Heinisch, 2022). Although such populist parties declare themselves to be anti-political, they can still be classified based on their ideological stances (e.g. Rooduijn et al., 2019). In the Czech case, although both populist parties are entrepreneurial (Hloušek et al., 2020), scholars have labelled ANO as centrist populist (e.g. Havlík, 2019b; Saxonberg & Heinisch, 2022; Vachudová, 2019) and UPD/SPD (radical) as right populist (Rooduijn et al., 2019).

Welfare state dimensions: Populist accounts

We suggest that two welfare state dimensions related to political populism deserve the most attention: *welfare state objectives* and *deservingness criteria*. Some studies apply a similar approach for analysing the populist welfare agenda in that they focus on the principles of social justice (Ennsner-Jedenastik, 2018) or which groups receive benefits (Ennsner-Jedenastik, 2016). Our dimensions seem more suitable because policy objectives and deservingness criteria represent key policy choices in social policy (see the discussion below). At the same time, policy objectives are more concrete than social justice principles, while deservingness criteria imply that different groups will have different degrees of access to welfare provisions.

In conceptualising the potential welfare state objectives, we follow Barr and Whynes (1993), who distinguish several domains of objectives: (1) protection against social risks (including poverty alleviation, protection of living standards and income smoothing over the individual life cycle); (2) the elimination of social

Table 1. Welfare state objectives

<i>Social objectives</i>
1 Risk protection (protection against social risks, protection of accustomed living standard in the case of sickness, maternity, unemployment, old age, income smoothing over the life cycle)
2 Poverty alleviation (protection against falling below the recognised living standard)
3 Equal opportunities (equal access to institutions that leverage life opportunities, such as education, health care and employment)
4 Reducing inequalities (vertical and horizontal redistribution)
5 Social integration – risk sharing (building collectivity of risk, participation in one collective system of social protection, where people with high risks are included)
6 Social integration – targeted support for marginalised people; social inclusion
<i>Economic and administrative objectives (instrumental objectives)</i>
7 Economic efficiency:
Economic macro-efficiency (an efficient proportion of GDP allocated to social policy)
Economic micro-efficiency (efficient distribution of resources across policy fields corresponding to the urgency of needs)
8 Efficiency incentives:
Avoiding/minimising adverse incentives to work, to save to protect situations such as old age, illness
9 Administrative feasibility: intelligibility/smartness of the system (easy for citizens to understand the system, easy to administer the system), control over resources, effective use of resources (no wasting)

Source: Authors' own model based on Barr and Whynes (1993) and other literature cited above.

inequalities (vertical and horizontal redistribution); (3) social integration; (4) economic efficiency (which includes macro- and micro-efficiency and preserving incentives) and (5) administrative feasibility (which includes intelligibility/smartness and control over resources).

For our analysis, we have adapted Barr and Whynes's classification as follows: First, we treat poverty alleviation as a distinct objective, separate from risk protection, because poverty alleviation is the prime welfare state objective and the main criterion of welfare state effectiveness (Ringen, 1987). Second, we have included the objective of equal opportunities in our model since it represents one of guiding principles of social justice (Rawls, 1980) and is distinct from the objective of reducing inequalities through redistribution. Third, we have split the

social integration objective into two: risk sharing² (e.g. Baldwin, 1990) and social inclusion.

Thus, we distinguish the following *welfare state objectives*: (1) poverty alleviation, (2) risk protection, (3) equal opportunities, (4) reducing inequalities, (5) social integration/risk sharing, (6) social integration/social inclusion, (7) economic efficiency, (8) efficiency-incentives and (9) administrative feasibility. We consider the economic and administrative objectives (7, 8 and 9) to be instrumental ones; they underlie the effective achievement of the (main) social objectives. Our classification of the core welfare state objectives largely corresponds to recent debates on the fundamental policy choice between consumption-oriented policies (benefits) and social investments (education, employment policies, caring services) (see above). In our view, objectives 1, 2, 4 and 5 fall under consumption-oriented policies, while objectives 3 and 6 fall under social investments.

We summarise the welfare state objectives in Table 1.

Our second dimension is *deservingness*. In principle, there is a key policy choice between universalism (where welfare is a social right provided to all citizens³) and selectivism (where welfare is provided to groups that, according to some criteria, deserve it) (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990). When there is universal access to public goods, services and benefits, there are no deservingness criteria because everyone deserves the services and benefits; when access to services and benefits is selective, the distribution of these benefits and services is based on deservingness criteria. In our study, we employ the following deservingness criteria suggested by Van Oorschot (2006):

- 1) reciprocity: assessing people's level of contribution and whether they have earned support: the higher the contribution, the more deserving;
- 2) control: assessing people's control over their neediness and whether they are responsible for it: the less control, the more deserving;
- 3) need: the greater the need, the more deserving;
- 4) identity: the closer welfare claimants are to 'us', the more deserving;
- 5) attitude: assessing people's attitude towards support: the more compliant/docile welfare claimants are, the more deserving.

Enggist and Pinggera (2021) argue that universalism and particularism/selectivism comprise an essential dimension of populist voters' stances on the welfare state. They also associate universalism with support for social investments, while they associate particularism/selectivism with the backing for redistribution because redistribution implies the application of selectivist criteria.⁴

² Collective protection against social risks (building community of risks).

³ This may include preferential support in access to welfare targeted at disadvantaged groups.

⁴ Thus, there is apparently some correspondence between deservingness criteria and welfare state objectives. Since this is a complex issue, it is not a focus of this paper.

Studies suggest that the attitudes of the public toward deservingness shape support for different social groups (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018; van der Waal et al., 2013). Deservingness criteria matter the most to right/wing populist parties since these parties espouse an exclusionary ideology: They are explicitly nativist and authoritarian, and they want to exclude non-natives, 'ree riders' and those who do not meet certain criteria from welfare benefits (e.g. Afonso, 2015; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016, 2018). The right-wing populist party supports *welfare chauvinism* (Burgoon et al., 2019; Greve, 2019; Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018), which promotes the interests of the 'modal' citizen over 'outsiders' and the 'undeserving/lazy poor' and seeks to restrict welfare benefits to 'deserving' natives (Burgoon et al., 2019). However, for right-wing populist supporters, welfare state issues are subordinated to the cultural dimension and competition (e.g. Spruyt et al., 2016) and the general refusal to accept and support immigrants and ethnic minorities.

So far, little has been written about how centrist-populist parties design their WS objectives, policy measures, deservingness criteria and target groups. Heinisch and Saxonberg (2017) and Saxonberg and Heinisch (2022) argue that centrist-populist parties hold the political centre by combining leftist ideas (e.g. increased social benefits) with rightist ideas (e.g. capping tax rates). However, they further argue that in the Czech case, their catch-all style appeals to new middle-class voters (whom they define as professionals and clerks) with social-liberal attitudes. These voters would have preferred a social-liberal party, but in the absence of a viable social-liberal alternative, the centrist-populist party's centrist image appeals to them. To attract these voters, centrist-populist parties, unlike right-wing populist parties, do not single out specific social groups (e.g. immigrants or ethnic minorities) as 'undeserving'. While right-wing populist parties claim that they can improve economic efficiency because they are not corrupt like the traditional elite, centrist-populist leaders assert that they can improve efficiency because they could reform the bureaucracy to make state administration perform better.

Hypotheses

First, we expect that populist parties (especially centrist-populist) will emphasise the welfare state objectives of administrative feasibility and economic efficiency. Indeed, this strategy may be an important political tool used in accusing the ruling political elites for crises and ineffective policy-making: *the policy efficiency hypothesis* (H1).

If studies are correct in stating that centrist-populist parties appeal to middle-class, social-liberal voters (Heinisch & Saxonberg, 2017) or to a broad spectrum of voters (Brunnerová, 2019; Pop-Eleches, 2010), we can hypothesise that the Czech centrist-populist party will emphasise a range of societal policy objectives that address a broad spectrum of voters. This includes social integration through

risk sharing and social inclusion, risk protection and equal opportunities. Further, we expect the RWP party to support less encompassing policy objectives while favouring benefits for the traditional working class and the self-employed: *the centrist-populist encompassing objectives hypothesis* (H2).

Given their centrist position and reliance on social-liberal, middle-class voters, in addition to their support for some amount of universalism in access to welfare benefits and services, we also expect the centrist-populist party to support some deservingness considerations, based on liberal and neo-liberal notions of deservingness, such as reciprocity and possibly control. This is because centrist-populist parties turn to the median voter, who rejects support for alleged 'free riders' and other undeserving groups. Since centrist-populist parties also appeal somewhat to left-wing voters, we expect the centrist-populist party to strongly emphasise the need criterion, along with equal/universal access to some welfare provisions: *the centrist-populist compromised deservingness hypothesis* (H3).

Last, we expect right-wing populist party to favour a generous welfare state. However, they will want to limit social benefits to the insider groups, like natives, traditional families and working people, while excluding outsiders: *the right-wing populist exclusionism hypothesis* (H4).

Method and data

Our research question is as follows: *What types of social policies do the different types of populist parties (centrist-populist and right-wing populist) propose in the Czech Republic, and how do their proposals differ from those of the main non-populist parties?*

To answer this question, we conducted a qualitative content analysis of the election programmes of four political parties that took part in the Czech elections in 2013 and 2017. Previous studies have already classified ANO, UPD/SPD as populist (Rooduijn et al., 2019). We compared the centrist-populist party ANO with the social democratic party (ČSSD), which is the leading centre-left party in the country, because these parties compete for voters close to the political centre. Then, we compared the right-wing populist party UPD/SPD to the liberal-conservative ODS, which is the leading non-populist right-wing party in the country. We view election manifestos as diagnostic frames of social demands with strategic framing through which the voter can identify with the party (Caiani & Porta, 2012; Tsatsanis, 2011). Election manifestos give a clear overview over where a party stands at a certain point of time. Further, election manifestos are reasonably comparable across countries and over time (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). For this reason, we did not include other sources, such as speeches or press releases. Our approach is novel in that we examined the welfare state agenda of the populist parties in-depth while focussing systematically on two welfare state dimensions: objectives and deservingness. This allowed for a more systematic examination than the Party Manifesto Dataset, which only captures three general issues: WS

expansion of expenditure on the specified policy fields, equality in terms of protection of underprivileged groups and education expansion.

As noted in our theory section, we divided the policy dimensions into nine categories for objectives and six categories for deservingness criteria. We coded the proposals on social policy measures in each election programme and linked them to the pre-defined categories. Thus, each sentence in the election manifesto containing social policy proposal(s) was attributed to the specific policy objective(s) and deservingness criteria. In some cases, the policy proposal was attributed to more than one social policy objective and more than one deservingness criterion. Then, we counted the relative number of sentences (from all sentences) in which the specific social policy objectives and deservingness criteria appeared. We treated each sentence as a data unit of equal relevance. Thus, we did not subjectively assess the 'strength' of the statements to safeguard the reliability of our findings. Instead, in several cases we illustrated the wordings of the specific objectives and deservingness statements. We also performed a quantitative text analysis of the frequency of words associated with the central deservingness category *universalism* in the sentences on social policy proposals in order to discover the substance/contents of this category. The method of coding sentences according to pre-selected categories is common and has also been used in several studies exploring the profile of social policy in election manifestos of the populist parties, with categories including policy areas, social justice principles and targeted groups (e.g. Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016, 2018).

We conducted the analysis using axial coding, guided by the key dimensions and categories of the welfare state (see above). In total, we coded 4,001 sentences. To ensure the external validity of the coding, we had a second researcher involved in our project check the coding of the key sentences. In case of diverging views on coding the sentences, we discussed and agreed upon appropriate solutions.

The welfare agenda of Czech populist parties

Although the centre-left ČSSD emphasised welfare issues more than centrist-populist ANO in 2013 (19% of the sentences in its programme included social policy proposals compared to 16% for ANO), by 2017, social policy issues became more salient for ANO, with 21.5% of the sentences covering social policy proposals, compared to only 16% in ČSSD's programme. One reason for this shift could be that, in 2013, the opposition party emphasised more typical populist issues targeting the allegedly corrupt elite in 2013. After the elections, ANO joined the government coalition as the second largest party in terms of votes. It thus entered the 2017 race as one of the incumbent parties, which prompted it to emphasise socio-economic rather than anti-elite issues.

Surprisingly, the right-wing populist party (UPD) mentioned welfare policies more often (in 32% of sentences) than the centrist-populist party ANO and

the centre-left ČSSD in 2013 as well as the centre-right ODS party. In 2017, the percentage dropped to 18% of all sentences in the election programme of the successor party SPD, but it still slightly exceeded the centre-left ČSSD in this year. The right-wing populist party also clearly ranked higher than the non-populist right-wing ODS, with 32% compared to 13.5% of welfare-related sentences in 2013 and 18% compared to 10.5% of sentences in 2017, respectively.

H1: The policy efficiency hypothesis

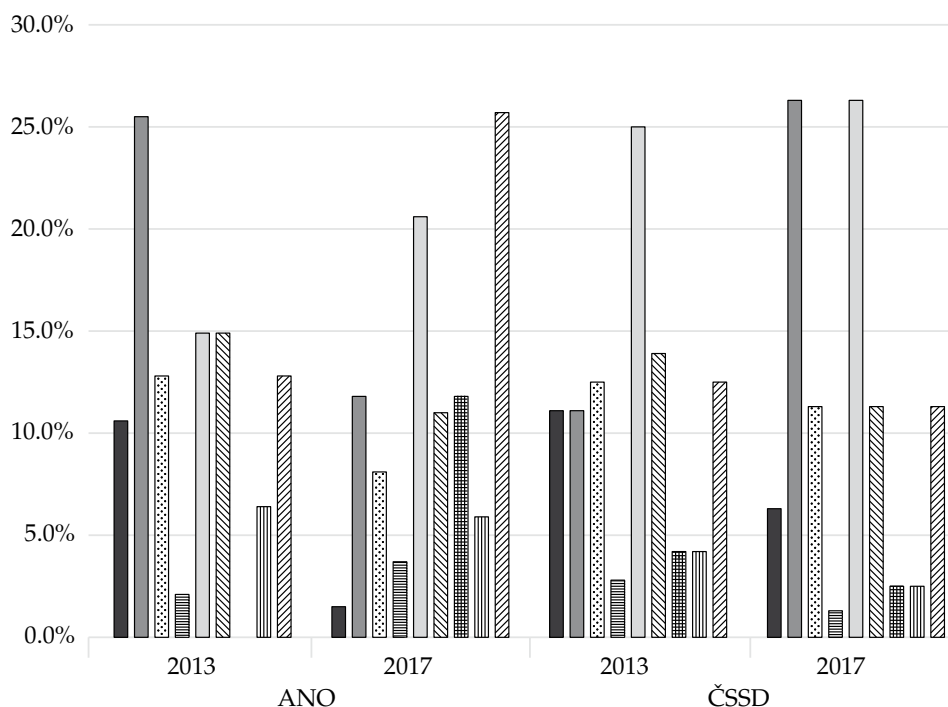
The specific feature of the welfare state agenda of centrist-populist ANO that connects social policy proposals with populism is the strong emphasis on administrative feasibility and economic objectives based on the entrepreneurial populist notion that if one can run a business successfully, then one can run the country efficiently like a business (Saxonberg & Heinisch, 2022). Second, we may associate this feature with anti-elitism, particularly with a strong critique of the allegedly incompetent traditional political parties and elites. Thus, the party's main slogan in the 2013 election campaign was 'We are not like the politicians: we work!'

Most importantly, as shown in Figure 1, ANO increased its emphasis on economic efficiency (18% of sentences in the election programme in 2017 include relevant proposals on social policy issues compared to 6.5% in 2013). While the percentage of sentences dealing with economic efficiency increased for ANO, it decreased for the ČSSD, which devoted 8% of its sentences on social policy to dealing with economic efficiency in 2013 (slightly more than ANO's 6.5%), decreasing to 5% in 2017 (which is less than 1/3 as much as ANO's 18%).

Regarding administrative feasibility, a similar picture emerges. ANO increased its emphasis from 13% of all sentences dealing with social policy in 2013 to 26% in 2017. In comparison, ČSSD's emphasis on administrative feasibility was similar to ANO's in 2013 at 12.5%, but it decreased slightly to 11% in 2017, which is much less than half of ANO's total for that year.

Similar to centrist-populist ANO, the right-wing populist UPD/SPD gave increasing attention to the objectives of efficiency and administrative feasibility in its electoral programme. The welfare state objective that the SPD mentioned the most in 2017 was economic efficiency (in 34.5% of all sentences on social policy), mainly by strengthening economic incentives (31% of sentences on social policy). Administrative feasibility was another aim of the proposals: both in 2013 and 2017, 14% of all sentences on social policy in the UPD/SPD election programmes addressed administrative feasibility or smartness. Interestingly, the SPD took the agenda of economic efficiency from ODS, especially in supporting economic incentives, which is a traditional right-wing issue.

Meanwhile, ODS increased its emphasis on economic efficiency from 10% of all sentences containing social policy proposals in 2013 to 19.5% in 2017. However, this was still only slightly more than half of SPD's total. It also increased

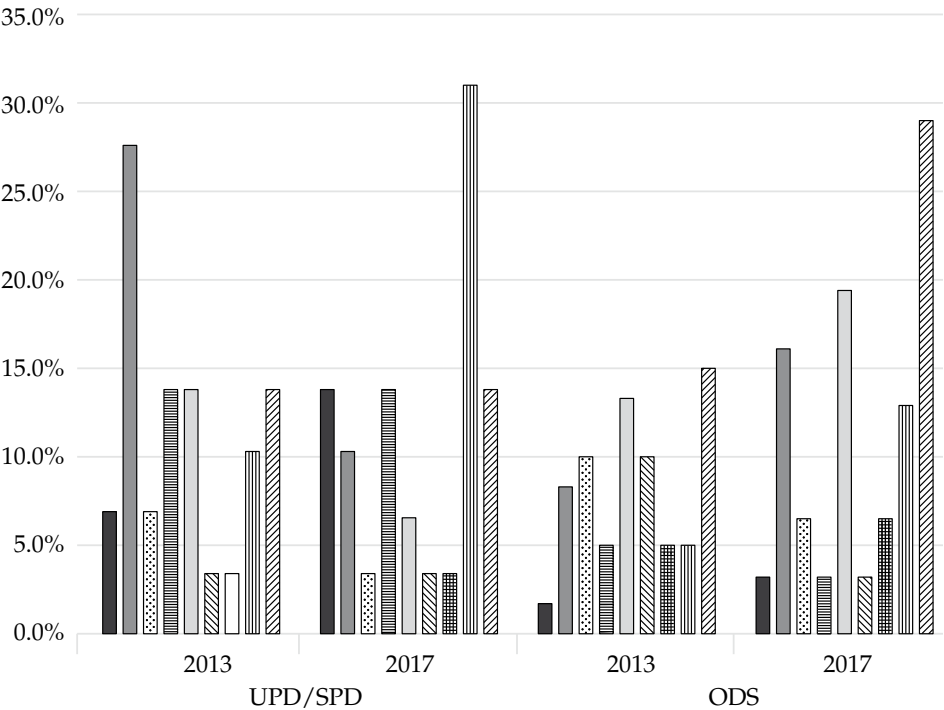
Figure 1. Social policy objectives (ANO and ČSSD)

	ANO		ČSSD	
	2013	2017	2013	2017
■ Poverty alleviation	10.6%	1.5%	11.1%	6.3%
■ Risk Protection	25.5%	11.8%	11.1%	26.3%
▨ Equal Opportunity	12.8%	8.1%	12.5%	11.3%
■ Reducing Inequality	2.1%	3.7%	2.8%	1.3%
□ Social integration – risk sharing	14.9%	20.6%	25.0%	26.3%
▨ Social Integration	14.9%	11.0%	13.9%	11.3%
■ Efficiency	0.0%	11.8%	4.2%	2.5%
▨ Efficiency – Incentives	6.4%	5.9%	4.2%	2.5%
▨ Feasibility/Smartness	12.8%	25.7%	12.5%	11.3%

Source: Authors' analysis of the election manifestos.

Note: In per cent of all sentences dealing with social policy.

Figure 2. Social policy objectives (UPD/SPD and ODS)



	UPD/SPD		ODS	
	2013	2017	2013	2017
■ Poverty alleviation	6.9%	13.8%	1.7%	3.2%
■ Risk Protection	27.6%	10.3%	8.3%	16.1%
▨ Equal Opportunity	6.9%	3.4%	10.0%	6.5%
■ Reducing Inequality	13.8%	13.8%	5.0%	3.2%
□ Social integration – risk sharing	13.8%	6.9%	13.3%	19.4%
▨ Social Integration	3.4%	3.4%	10.0%	3.2%
■ Efficiency	3.4%	3.4%	5.0%	6.5%
▨ Efficiency - Incentives	10.3%	31.0%	5.0%	12.9%
▨ Feasibility/Smartness	13.8%	13.8%	15.0%	29.0%

Source: Authors’ analysis of the election manifestos.
Note: In percent of all sentences dealing with social policy.

its emphasis on administrative feasibility. In 2013, 15% of sentences containing social policy proposals dealt with administrative feasibility, which was slightly more than UPD/SPD. However, in 2017 this increased to 29%, more than twice as much as the right-wing populist party. This reflects the right-wing promise to slim down the state and increase efficiency (see Figure 2).

SPD connects economic efficiency and administrative feasibility objectives with the other welfare state objectives to protect the 'common people'. According to the UPD (2013), 'We don't want an expensive and non-functional social system but a system supportive to all clean-living/well-mannered people: seniors, families with children, physically handicapped and children at risk of poverty.'

The *policy efficiency hypothesis* holds somewhat. The emphasis on economic and administrative feasibility increased the most for the right-wing ODS (to 48.5% of all sentences on social policy) and right-wing populist UPD/SPD (to 48% of all sentences). Centrist-populist ANO was slightly behind (at 43.5%), clearly outpacing ČSSD (16.3%). It seems that right-wing ideology matters somewhat more than populist appeals regarding the promises of an efficient and effective welfare state.

H2: The centrist-populist encompassing objectives hypothesis

Comprehensive coverage of social welfare state objectives is a unique feature of centrist-populist ANO's election programme. This comprehensive coverage is reflected in the party's emphasis on social integration through risk sharing (15% of all sentences on policy proposals in 2013 and 21.5% in 2017), social integration through social inclusion (15% of sentences on social policy proposals in 2013 and 11% in 2017), risk protection (25.5% of all sentences in 2013 and 12% in 2017) and equal opportunities (13% of sentences in 2013 and 8% in 2017). Thus, in 2017, three social objectives scored above 10%, and one of them was above 20%. In 2017, ČSSD placed greater emphasis than ANO on these: Risk protection comprised 26% of social policy sentences compared to 12% for ANO; social inclusion through risk sharing comprised 26% of all social policy sentences compared to 21% for ANO; and equal opportunities comprised 11% compared to 8% for ANO. Meanwhile, support for social integration through social inclusion accounted for 11% of all social policy sentences for both parties in 2017. Thus, in 2017, for ČSSD, five social objectives scored above 10%, and two of them were above 20% (see Figure 1). However, ANO placed greater emphasis on social objectives than either UPD/SPD or ODS. ODS constantly emphasised risk sharing (13% of sentences in 2013 and 19% in 2017) and risk protection (8% of sentences in 2013 and 16% in 2017). Meanwhile, the party decreased its emphasis on social integration through social inclusion, falling from 10% of sentences in 2013 to 3% in 2017. Thus, only two social objectives scored above 10% in 2017.

As expected, right-wing populist UPS/SPD was more concerned with social objectives than right-wing mainstream ODS. Meanwhile, SPD focussed on

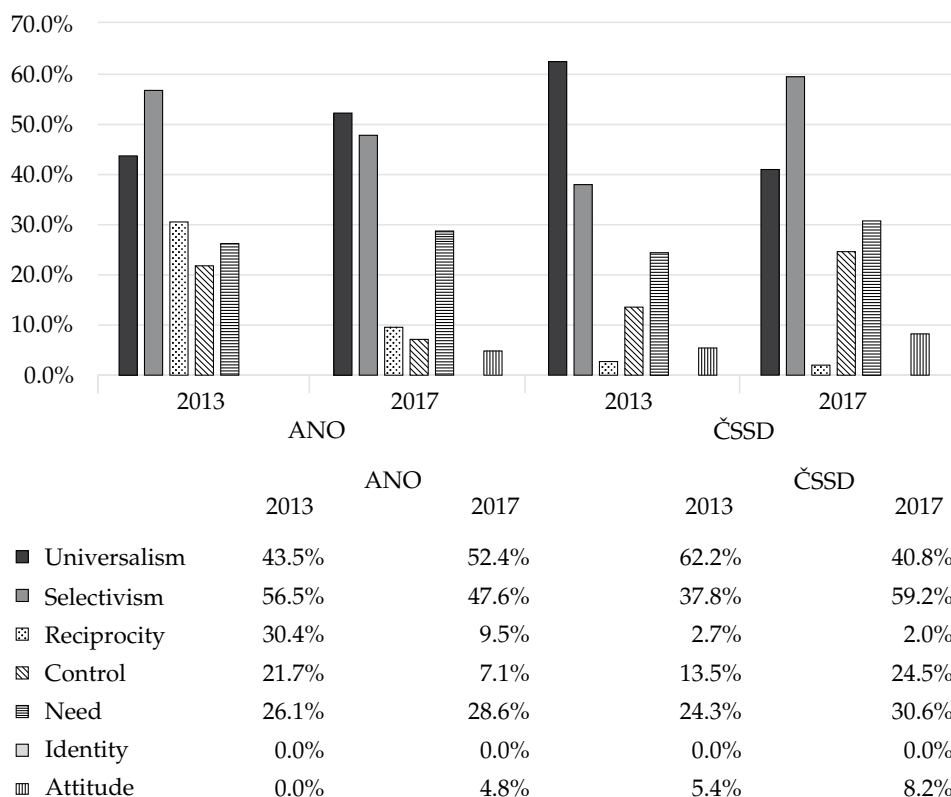
social consumption-related redistributive objectives. Consequently, it increased its emphasis on poverty alleviation from 7% of sentences in 2013 to 14% in 2017. Meanwhile, its objective of reducing inequalities remained stable at 14% of sentences. The objective of risk protection dropped from 28% of sentences in 2013 to 10% due to its increased emphasis on the instrumental objectives; three of the social objectives scored 10% or more in 2017 (see Figure 2).

In summary, the *centrist-populist encompassing objectives* hypothesis partly holds when comparing centrist-populist ANO (and right-wing UPD/SPD) to the right-wing ODS. Centre-left ČSSD emphasised social objectives the most due to its ideological position.

H3: Centrist-populist compromised deservingness hypothesis

Regarding deservingness, ANO strongly emphasised universal access to welfare state provisions and services in 2017 (in 52% of sentences dealing with social policy proposals), which was even more than in its 2013 election programme (43.5%). Its emphasis on universal access, particularly on the provision of public goods (see below), was stronger than ČSSD's in 2017 (52% for ANO compared to 41% for ČSSD), which is surprising since social democratic parties are usually the main advocates of universalism. At the same time, ANO applied a selective approach to welfare state provisions to some extent, although it did not use exclusionist criteria. Instead, ANO often used the deservingness criterion of need, for example, in its proposals to improve specialised services for the disabled and foster care for endangered children (in 26% of sentences on policy proposals in 2013 and 28.5% in 2017). In contrast, it decreased its emphasis on reciprocity between 2013 and 2017 (from 30.5% to 9.5% of sentences on social policy proposals) in proposals like the guarantee of a minimum pension for individuals who contributed and financial advantages rewarding childcare in the pension system, with an emphasis on control (from 22% of sentences on social policy proposals to 7%). In contrast, ČSSD's 2017 election programme was less orientated than ANO's on universal provision (ČSSD's mentioning of universalism decreased from 62% to 41% between 2013 and 2017). Instead, it aimed more at the 'needy' groups in society (see Figure 3).

Similar to ANO, ČSSD strongly stressed the need criterion (in 24% of sentences on policy proposals in 2013 and 31% in 2017). But, in contrast to ANO, it did not prioritise reciprocity, mentioning it in only 3% of sentences on policy proposals in 2013 and 2% in 2017. This was considerably less than ANO (10%). In contrast to what we would expect from a social-democratic party, ČSSD increased its emphasis on control from 13.5% of sentences on policy proposals to 24.5% between 2013 and 2017, applying it even more frequently than the right-wing populist UPD/SPD and centre-right ODS (see Figure 4). In conclusion, ANO seems to have a more even balance than ČSSD between universalism and selectivism, which enables the party to gain support from centrist, left-wing and right-wing voters.

Figure 3. Deservingness in the policy proposals (ANO and ČSSD)

Source: Authors' analysis of the election manifestos.

Note: In percent of all sentences dealing with social policy.

ANO's increased emphasis on universalism in 2017 represented a significant shift in the party's election programme. We analysed specific aspects of ANO's universalism using quantitative text analysis (in WordStat) and identified the most frequent words in sentences coded as associated with universalism in the ANO's and ČSSD's election programmes (see Annex) and their patterns. ANO's universalism seems to be all-encompassing. First, ANO effectively covers some of the key traditional centre-left social democratic issues. It stresses the provision of public goods by the state using words like 'services', 'care', 'health-care' and 'education'. ANO associates universalism with the role of the state and with streamlining the system. At the same time, ANO's universalism is related to managerial competence promises, as indicated by words such as 'development',

‘financing’, ‘management’, ‘investment’, ‘state’ and ‘system’. This pattern was similar in 2013. However, in 2017 it increased its emphasis on management and investment. Briefly, ANO addresses themes that appeal to centrist voters with social-liberal preferences by emphasising its competence in managing, financing and developing a social system that can become more generous without raising taxes. Yet, at the same time, the party supports the centre-left theme of state responsibility for providing public goods.

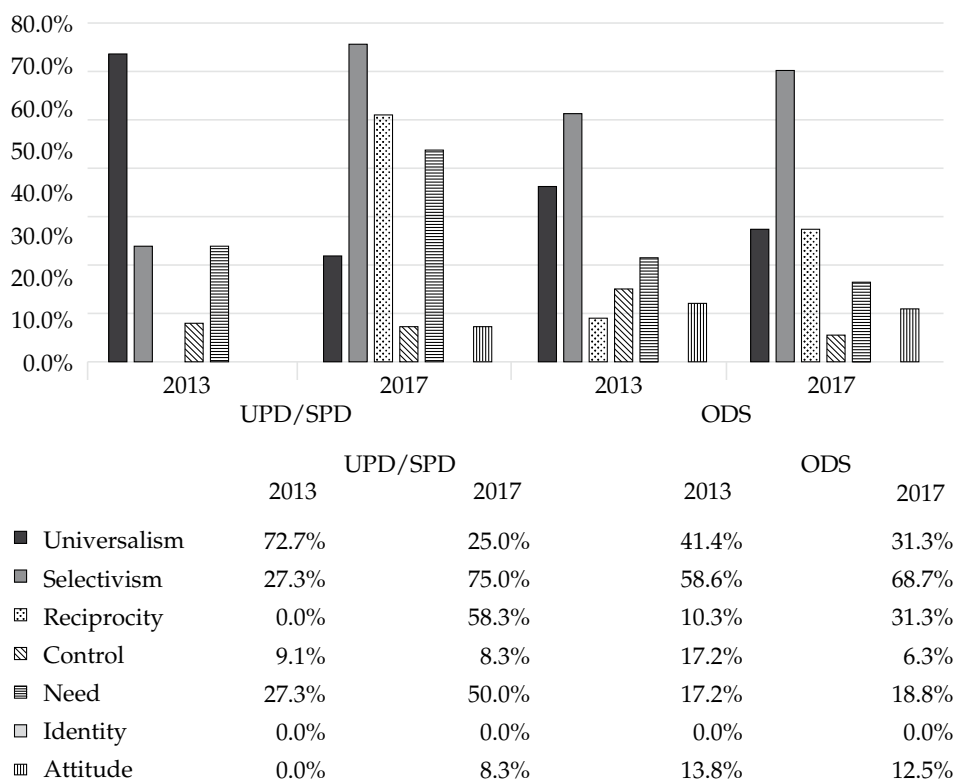
ČSSD is also somewhat supportive of universalist policies, but not as much as ANO. Additionally, ČSSD is much less concerned about the issue of managerial competency. Rather, it focusses more closely on specific subsystems related to public goods provision. Left-wing values are indicated by the words ‘work’, ‘wages’, ‘growth’, ‘quality (of services)’, ‘housing’ and ‘taxes.’ In 2013, the pattern was similar; only the party’s stress on the quality of social services increased, while its stress on financing decreased in 2017. This means that ANO, more than the centre-left ČSSD, aims to address the middle-class preference for an efficient welfare state based on effective management, financing and social investments as well as accessibility of public goods and services for all, while ČSSD is more concerned with services than making the welfare state more efficient. ANO is less concerned with all left-wing topics, such as work accessibility and conditions, wages, housing and quality of services. However, it appeals to left-wing voters by promising universal access to public goods (see Table 1 in Annex).

A somewhat surprising finding is that in 2017, centrist-populist ANO had a greater emphasis than the centre-left ČSSD on universalism. The reason might be that ANO saw an opportunity to gain left-wing oriented ČSSD supporters when the social democrats started imploding. This assumption is consistent with Sax-onberg and Heinisch’s (2022) suggestion that entrepreneurial populist parties do not have a clear ideology but look for political openings. In the Czech Republic, this opening was in the centre in 2013, and in 2017 it also included parts of the centre-left.

H4: The exclusionism hypothesis⁵

We would expect right-wing populist parties to be much more exclusionist than mainstream or centrist-populist parties, particularly because of their tendency toward welfare chauvinism. Right-wing populist UPD/SPD has moved in an increasingly market-liberal direction in its social policy proposals. Whereas 73% of its sentences on social policy proposals in 2013 promoted universalist policies, in 2017, an even greater percentage (75%) promoted selectivist policies. Among selectivist proposals, need was previously the most important, but it has recently been surpassed by reciprocity. Need was the guiding criterion for 27% (2013) and

⁵ Excluding ‘undeserving’ outsider groups from welfare (see the theoretical assumptions).

Figure 4. Desevingness in the policy proposals (UPD/SPD and ODS)

Source: Authors' analysis of the election manifestos.

Note: In percent of all sentences dealing with social policy.

50% (2017) of sentences on social policy proposals (remember that some sentences contained more than one welfare objective, which is why the total is more than 100%). The following is an example of the SPD's emphasis on need:

We will significantly increase the lowest pensions. We will ensure regular indexation of the minimum wage, depending on average wage growth... We will ... prepare an act that will retrospectively release citizens from the portion of their debt accumulated by usury/loan-sharking. (SPD 2017)

Reciprocity radically increased from 0% of sentences on social policy proposals in 2013 to 58% in 2017: 'Money to working families and pensioners. We sup-

port decreasing the retirement age depending on the number of properly raised children' (SPD 2017). In contrast, the control criterion only appeared in 8–9% of sentences on social policy proposals in both 2013 and 2017. The attitude criterion did not appear in any sentences on social policy proposals in 2013 and in only 8% of sentences in 2017. Actually, SPD social policy proposals represent a mixture of selective and universalist measures to support disadvantaged population groups based on the need criterion, but combined with the criteria of reciprocity and/or control (see Figure 4).

There are no measures based on nativism evidenced in UPD/SPD's social policy proposals, although this is one of the main features of right-wing populism. The reason for this is probably that the UPD/SPD does not need to employ welfare chauvinism since the party promises to halt all illegal immigration. The UPD/SPD welfare policies are not strongly exclusionary. The explicit exclusion of outsider groups based on the criteria of identity and control rarely appears related to the objectives of economic efficiency and administrative feasibility (see hypothesis 1). In 2013, the socially excluded—a term that is mainly linked to Roma in public policy discourse in the Czech Republic—were the subject of one exclusivist proposal, based on the identity criterion: 'We reject enforced social inclusion: the same money invested in the socially excluded children must also be invested in gifted children' (UPD 2013). In SPD's 2017 election programme, one proposal was exclusionary, based on the control criterion, targeting the unemployed who do not genuinely seek a job (SPD 2017).

ODS has placed greater emphasis on selectivism than UPD/SPD. In 2013, ODS devoted 58.5% of its sentences on social policy proposals to selectivism, compared to 27% for UPD. In 2017, the percentage increased to 69% for ODS, compared to 58% for the SPD (a successor of UPD). ODS has also paid much less attention than UPD/SPD to need, devoting 17% of sentences on social policy proposals to this criterion in 2013, compared to 27% for UPD. By 2017, it only increased its emphasis slightly to 19%, which was much less than SPD's 50%. Meanwhile, control was more important for ODS than for UPD/SPD in 2013, accounting for 17% of all sentences on social policy proposals, compared with only 8–9% for the UPD/SPD. However, its importance for ODS declined to 6% in 2017, thus dropping below the level of importance assigned to it by UPD/SPD (for whom it remained stable at 8–9% of sentences). In contrast, reciprocity became much more important for ODS policy proposals⁶, increasing from 10% to 31% of sentences on social policy proposals, although still behind UPD/SPD (see above). ODS appears to be more neo-liberal when we also use the criterion of attitude (14% of sentences on policy proposals in 2013 and 12.5% in 2017) (see Figure 4).

⁶ Like tax relief and direct rewards for informal carers related to the elderly and the possibility to contribute from pension social insurance payments to one's parent's pension.

Conclusions and discussion

Our findings partly confirm hypothesis 1: centrist-populist ANO places substantial weight on both administrative feasibility and economic efficiency objectives compared to the centre-left ČSSD, which could be an expression of entrepreneurial populism. In 2017, right-wing populist SPD out-scored ANO when it increased its focus on instrumental objectives by placing greater emphasis on economic efficiency. However, the mainstream right-wing ODS emphasises instrumental objectives as much as SPD. This corresponds to the right-wing ideology of a lean and cheap state.

Hypothesis 2 holds partly as well. In its programme, the centrist-populist ANO advocates comprehensive coverage of welfare state objectives. It emphasises redistributive measures less than does the centre-left ČSSD, but, similar to ČSSD, it also emphasises social integration through risk sharing and social inclusion as well as equal access/opportunity. It does so to attract voters from the political centre—including those on the centre-left. ANO thus addresses all social groups when emphasising instrumental objectives. Moreover, its coverage of social objectives is more comprehensive than that of right-wing populist UPD/SPD and the right-wing ODS. Meanwhile, UPD/SPD emphasises poverty alleviation and the reduction of inequalities more than ČSSD, as the right-wing populism targets voters from the lower classes and those dissatisfied with current social policies.

Hypothesis 3 holds well: centrist-populist ANO balances universalist measures that address most of the population with selective measures that target specific population groups. ANO stresses the criteria of need and reciprocity while giving less focus to the criterion of control, and it does not advocate excluding some groups from welfare provisions. Rather, it wants to make welfare policies more effective (through better management, improving incentives and eliminating the misuse of public finance). In 2017, ANO increased its emphasis on universalism and social policy issues in general, which it linked to its managerial competence. This strategy probably developed by identifying a political opportunity to attract former ČSSD voters when the social democrats imploded. The other reason might be that ANO entered the government coalition in 2013, so being part of government made it more difficult to promote an anti-elitist or anti-system attitude. Therefore, the party highlighted welfare issues more in 2017.

Hypothesis 4 partly holds. Right-wing populist SPD's welfare state agenda is exclusivist to some extent, as it distinguishes between the deserving and undeserving based on the criteria of reciprocity, control and attitude. However, contrary to expectations, welfare chauvinism does not appear in its programme. It also focusses on aid for disadvantaged and deserving groups of citizens based on the need criteria.

In summary, in the 2013 and 2017 elections, both populist parties pushed their welfare state agendas forward and linked them to their populist appeals. They achieved more balance between the instrumental objectives of economic

efficiency and administrative feasibility on the one hand and social objectives on the other hand, compared to the mainstream left-wing and right-wing parties. Centrist-populist ANO also out-scored the centre-left ČSSD in the universalism category. Our findings support Saxonberg and Heinisch's (2022) assumption that the entrepreneurial populist ANO saw a political opening in the centre in the Czech Republic and tried to appeal to voters with social-liberal welfare attitudes.

Meanwhile, UPD/SPD accentuates the need criterion while avoiding exclusionism. The right-wing populist party turned to the losers of modernisation, emphasising the principle of need. It combined need with the objectives of efficiency (mainly economic incentives) and reciprocity, which are traditionally right-wing stances. The party seeks support from modernisation losers with rightist views. Thus, Czech populist parties try to address broader segments of voters than their mainstream competitors, although they do not necessarily score higher in addressing the voters in any single dimension or subdimension (objectives—instrumental, social; deservingness).⁷

We have found that populist parties strongly emphasised the welfare agenda in their election programmes in 2013 and 2017. In 2017, this emphasis was stronger than for the centre-left ČSSD and right-wing ODS. During these years, there was a considerable flow of voters from left-wing parties to populist parties. According to Škop (2017), 360,000 ČSSD voters and 200,000 Communist party voters switched to ANO during the 2017 elections. Similarly, around 120,000 voters switched from the Communists, and around 70,000 voters switched from the Social Democrats to the SPD between 2013 and 2017. Left-wing parties suffered considerable losses to populist parties (see also Brunnerová, 2019). More research is necessary to determine the role of the welfare state agenda in populist parties gaining electoral support.

Since this article only analyses one country, further studies are needed to ascertain the extent to which our findings can be generalised to centrist-populist and right-wing populist parties cross-nationally, especially since the ideologies and programmes of populist parties vary depending on the national context. We are considering writing a follow-up article, which would include the 2021 elections, where ANO lost to a coalition of centre-right parties. ANO remained the single largest party in this election, and the SPD succeeded in keeping its position in parliament, in contrast to both the ČSSD and Communist Party, which failed to reach the 5% threshold.

⁷ On the importance of multidimensionality in understanding populism, see Wutke, Schimpf, and Schoen (2000).

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Annex

Table 1. Occurrence of 20 most frequent words associated with the category ‘universalism’ (absolute and relative count of words in sentences associated with universalism, weighted percentage)

ČSSD	Count	Weighted percentage (%)	ANO	Count	Weighted percentage (%)
Work	32	0.39	Development	47	0.31
Social	30	0.36	Services (genitive case)	46	0.30
Quality (adjective)	29	0.35	State	43	0.28
Care (genitive case)	27	0.33	Care (genitive case)	40	0.27
Services (genitive case)	26	0.31	All (genitive case)	36	0.24
Development	25	0.30	Financing	34	0.23
Wages	23	0.28	State (genitive case)	34	0.23
System	23	0.28	System (genitive case)	29	0.19
People	22	0.26	Healthcare	28	0.19
Care (accusative case)	21	0.25	Services	27	0.18
Healthcare	21	0.25	All (accusative case)	27	0.18
To all	20	0.24	Work	25	0.17
Life (adjective)	20	0.24	System	25	0.17
Growth	19	0.23	Management	25	0.17
All (accusative case)	19	0.23	Children	23	0.15
State	18	0.22	State (adjective)	23	0.15
Health (adjective)	18	0.22	Investments	23	0.15
Housing	17	0.20	Education	22	0.15
Taxes	16	0.19	Culture	20	0.13
Services	16	0.19	Citizens (accusative case)	20	0.13

Source: ČSSD and ANO election programmes, own coding and computations.

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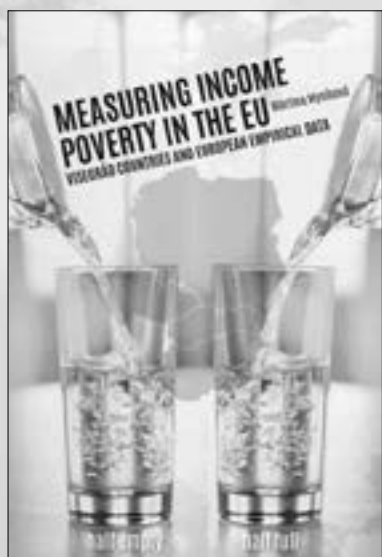
MEASURING INCOME POVERTY IN THE EU: VISEGRÁD COUNTRIES AND EUROPEAN EMPIRICAL DATA

Martina Mysíková

This book recapitulates the methodology of income poverty measurement applied in the EU and provides statistics and outlines the characteristics of the poor in Visegrád countries, and includes appendices with results

for EU countries. After introducing the data, which is drawn from EU-SILC 2005-2018 and HBS 2010, the main analytical chapter focuses on methodological issues connected to measuring income poverty in a European context, with a focus on the suitability of the currently applied equivalence scales. The sensitivity of the at-risk-of-poverty rate to the OECD-type equivalence scale differs across countries. If the equivalence scale applied does not fit national conditions well, resulting income poverty rates may fail to accurately inform social policies, especially in countries with high sensitivity. Two sets of county-specific equivalence scales are estimated in this work: an expenditure-based scale using HBS data and a subjective equivalence scale based on subjective poverty lines and EU-SILC data. The book discusses the impacts of the

estimated scales on income poverty rates and provides alternative subjective income poverty measures, which can usefully supplement objective income poverty data.



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Manoeuvring towards Success: Reconstruction of the State and Its Effective Campaign Countering Corruption and State Capture*

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Abstract: In the period from 2013 to 2017, the Czech Parliament passed five bills against corruption. A civil initiative called Reconstruction of the State was heavily involved in the process. Before the 2013 elections, the initiative prompted the candidates running for an MP mandate to publicly commit to supporting selected legislation proposals. The initiative used a variety of advocacy and campaign tactics to support passing the bills after the elections. This paper uses process tracing to answer the following research questions: (1) What path led to this success?, (2) Is there sufficient evidence about the actual role of the initiative in seeing the proposals passed by the Parliament? and (3) What has determined the initiative's advocacy decisions? The first research question is treated descriptively, focusing on the key milestones in this historically unique advocacy campaign. To answer the second question, we conducted a non-formal counterfactual assessment of whether the absence of the initiative would have resulted in passing fewer proposals. This is important for evaluating civil society's potential to effectively influence the political process. Finally, in answering the third question, we show that advocacy tactics have markedly changed throughout the Reconstruction of the State campaign. Building on this observation, we argue that tactics are not only policy- or campaign-specific but also change within a single case.

Keywords: advocacy campaign, state capture, anti-corruption, transparency, civil society, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)

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Introduction

In the past decade, the supposedly weak civil society of post-communist countries has been mobilised against corruption. In 2011, unions protested corruption in Prague. In February 2017, the world watched massive rallies in Romania against corruption, and just two months later, anti-corruption protests on the streets of Slovakia once again drew international attention.

In the meantime, an initiative called Reconstruction of the State (hereafter ReSt) was extremely successful in setting the agenda for the Parliamentary election campaign in 2013 and persuading politicians to publicly pledge their support for nine anti-corruption legislative proposals. In the run-up to the elections and the subsequent four-year electoral period, ReSt advocacy workers managed to follow the bills through the legislation process and see that five of them passed. This case study shows how civil society in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) can fight corruption and promote government transparency, even without large mass mobilisations. We use process tracing to provide a detailed account of the ReSt initiative and how its strategic decisions contributed to the campaign's success. The overarching theoretical goal of this paper is to analytically connect the structural level of political opportunities (McAdam & Tarrow, 2018) with the activists' agency to deliver a complex understanding of this historically important case.

Specifically, we strive to answer three related research questions: (1) What path led to the advocacy success?, (2) Is there sufficient evidence about the actual role of the initiative in seeing the proposals passed by the Parliament? and (3) What has determined the initiative's advocacy decisions? The first research question is treated descriptively, focusing on the key milestones in the advocacy process. The initiative achieved high visibility, and its proclaimed goals were in large part fulfilled, which makes it an important and possibly inspirational case deserving detailed description. To answer the second question, we conducted a non-formal counterfactual assessment of whether the absence of the initiative would have resulted in passing fewer proposals. This is important for evaluating civil society's potential to effectively influence the political process. Finally, in answering the third question, we show that advocacy tactics have markedly changed throughout the Reconstruction of the State campaign. Building on this observation, we argue that tactics are not only policy-specific but also change within a single case. This, among other things, has implications for comparative research discussed in the conclusion. In the discussion, we also link this case to broader considerations about the post-1989 development of civil society in the Czech Republic (and, to some extent, CEE in general).

The case: Reconstruction of the State

ReSt was publicly announced in March 2013 as an anti-corruption initiative of then 19 NGOs. Before going public, the initiative had selected nine proposals that

it deemed should be implemented in Czech legislation to limit corruption and state capture opportunities. Their original idea was to pressure the government to pass these proposals before the next election, which was due to take place in May 2014. However, this approach was compromised after a governmental crisis that resulted in the elections being brought forward. The ReSt quickly changed their plans and addressed the politicians who were running for election with a novel offer: as candidates, they could pledge to support the initiative's nine anti-corruption proposals if they were elected. In return, ReSt would endorse them in the election campaign. If, however, they chose not to pledge their support for the proposals, ReSt would label them with a derogatory 'blah blah' (*bla bla* in Czech, indicating empty talking and no willingness to action) in a pre-election flyer that was to be distributed to Czech households, and hence undermine their position in the election campaign.

This confrontational strategy was effective. More than 1,500 of the almost 6,000 candidates signed the pledge. When the ballots were counted and the new Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament established, 157 of the total 200 MPs were bound by their pre-election pledge to support the anti-corruption proposals. Before the end of the election term in October 2017, five of the proposals were, indeed, passed¹.

Within Czech civil society, the initiative has become a leader in advocacy

¹ This is a brief and simplified summary of the bills supported by ReSt which were passed in the 2013–2017 electoral period: (1) Amendment to the law of political parties (no. 424/1991). This amendment made it obligatory for political parties to have transparent bank accounts. It also introduced some other regulations concerning how political parties are financed and established an office to control political parties' economic activities. (2) Amendment to the law of conflicts of interest (no. 159/2006). This amendment required about 50,000 politicians and civil servants to file an inventory of their property not only on 30th June each year, but newly also upon taking up office. The amendment also established a single database run by the Ministry of Justice to administer these files. (In the past, the property inventories had been dispersed across thousands of physical offices). (3) Law establishing an electronic register of governmental contracts (no. 340/2015). This law ordered that all contracts entered into by the state and public institutions be published in an open online register. (4) Law of transparency (no. 134/2013). This law abolished anonymous stocks and shares. This one law was passed already before the 2013 elections in the run-up to it. (5) Amendment to Parliamentary law (no. 90/1995). This amendment helped to make the legislative process more transparent and hence prevent so-called legislative add-ons, an infamous practice used in the past by which last minute legislation changes were added on to unrelated legislation. Furthermore, the following proposals were also strived for by the initiative, but were NOT passed: (1) De-politicizing the appointment process for state-owned companies' supervisory boards. (2) Making public administration more independent from politicians (the corresponding bill was passed but in a form that the initiative considered not in line with the original pledge and inadequate for the anti-corruption purposes it was meant to serve). (3) Bolstering the independence of public prosecutors to prevent political interference in investigations. (4) Extending the powers of the Supreme Audit Office.

know-how and several other platforms, and even at least two foreign initiatives (from Hungary and Slovakia) have consulted with ReSt and had their own approaches informed by the initiative's strategy. ReSt could easily be considered one of the current benchmarks of the extent to which civil society actors can enter the political process and exert influence in Czechia. In this sense, the case study sheds new light on the potential outcomes of civil society capacity-building in new democracies.

Theoretical framework

Corruption and state capture

Zakaria (2013) suggested that in CEE in particular, corruption may explain low levels of social trust and an overall malaise in the societies. Despite efforts to curb corruption in CEE, scholars express doubt about the effects of anti-corruption measures, speaking of *'poor, if any, enforcement of the existing laws and norms'* (Kotchegura, 2004, p. 140), and referring to the target population's insufficient compliance with the laws (Batory, 2012; Falkner & Treib, 2008). While such analysis may be correct, an important conceptual distinction is in place: First, scholars including Batory and Kotchegura often address everyday *'street-level'* corruption: bills targeting *'the citizenry as a whole'* (Batory, 2012, p. 68) or ground-level officials, limiting the opportunities for bribery among policemen etc. (Kotchegura, 2004). Second, the proposals advocated by ReSt all target those in political office and those who might try to corrupt them. The distinction between laws targeting the *'citizenry as a whole'* and laws targeting political elites and government institutions loosely parallels the distinction between corruption in general and state capture. While corruption can be conceptualised very broadly, state capture is a more nuanced concept, which does not just mean widespread corruption. *'Rather, its essence lies in a distinct network structure in which corrupt actors cluster around parts of the state allowing them to act collectively in pursuance of their private goals to the detriment of the public good.'* (Fazekas & Tóth, 2016, p. 320). Specifically, Czechia represents a case where powerful firms and business groups have tended to seize control of the state and shape the political environment so as to extract rents, often at high costs for the society. Analysing the Czech case, Innes described this as *'corporate state capture'*, which *'intensified as the rents available from privatization dried up and this shrinking market encouraged political parties and their established business networks to turn to state-based opportunities'* (Innes, 2014, p. 100). State capture is linked to a lack of administrative independence from political pressure (Innes, 2014) and can be countered by increasing transparency and empowering civil society (Hellman et al., 2000). On the other hand, petty corruption may be explained by the low likelihood that perpetrators are reported, the absence of positive incentives for reporting such incidents, and ambiguous social norms concerning corruption (Batory, 2012).

Civil society in CEE

Post-communist civil societies have been labelled as weak and are marked by low levels of participation and low potential to mobilise (Howard, 2002). Henderson (2002) argued that it was the distrust in voluntary organising and the economic hardship of post-communist societies that made the development of organised civil society in CEE largely dependent on foreign assistance. Much of the scholarship in the early 2000s contended that the dependence on foreign assistance introduced something of a vicious circle, further undermining popular participation. According to this argument, foreign donors have encouraged civil society organisations to professionalise, but disincentivised them from connecting to grassroots organisations (Fagan, 2004, 2005; McMahon, 2001; Narozhna, 2004). This critical account of civil society in CEE emphasises the risk of neutralising or co-opting social movements via the process of so-called NGO-isation fuelled by Western influence (see also Mendelson & Glenn, 2002; Waller, 2010). Some later studies, however, were contrastingly optimistic about the fitness of civil society in CEE when they pointed at the surprising capacity of civil society in CEE to effectively engage in political activism and advocacy without broad mobilisation. Their argument emphasised the conceptual distinction between mass participation and so-called transactional activism as two legitimate alternatives (Petrova & Tarrow, 2007). The term transactional activism refers to *'the ties—enduring and temporary—among organized nonstate actors and between them and political parties, power holders, and other institutions'* (p. 79). They summarised the thrust of the idea as follows:

[A] low level of individual civic participation does not necessarily imply a lack of capacity for transactional activism, which may provide incentives for as well as constraints on civic and political elites and their international allies, even in the face of weak mass participation (pp. 87–88).

It could be deceptive to imagine a sharp empirical distinction between participation and transactions. Clearly, social movements and civil societies have always benefited from exchanging and building coalitions. Civil society actors have always drawn their power not just from the numbers behind them but also from their position in networks. Specifically, advocacy is marked by the strong presence of small, professionalised organisations with few members in the West (Skocpol, 1999; cf. Minkoff, 2008). Professionalisation was made possible thanks to Europeanisation due to the formation of communicative connections between national and European levels via political demands (Klášková & Císař, 2021). Yet the transactional character of civil societies in CEE countries, and seemingly in Czechia in particular (see Korolczuk & Saxonberg, 2015), is different in that it did not develop on top of more participatory forms of civic organising, but as an alternative when engagement of the broader public seemed out of reach. The above-mentioned distrust is also true for Czech civil society. This disbelief towards civil society actors on the side of citizens is caused by their conviction

that civil society organizations (CSOs) represent business interests and not civic ones. According to Navrátil and Pospíšil (2013, p. 26), there is specific tension in contemporary Czech society:

We observed a clear distance of citizens towards practical (pro-)active engagement in CSOs' activities and a tendency on the side of the CSOs to ignore the citizens and to rely on technical expertise and their employees in fulfilling their missions. Both the citizens and the CSOs are active but they do not connect very well. The CSOs thus fail to perform the role of the intermediary between the individual and politics, and the citizens as a rule do not make use of CSOs when they encounter a societal problem.

Now, let us focus on the ReSt itself. The initiative was founded as a coalition of 19 NGOs, most of which were small with only a few members, for the purpose of building expertise in a specific area and often focusing on networking, watchdogging and lobbying. Many of them had a history of some cooperation or exchange with each other from before starting the ReSt initiative (Mazák & Diviák, 2018). The core organisations of the initiative had been around since the early 1990s, and their ability to launch a large-scale campaign and quickly get access to both the media and most prominent politicians resulted from a well-described process of civil sector capacity building in CEE (Císař, 2010, 2013; Císař & Navrátil, 2015) sponsored in post-communist countries by foreign or international donors, including, in the past two decades, the European Union's structural funds, European Economic Area Grants and Norway Grants. Overall, the European Union had enormous influence over the accessing countries, even though the path to admission to the EU was not ideal for the Czech Republic because of its slow introduction of the required administrative reforms. This is due to its stagnant reformist legacy from the communist past, hence the hesitancy for institution-building after the collapse of communism. The Klaus government in the early 1990s ignored demands for anti-corruption laws; later, the Zeman government tried to implement them, but those efforts were obstructed by the Civic Democratic Party. In the end, requirements from the EU were met, but only due to the union's coercive conditionality mechanism (Camyar, 2010).

The ambition of this paper is to move beyond the path-dependency explanation towards uncovering the scope of activists' agency and decision-making against the background of a given structural context.

Bridging political opportunity structure (POS) with agency

The idea that social movement research has been overly rooted in structural approaches at the expense of studying agency has been around for some time. Calling for more cultural and agency-oriented approaches has given birth to the

popular framing perspective (Snow et al., 2014). However, its applications have mostly been static, neglecting the processual reality of civil society actors engaging in political struggles (Benford, 1997). Within POS scholarship, there have been efforts to make space for agency by refocusing on perceived rather than objective political opportunities. Social movements themselves can craft opportunities through their deeds, not just wait for opportunities to open up for them (della Porta, 2015 as cited in della Porta, 2018; McAdam et al., 2001). Doherty and Hayes (2012) stressed the importance of activist tradition as a bridge between structure and culture, where the concept of activist tradition helps to understand how social movement actors build ranges of action. Devoted activists are essential for the grander efficiency of civic initiatives, for they can realise powerful programmatic activity and shape organisational capacity. The social movement's anti-corruption paradigm has shifted in the contemporary neoliberal context from spreading through the flow from the top-down to the problematisation of deregulation and privatisation (seen as the cure for corruption in the neoliberal paradigm) and to the perception of anti-corruption '*as a matter of social justice*' (della Porta, 2018, p. 663). Nevertheless, accessible resources and a favourable political context also carry some weight in the context of corruption. When a closed political opportunity structure appears, external strategies of anti-corruption actors and conflict-ridden discourses on corruption prevail. A promising political background may lead to cooperation between established actors and collective actors likewise stimulating a wide-ranging discussion on corruption, which actually meets outcomes (Andrews et al., 2010; Pirro & della Porta, 2020). The analytical framework for connecting the structural level of political opportunities with the activists' agency is based on combining process tracing (e.g. Bennett & Checkel, 2015) with Jasper's (2004) suggestions about analysing strategic decisions. As he puts it in his critique of the dominance of structural approaches in scholarship on social movements, '*[p]articipants in social movements make many choices, but you would never know this from the scholarly literature*' (p. 2).

Jasper suggested analysing social movements' strategic choices as dilemmas. For example, there is the naughty or nice dilemma of choosing between more and less contentious approaches (Jasper, 2004, 2011). He also suggested that organisations' decisions about various dilemmas can be coded as variables and used for comparative research. However, organisations' responses to different dilemmas may not be definitive. They may be responsive to changing contexts (and hence hard to code as variables). In other words, an organisation may switch between being naughty and nice multiple times, and it is important to understand why these changes happen and to what effect. In a single-case study like this one, we are trying to describe various strategies that helped make the initiative a success. To achieve this methodologically, we will use process tracing, which is designed for the analysis of causal processes in single-case research. Beach and Pedersen (2016) recommended conceptualising a causal process as a chain of directly subsequent parts, where each part is represented by an 'entity' (an agent) and an

‘activity’ performed by this entity. Each part of the causal process should then be empirically substantiated with its observable manifestations. For our analysis, we specifically focused on tactics as the activity, and we look for evidence of the decisions’ impact. The data collection was focused on understanding why certain decisions happened and how they were influenced by their context, by things that preceded them and what they probably caused next.

Conceptually, the literature on process tracing distinguishes between exploratory (inductive) and confirmatory (deductive) process tracing (Bennett & Checkel, 2015). The first is related to theory building or explaining the outcome of an important event, while the latter builds on an existing theory and tests it, often against alternative explanations. In this case study, we are using the first approach, which is more inductive: We have collected evidence about the case, and the evidence gradually crystallised into a set of strategies explaining ReSt’s success. In conclusion, we argue that the resulting explanation can contribute to the theoretical discussion of the civil sector in young democracies, specifically the discussion on NGO-isation.

Lobbying and advocacy for anti-corruption

Lobbying tactics denote efforts to assert various group interests in the political domain and/or influence this terrain. Generally, the literature dealing with this phenomenon distinguishes between inside and outside lobbying, sometimes also termed ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ or ‘voice’ and ‘access’ (Beyers, 2004; Colli & Adriaensen, 2020). Research has mostly focused on inside lobbying, which involves private gatherings with officials or partaking in consultative groups. Outside strategies centre on media campaigns, organising press conferences, opening public debates (online or face-to-face) or leading demonstrations. Inside and outside strategies are often intertwined, as in our case (Binderkrantz, 2005; Colli & Adriaensen, 2020).

Flow of information in the access (or inside) strategies is direct with the public officials, and this takes place where the political negotiation occurs. However, this bargaining frequently happens ‘behind closed doors’ and is invisible to a larger audience (Beyers, 2004). This most likely contributes to a negative perception of lobbying in general in the CEE. Citizens can perceive this behaviour as an illicit influence of politics, mainly from the side of businesspersons (Perottino et al., 2020). On the other hand, outside (or voice) strategies are observable by a wider audience, happen in the public and aim to draw attention to the subject. Therefore, the flow of information between initiatives and policy makers is indirect (Beyers, 2004; Colli & Adriaensen, 2020). A significant part of the literature deems outside strategies as a ‘plan B’ option for those initiatives with some kind of deficiency, which prevents them from getting in touch with the decision-makers directly (Binderkrantz, 2005).

Beyers (2004) further distinguished between information politics and protest politics as two outside strategies. Protest politics deliberately intend to expand conflict and make an impression on government officials. Indeed, tackling corruption from below can be diverse. Civil society actors can adopt a more disruptive repertoire of collective action, which has occurred throughout history, such as protests in Bosnia or Gezi Park in Turkey (della Porta, 2018). Troublesome actions focusing on transparency have also been caused by dispersed groups, such as Anonymous or WikiLeaks. However, professionalised organisations use milder forms of mobilisation and turn to lobbying (in the sense that it excludes protest politics). They are skilled at acquiring grants; they know how to spread awareness, how to evaluate corruption issues and, overall, how to lobby for new customs (della Porta, 2018).

Nonetheless, the analysis presented in this paper shows that it was largely due to a shift away from white-collar, always-polite transactional activism towards adopting more contentious strategies that the initiative was successful. It is this changeability of agency that we have identified as the underlying mechanism of the initiative's success.

Empirical analysis

Data

From April to June 2014, we conducted face-to-face interviews² with 10 representatives from nine of the participating NGOs. We first approached the campaign coordinator, a person then frequently mentioned in the media in relation to ReSt and speaking on its behalf. He suggested a few further interview partners from among the participating organisations, including some who were critical of the mainstream positions within the initiative and sometimes had dissenting views in internal debates. Further interview partners were snowballed.

Subsequently, in June 2014, we sent out structured questionnaires to all 19 participating NGOs, 18 of which responded (after two rounds of reminders). The main goal of the questionnaire was to analyse internal cooperation among organisations within the initiative (see Mazák & Diviák, 2018). In addition, we made a systematic analysis of articles in printed country-level media that mentioned the ReSt initiative over the period from March 2013 (when the initiative went public) to March 2014. This period covers both the election campaign and the closest aftermath of the election, that is, the peak of the initiative's activity.

² All interviews were conducted as personal face-to-face interviews and were audio-recorded with permission of interviewees based on an interview script. The scripts were expanded in between individual interviews if new information came to light which required triangulation. Word-by-word transcripts were produced for the analysis.

The aim was both to evaluate the initiative's media presence (see Figure 1) and to identify important events and controversies related to the initiative. This knowledge was then valuable when preparing interviews with politicians and, in some cases, having follow-ups with our past interview partners from the organisations when necessary for clarification. We also reviewed the initiative and political parties' webpages, social network sites and online media outlets to find supportive evidence, which helped us test emerging theories about the causal process as our primary data analysis progressed. As a further reality check on our results, we conducted interviews with four MPs from four different political parties and with various attitudes towards the initiative, from supportive to hostile. We mostly discussed ReSt's actions in lobbying and their legitimacy. Finally, we conducted three further interviews with other ReSt representatives in May and June 2018 after the electoral period was over, and the results of the campaign had been made clear. This was important to get some hindsight.

Overall, our interview partners from the initiative included two of the then three directors at the guarantor organisations who had the main decision-making power, three legal experts who were responsible for the legislation analysis and preparing materials to persuade politicians, two communication and PR coordinators, two econometricians and data analysts, two lobbyists responsible for continuous contacts with politicians, a director at a donor organisation, which was also part of the initiative and supported networking and cooperation, and the campaign coordinator mentioned earlier. We briefly re-interviewed the campaign coordinator and one of the directors to clarify some new questions that arose from the media article analysis and other online material research.

Political opportunities

We began our analysis by examining the broader social and political contexts. To begin with, at the time, the perception of corruption as a major problem was peaking in public opinion. In March 2012, a year before ReSt was publicly announced, The Public Opinion Research Centre, a polling agency, reported that 74% of the adult Czech population thought that over half of all public officials were involved in corruption (CVVM, 2012). This was a substantial increase compared to 61% in 2008. As a result, it was easier for the initiative to make corruption one of the election's major topics:

People's frustration with the way things are mismanaged and stolen [due to corruption] here reached a point where people were more sensitive to this type of campaign (Employee, Transparency International).

Second and related to that, there was swift growth in the number of anti-corruption NGOs. Visiting webpages of the 19 organisations involved in ReSt revealed

that 10 of them originated during the period from 2008 to 2012. This was also reflected as an important aspect by the initiative's representatives:

My personal experience from [a previous anti-corruption initiative in 2008 and 2009] was that we were very out... But gradually, the media began to write about [corruption] cases... The Parliamentary election in 2010 was key. The initiative Exchange Politicians emerged, Klus started to write his [protest] songs and several organisations which are now our members were created. Without that, we would not have had the partners to approach (Employee 1, Frank Bold).

Furthermore, the political situation was unusually turbulent. In the elections in 2010, which preceded the campaign and the elections in 2013, two new parties successfully entered the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament, while the Christian Democrats failed to surpass the 5% electoral threshold for the first time since 1990. The new parties were a central-right conservative party TOP 09, and more importantly Public Affairs (*Věci veřejné*), a party that defined itself in terms of fighting corruption and raised the topic to the wider public awareness³. This showed that substantial change in the composition of the Parliament is possible. On top of that, the Civic Democratic Party, the most important right-wing party of Czech post-communist history, was a mere shadow of its former self and heading for what later turned out to be less than 8% of votes in the 2013 elections, a stark contrast to its approximately 30% gains in the previous decades. Related to the Civic Democrats' tumble, other new parties were knocking on the door of the Parliament in 2013, most importantly ANO, a new central-populist party that then finished second in the elections, and Úsvit, a far-right party that won almost 7% of the vote (Císař & Navrátil, 2019; Hanley, 2012).

In addition, the standing of individual politicians within parties was being reshuffled, too, due to a change in voters' behaviour. In Czechia, voters cast party ballots, but they can also give preferential votes to candidates on the party ballot and potentially overwrite the order of candidates suggested by the party. Morkes (2008) showed that historically in the 1996, 1998, 2002 and 2006 elections, preferential voting resulted in a different MP being elected than the candidate suggested by the party in 0, 2, 12 and 6 cases, respectively (out of the 200 MPs). In 2010, this number rose to 48, probably due to campaigning by civil society organisations. This means that almost a quarter of the elected MPs were elected thanks to preferential voting, effectively making preferential voting a truly relevant part of the electoral system for the first time and a tool to be used by ReSt in 2013. It was no accident that the pledge was framed in the media as a potential guideline for preferential voting in the upcoming election.

In his book, O'Dwyer (2006, p. 58) saw the Czech bipolar party system as comparatively stable within the CEE. Yet, in 2010 and 2013, after more than two

³ However, this party collapsed in 2013 due to several scandals, including corruption.

decades dominated by two parties, the left-wing Social Democrats and the right-wing Civic Democrats, the political landscape was changing. A window of opportunity opened.

This context, however, was only a background for the initiative's conscious decision to approach political candidates as individuals and pressure them to make a public pledge. The remainder of our analysis focused on deliberate decisions that the initiative's leaders made as a result of the backdrop of a favourable context. In the 1990s, there were similar opportunities to make political issues out of well-known corruption scandals; however, because of the lack of capable actors, this topic was not brought to the fore by the members of the Parliament. The importance of our case lies in the power of activists' agency, which was able to thematise corruption and to mediate this issue forward.

Therefore, our focus on the ReSt's strategies and our use of process tracing to map those manoeuvres will contribute to the still limited literature that deals with the political actors and their capacities, since the research area is still more attentive to the structural conditions of activism (Císař & Navrátil, 2022). We are presenting innovative strategies, campaigns and tactics that ReSt used or, on the other hand, those that were intentionally abandoned.

Analysis

In this section, we identify the schemes ReSt's leaders devised throughout the campaign, and we empirically substantiate how these influenced the campaign's trajectory.

Strategic selection of laws

The first important thing for the initiative was selecting the laws. According to interviews with the activists, about 30 ideas were gathered for consideration, often inspired by existing legislation abroad. The selection process to pick the final nine was driven by pragmatism and feasibility. For example, no laws were included among the nine, which would bring an additional burden on common people. This idea was expressed in one interview:

The laws only create obligations for people who handle public budgets and administer this country on our behalf. This was important to me in the selection process (Employee 2, Frank Bold).

While this meant that some of the laws were rather technical and not easily relatable for the median voter, it prevented any law from becoming a target of active popular resistance. In their effort to avoid increasing the burden on citizens,

ReSt's leaders sidestepped all legislation concerning everyday common corruption and exclusively focused on issues of high-level corruption and state capture. Also, they did it very much along the lines of increasing transparency, administrative independence from political pressure and empowering civil society, as suggested in the literature (see Fagan, 2004, 2005; Henderson, 2002; McMahon, 2001; Narozhna, 2004).

Another pragmatic consideration in the selection process concerned public communication, which was to become a crucial part of the campaign:

We also wanted to include things which are easy to communicate, such as the register of governmental contracts. If all the laws were as complex as the civil service act, for example, people would never have taken ownership of the issues (Employee 1, Frank Bold).

On the other hand, the selected laws were probably not 'too easy' in the sense that they would have been passed without the initiative, too. This claim is substantiated by the difficulties ReSt encountered later in the process and corroborated by an MP interviewed for this study who reflected that:

...the topics [individual laws] were well selected. They are important matters and matters that have been discussed here for decades, well, some of them, but nobody had managed to get them passed (Jan Farský, MP).

The academic discussion about NGO-isation has often stressed the risk for NGOs to lose authenticity and be neutralised via professionalisation (see Fagan, 2004, p. 173 for unrooting communities or McMahon, 2001, p. 48 about women's groups). However, there is a different perspective. Due to its capacity for combining complex expertise, professionalised and sufficiently funded NGOs can develop effective campaigns based on pragmatic analysis of political opportunities and an understanding of public sentiments.

Confrontational strategy

The dynamics of civil sector development in CEE resulted in the existence of professional NGOs with a focus on expertise and less interest in contentious action. Despite some internal disagreements, ReSt's representatives thought that it was time for change. However, ReSt, reflecting on a low level of popular readiness for mobilisation⁴ (see Petrova & Tarrow, 2007), did not rely on traditional contentious

⁴ However, subsequent development showed a higher level of emergence of collective action: In February 2017, the whole world watched massive rallies in Romania against cor-

action such as demonstrations. In fact, ReSt's leaders saw an unsuccessful demonstration as a potential source of embarrassment, where the best one can hope for in a successful demonstration is media coverage. But the same media coverage can be won with a small public happening if it stirs debate. As one interview stated:

...in my experience, a successful campaign must be controversial. Unless it provokes debates, nobody cares. I always do my best to add controversy to campaigns (Employee 1, Frank Bold).

Most visibly, ReSt shamed politicians for undermining anti-corruption legislation. Apart from the pre-election 'blah-blah' campaign described earlier, they publicly awarded a corruption anti-prize to Vít Bárta, the leader of the Public Affairs party. Explaining the anti-prize, ReSt accused Vít Bárta of voting against anti-corruption laws, even though the party presented itself in anti-corruption terms. The event received substantial media coverage, including in some of the most widely read tabloids (e.g. novinky.cz and blesk.cz). Later, ReSt continued to pursue this strategy and put up billboards, denouncing politicians who, in ReSt's view, undermined the advocated anti-corruption bills.

Interviews with the initiative's representatives revealed that the strategy to go 'naughty' and exert a lot of pressure at some points of the campaign was not well accepted by all the participating organisations and became a source of inner tension:

We also function as the more sceptical voice which says, 'Do not fool around so much with activism [as opposed to advocacy]'... (Employee, Transparency International).

The first thing [source of conflict] is the way they [participating organisations] work. Some organisations do not like the fact that ReSt appears to be too heavily activist (Employee, Open Society Fund).

These observations show how the confrontational approach was not fully in line with the usual *modus operandi* of the professionalised Czech NGO sector. Exerting strong pressure was an important manoeuvre, which marks discontinuity with the previous work by professionalised NGOs. This is an important insight for the broader theoretical debate about civil society in newly emerging democracies. Even if foreign or other institutional sponsorship temporarily leads to NGOs los-

ruption, reportedly attended by 500,000 protesters. The events were covered by BBC, CNN, Al-Jazeera and other global media. Just two months later, anti-corruption protests on the streets of Slovakia once again drew international attention.

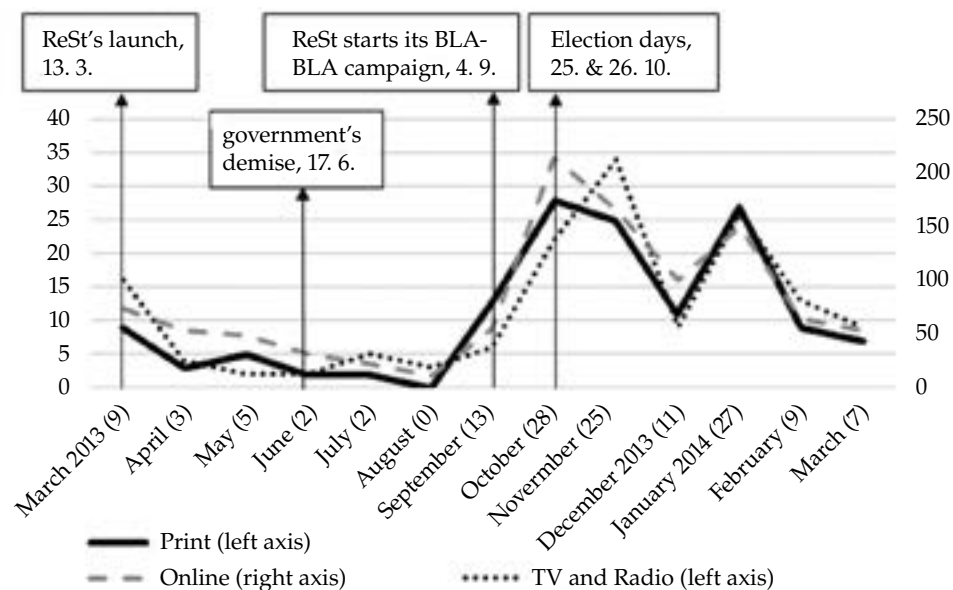
ing some sharp edges, it does not mean they will not become more radical and contentious again once they develop a strong enough capacity to become worthy contenders or once they feel favourable political opportunities.

Prioritising media coverage

ReSt's campaign before the election was designed around the pressure on political candidates under the threat that people would not vote for those who would not publicly pledge to fight corruption by passing specific anti-corruption laws. For that threat to be taken seriously, media coverage was essential, and confrontation was not the only way to raise it. Various events took place. For example, in June 2013, a large abacus was placed on the façade of a building opposite the Chamber of Deputies, showing the number of MPs who had promised to support the law to establish a public online register of governmental contracts. This event received media coverage in multiple large outlets.

The efforts to raise media coverage paid off and the media coverage became substantial in the two months before the election and the first months after it

Figure 1. Media coverage from the start of the campaign throughout its peak



Note: The numbers in brackets indicate the number of articles in country-wide printed media (eight outlets, solid line in the chart).

(see Figure 1). Furthermore, the initiative's YouTube channel produced a few successful viral pieces (one which has by now received over 700,000 viewings in a country with 10 million inhabitants, and one which has been viewed over 99,000 times).

Mobilisation was boosted via social networking sites. In April 2016, the ReSt Facebook page had ca. 19,800 likes. To put it in perspective, the number of likes for ReSt by far exceeded the number of likes for the Facebook pages of the best-known organisations in the initiative. At the same time, Transparency International Czech Republic had ca. 4,300 likes, Frank Bold had ca. 4,900 likes and Oživení had approximately 2,800 likes. These were all well-established organisations that originated in the 1990s and played a central role in the ReSt (Mazák & Diviák, 2018). This further shows that the initiative was not just a continuation of the professionalised approach to activism created and sustained by foreign sponsorship, but a campaign based on strategic innovations.

Inviting people to participate

A lack of a following makes NGOs much more vulnerable to accusations of illegitimacy and puts them in a weak position *vis-à-vis* politicians. When politicians do not deliver on their promises, organisations without a following can do little about it. ReSt's architects knew about this problem from their own experience and decided to boost leverage over politicians not only by focusing heavily on media coverage, but also by inviting citizens to participate as ambassadors. Interviews with ReSt's representatives suggest that ambassadors were important, especially in the election campaign, when they personally contacted political candidates in their regions and tried to convince them to pledge their support for the proposed anti-corruption legislation:

We had an agreement with the political parties that they would send out our appeal centrally [to individual candidates]. That did not work very well. What did work was the... whirlwind of emails and phone calls, and we would not have been able to do that without the ambassadors (Employee 1, Frank Bold).

One of the interviewed MPs also confirmed the importance of ambassadors in the campaign:

I think it was a masterstroke to expand the campaign to the regions, so that MPs did not only listen to what was going on in Prague but were also personally visited by ambassadors in the regions (Jan Farský, MP).

This was something politicians were not at all used to, and it created the impression of a broad civil movement.

Action and reaction

While at least some politicians felt pressured, surprisingly few expressed their indignation publicly before the election. The context of the volatile political situation and the momentum of the campaign's public and media engagement persuaded most politicians to jump on the bandwagon. While some of them were sincerely in favour of the proposed legislation, others probably just caught a whiff of opportunity and embraced ReSt as a means of gaining the upper hand over their opponents, or at least not being left behind.

As a result, ReSt became one of the key issues discussed during the so-called pre-election super-debate on Czech public television among the leaders of the strongest political parties when three party leaders named ReSt's laws as the first thing the new government could agree on after the election.

It was only after the election that more of the critical voices were raised against ReSt. The initiative was accused of disrespecting the principle of democratic discussion by exerting too much pressure on politicians. A conservative MP from the right-wing Civic Democratic Party complained about the initiative's lack of willingness for discussion:

The idea that someone can bring us a 'most beautiful law' [ReSt's nickname for the online register of governmental contracts]... and because someone has dubbed it 'most beautiful', we are forbidden from talking about it, raising doubts about it and even making amendatory proposals. It is hardly legitimate for me (Marek Benda, MP).

Another MP, Radek Vondráček, otherwise more favourable to the initiative and the proposed laws, explained why many MPs were frustrated:

They [ReSt] are not behind-the-scenes actors. They are transparent, but they go by a roundabout route. They use media pressure a little. They play with public opinion. Many of those [MPs] affected perceive this negatively.

According to the then head of communication at ReSt, the backlash after the election made it more difficult to actively manage media content, which was supposed to be one of the main sources of leverage over politicians after the election. Instead, it was now ReSt's position that became more reactive, such as when they had to deal with accusations of being partisan and secretly supporting Andrej Babiš, a claim that appeared in the media and was echoed by some politicians. This situation caused ReSt to change its tactics. When the initial efforts after the election to quickly push the legislation through backfired, it was decided to ease up the pressure, and the core of activist work shifted towards less contentious work and regular presence in the Parliament. Such presence enabled quick reactions to any threats to the anti-corruption laws, as some of them had already pro-

gressed through the legislation process. In other words, the work was continued, but controversy was suddenly seen as potentially harmful, so it was deliberately avoided by the initiative. Happenings and efforts to shame unsupportive politicians subsided and almost disappeared. Instead, ReSt's advocacy workers focused on understanding the inner dynamics of each party's group of MPs, identifying core influencers for each law and establishing and sustaining relations with them.

The case of ReSt shows that the election campaign and the period between elections had dramatically different dynamics, which required very different modes of operation. In sharp contrast to the pre-election campaign, when ReSt managed to come across as a strong actor with power to influence voters and was not hesitant to directly attack some of the most visible political figures on the Czech scene, the post-election advocacy was much more adjusted for the subtleties of everyday politics, changing power balance and changing popular moods and media attention. ReSt's advocacy workers tried to reposition themselves as useful for politicians, rather than threatening. They also started putting more emphasis on publicly praising compliant politicians as opposed to shaming those unsupportive of anti-corruption laws with the insight that public praise is something politicians rarely get and can react very positively to. At the end of the election period, five of the nine advocated laws had been passed.

Discussion and conclusion

This case study focused on understanding activists' agency and the success of the initiative via identifying key strategies. Our research demonstrates that activists have agency, and their strategic choices can result in unexpected discontinuities.

The campaign of the Reconstruction of the State cannot be perceived merely as a culmination of the process of professionalisation and white-collar transactional activism. On the contrary, the campaign was marked by strategic decisions deliberately aimed at discontinuing the allegedly ineffective white-collar advocacy. Instead, ReSt decided to attract the public and the media with contention, controversy and public happenings and by targeting individual politicians. The initiative tried to engage the otherwise not overly politically active public with viral videos and even invited citizens to shape the campaign as ambassadors by directly contacting politicians in their regional offices.

To answer our research questions about advocacy decisions made by ReSt and its overall path to success, on the following pages we summarise the initiative's strategic choices.

The first strategy was the selection of laws for the campaign. It was guided by the principle of not introducing any additional burden for the citizenry and some other pragmatic considerations to make the initiative less vulnerable and likelier to succeed.

Another tactic concerned the shift away from behind-the-closed-door white-collar activism towards a more contentious campaign and aggressive targeting of

individual politicians. This from-nice-to-naughty shift was the most obvious departure from the usual pattern typical of professionalised NGOs in Czechia and underscores the potential of activists' agency to bring about surprising discontinuity. Closely related to that was the decision to prioritise media coverage to set the agenda of the public discourse.

Yet another related manoeuvre was when ReSt decided to give up on full control of the campaign and invite ambassadors from among the public to shape it. This shift towards a more movement-like operation before the election also contributed to the campaign's success when the political candidates suddenly heard the name of ReSt coming from all directions.

The final strategy came after the election when the initiative faced a backlash from politicians who were no longer afraid that standing up against the ReSt would hinder their chances of being elected. Some politicians who had previously pledged their support started to push back against the initiative. It was at that moment that ReSt decided to ease up the pressure and refocus on a more standard lobbying and transactional approach.

Regarding the second research question, our analysis, of course, faces the counterfactual challenge: we do not know for sure what would happen in a world without ReSt. This is the place where we would like to discuss in more detail why we think our data allow us to make the conclusions we make. First, ReSt's leaders decided to take a far more contentious approach to advocacy than the individual member organisations had used (even causing some inner tensions in the initiative) and deliberately designed actions and events to attract attention, including tabloids. In the following months, media informed the public broadly, especially about the initiative's most contentious and controversial steps. Some of the initiative's videos went viral, and their Facebook page quickly gained a wide following, vastly exceeding that of any of the individual organisations. Taken together, these facts constitute strong evidence that ReSt marks a qualitative shift compared to how transactional activism and advocacy have been done in Czechia. In response to the media-amplified pressure and against the backdrop of a volatile political context, most politicians jumped on the ReSt's bandwagon, as evidenced by the sheer number of pledges, but also the fact that ReSt was the most frequently mentioned first-thing-to-do-after-the-election by party leaders in the pre-election super-debate. This constitutes strong evidence that ReSt's strategy was effective in setting an agenda for the then upcoming election. The initiative's contribution to passing actual anti-corruption laws is somewhat harder to prove. There were interviews with ReSt's advocacy workers who described their day-to-day routine of meeting politicians, disseminating information, explaining misconceptions that threatened to kill support for the bills, reminding politicians of their promises and occasionally ringing the alarm bell when the legislation was threatened at any stage of the process. Yet, people are not the most reliable informants when evaluating their own impact. To corroborate their perspective, we conducted interviews with four MPs across the political spectrum. They all asserted that ReSt helped to keep the nine anti-corruption laws on the agenda. At

least two of them were then critical of the initiative, and it was not at all in their interest to overstate ReSt's impact. In addition, there was at least one other politician's statement according to which the initiative helped to lubricate the legislation process around anti-corruption laws. According to an official record from the Senate's meeting on 26 May, 2016 Senator Miloš Vystrčil said:

I get informed by a representative of Reconstruction of the State about what Mr. Vondráček thinks and is going to say today in the Chamber of Deputies. Instead of us debating it directly. This way, we give the initiative some authority. And possibly rightfully so, when we are not able to communicate by ourselves.

Taken together with the fact that it was ReSt in the first place that brought up the nine anti-corruption laws for debate, it seems that there is fairly strong evidence that without the initiative, there would not be five new anti-corruption laws in Czechia in 2017.

To sum up the contributions of this paper, the most important lesson for practitioners is that advocacy is a process with various stages in which many actors mingle. To maximise chances of success, advocacy organisations need to continuously analyse the changing circumstances and learn and adjust their strategies, which sometimes means radically changing them.

The most important methodological innovation advocated in this paper is changing the perspective away from the centrality of structure and political opportunities (which are here seen as mere context, even if important and enabling) and towards agency and analysis of key decisions and tactics. We used inductive process tracing (Bennett & Checkel, 2015) to describe the above-mentioned successful strategies. These strategies of the initiative were treated as a performed 'activity' that was empirically validated (Beach & Pedersen, 2016). We also argue that Jasper's idea of simply coding different civil movements' decisions as variables to be used in comparative research (see O'Dwyer, 2006) can blur much of the insight we can gain from tracing the whole process. The case of ReSt demonstrates that strategies may be changeable, such as when the ReSt decided to ease up their pressure when facing backlash after the election.

Finally, the main theoretical contribution is to the discussion about NGOisation in emerging democracies. It has been argued that foreign sponsorship resulted in building a civil sector unconnected to grassroots, which was deradicalised and co-opted by the system (e.g. Fagan, 2004; Henderson, 2002; McMahon, 2001). This case study shows that even if foreign or other institutional sponsorship temporarily leads to NGOs losing some sharp edges, it does not mean they will not become more contentious again once they develop a strong enough capacity to become worthy contenders or once they sense favourable political opportunities.

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Vibrant Civil Society in Slovakia? NGOs Supported by the CEE Trust Are Still Largely Dependent on External Financing After 20 Years*

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Abstract: Large-scale funding of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) by states and corporations (external funding) can impact their functioning and diminish their civic character. It is therefore of importance to understand whether and how NGOs can become financially independent of external funding. In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), many NGOs were kickstarted by large sums from foreign state and corporate sponsors with the hopes of creating an independent civil society reliant on domestic sources: a ‘vibrant civil society’. However, did these NGOs become financially independent? This article examines a sample of 14 NGOs in Slovakia financed by the Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE Trust), an organisation started by six private American foundations. Their funding is compared year by year, and it is found that between 2000 and 2020, foreign funding decreased from 97.2% to 55.2%, and corporate funding dropped from 92.1% to 31.2%. However, public sector funding increased from 1.2% to 35.6%. Civic funding remained low over the entire period, rising from 0.1% to 8.6%. Thus, external corporate funding was largely replaced by another type of external funding (public funding), and the role of one major foreign donor (the Trust) was largely replaced by another major foreign donor (European Union (EU) and European Economic Area (EEA) funds). The results suggest that it is difficult for NGOs kickstarted by external funding to achieve financial independence, at least on a timescale of 20 years.

Keywords: civil society, non-governmental organisation funding, financial independence, civic funding, income diversification

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Introduction

A functioning civil society is considered an essential element of democracy. Its traditional role is often seen as counterbalancing the influence of the state with its potential power abuses on the one hand and the interests of big business with its strong lobby on the other (Habermas, 1989; James & Caliguire, 1993; Wang, 2006). To fulfil this role, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) need autonomy in operation, which is least at risk when they are financially independent of both the state and corporations (and other entities controlled or financed by them) and have their own sources of funding (Banks et al., 2015; Diamond, 1994). Such independence would also likely benefit the plurality of the civic sector (with no particular ideology being disproportionately supported by large donors) and enable NGOs to focus on creating innovative solutions instead of catering to sponsors' needs and bureaucratic requirements (Ochman, 2019).

An often-used strategy to kickstart civil society in countries where it is just emerging is to source large sums of money from external subjects (mostly private companies and states) to fund NGOs. While this approach has its positives, mainly enabling civil society to sustain its activities, it can also pose some risks. It may damage civil society in the long run, making NGOs accustomed to or even dependent on external aid. Such NGOs may not be able or willing to seek or effectively build up other sources of funding. It may also support NGOs that do not resonate with the local population or may even seek to support interests that run against prevailing public opinion (Demenet, 2001; Edwards & Hulme, 1998; Henderson, 2002; McMahon & Niparko, 2022).

The question of whether large-scale external funding may lead to an independent and functioning civil society can be approached from various sides (financial independence, organisational independence, democratic legitimacy, etc.). Countries that have only recently transitioned to democracy – the buildup of their civil societies concentrated in a rather short period for which data is usually readily accessible – provide ample opportunities to study this research problem. Since large-scale external investments into civil society were characteristic of the former Eastern Bloc countries (McMahon & Niparko, 2022; Pickering, 2022; Pietrzyk-Reeves, 2022), answering these questions is relevant for the entire region and may reveal insights on many important issues.

This article specifically examines financial independence, under which we understand the capacity of NGOs to acquire funding from sources other than states and corporations. The funding of a group of NGOs in Slovakia kickstarted by large external financing is examined: 25 NGOs supported since the early 2000s by the CEE Trust (for 14 of which there are quite comprehensive data). More than 20 years have passed since. What shape does their financing take now? Were they able to build up their own capacities based on community funding? Have they become more financially independent of states and corporations, or do they still largely rely on external actors? We focus solely on financial independence and do

not address organisational independence or analyse in detail the exact nature of these NGOs' activities. In addition, as detailed below, although we primarily use a quantitative approach, the scope of our data is limited, and our conclusions are arguably closer to a case study in terms of their generalisability.

Large-scale external investment into civil society in the 90s and the decrease in foreign funding in recent years are patterns typical of the former Eastern Bloc countries (McMahon & Niparko, 2022; Pickering, 2022; Sundstrom et al., 2022). While several authors have noted that activists often compensate for lack of funds by using new forms of activism (McMahon & Niparko, 2022; Sundstrom et al., 2022), to our knowledge, no detailed studies were done specifically examining the extent to which the NGOs were able to substitute external financing. Thus, answering the stated questions is relevant for the CEE region and may shed light on many important issues.

The financing of civil society and its independence

As with all organisations, civil society organisations need financial resources to function properly. These can be acquired from several sources, each having its benefits and downsides (Dluhá & Marček, 2009). Financial sources can be broadly divided into external (spanning various subjects such as foreign or domestic governments, corporations, or other NGOs, which, in turn, can have various sources of financing) or internal, which derive from the activity of the NGO itself, such as membership fees or income generated by providing services or selling the NGO's property (Laciňák, 2013). In this article, we understand civic funding (small voluntary citizen donations and entities funded predominantly by them) as also part of internal funding since it is endemic to the civic sector. Thus, we contrast it with external funding (from states, corporations, and entities funded predominantly by them).

Many authors have expressed concern that external financing – especially financing provided by states, corporations, and entities financed primarily by them – may potentially adversely influence NGOs' activities. Critics argue that such financing may lead to 'undermining the independence' of NGOs (Bútorá, 1998) and 'political manipulations' (Ghimire, 2006), come with 'strings attached', or at least cause the receiving institutions 'to mute any criticism of the donor' (McGann & Johnstone, 2005). According to Filho and Vargas (2017), such financing can distort 'the very nature of these organizations as representative of interests of society' (p. 2). An often-cited problem is 'donor-centered accountability', which is a shift of accountability from ordinary citizens to state or corporate donors, thus diminishing community participatory processes (Ochman, 2019; Sundstrom et al., 2022).

Other critics stress the changing character of many NGOs due to the 'over-financialization of the environment' (Cerrato & Ferando, 2020). NGOs face strong pressure from globalist, capitalist, and neoliberal discourses, leading them to of-

ten adhere to 'market logic', while alternative visions are 'marginalised' (Cerrato & Ferando, 2020; Ochman, 2019; Vogel, 2016). Functioning in a highly competitive environment may undermine cooperation and lead to a loss of innovation (Ochman, 2019). The fundamental civic character of NGOs may be lost as they become 'professional organizations based on technical competence and cost efficiency' (Ochman, 2019).

Some authors go as far as speaking directly of 'civil society capture'. Vogel (2016) claimed, using the example of Cyprus peacebuilding efforts, that top-down interventions and international donors 'create homogenized discourses that are not representative of the diversity of local notions of peace' and 'tend to support their orthodox top-down approaches from below rather than encouraging the formation of local alternatives' (p. 1–2). Similarly, Kover (2015) stated that civil society in Hungary is captured by the state and church. Simsa (2019) noted indications of civil society capture by the state in Austria.

However, these opinions are not shared by all researchers. Many of them view external funding as a critical enabling factor for civil society (Adolfová, 2009; Strečanský et al., 2017), stressing that it makes possible the development of civil society in an environment where it would otherwise be impossible or take an unfeasible amount of time. As NGOs face the 'fundamental revenue problem' (i.e. practically permanent resource scarcity; Anheier & Themudo, 2004), any resources helping them accomplish their mission are welcome.

External funding may also be crucial when transferring skills related to democracy to countries where the public has had little exposure to democratic government. This notion is personified in the words of George Soros (1991), a major sponsor of NGOs in Eastern Europe:

People who lived their whole lives in a totalitarian system may yearn for open society, but they lack the knowledge and skills to make it come to life. They need help from the outside so their dreams can become reality. (p. 90–91)

Furthermore, since the economic situation is unfavourable in many countries transitioning to democracy, the people will likely often prioritise fulfilling basic economic needs and may not be able or willing to invest in NGOs. Citizens may likewise not be aware of the critical role of democratic public discourse and institutions and, thus, would not be able to sustain these types of activities of their own accord.

Another argument is that NGOs can retain organisational independence (i.e. the discretion to make their own decisions), at least to some degree, despite being financially dependent on external sponsors (Themudo, 2004). Typical strategies include demand-avoidance (in a way that is difficult to discover, NGOs simply do not fulfil the demands of sponsors), 'buffering strategies' (using language and symbolism that attract sponsors but does not significantly impact the NGO's decision-making processes; Ebrahim, 2003), and joining NGO networks or alliances 'to increase their bargaining power with donors' (Themudo, 2004, p. 83).

Resource diversification is probably the most used strategy for decreasing dependence on donors (Crisan & Dan, 2018; Hudock, 1999; Milelu, 2018). When an NGO has many donors, then, although it is generally dependent on external financing, any single donor is, in principle, expendable and, therefore, cannot easily impose its will on the NGO. However, this does not solve the issue where all or a large portion of donors have similar or identical goals. In that case, it is not the dependence on a particular sponsor that is problematic but rather the dependence on a certain type of sponsor.

It can also be argued that external financing is relatively uncontroversial in the case of service NGOs that provide public goods in areas such as healthcare, social support, sports, or public space rejuvenation. However, it may be problematic in cases where NGOs enter the political arena, mainly if external financing disproportionately supports one side of the debate and even more so if foreign funding promotes the minority view on a heated topic (Jurášek, 2021).

Nevertheless, others have implied that citizen funding may contribute to the fragmentation of civil society and the enforcement of particular interests. According to theories such as ethics of recognition (Fraser, 1997; Honneth, 2014), a democratic society depends on inclusion and recognition for all citizens in addition to efforts to secure the good of the whole. However, this may be difficult to achieve by citizen funding alone, especially in countries where various forms of prejudice are widespread.

Although the opinions of authors differ, hardly anyone doubts that financing from states and corporations carries at least some risk and that NGOs financed largely by internal resources and small citizen donations is, *ceteris paribus*, the optimal model, even though this is not easily achieved in practice, given the current circumstances. Even if external financing may seem unavoidable, the question of how to make NGOs at least less dependent on external financing should be asked. To answer this question, it is interesting to examine countries where civil society has been built up in recent decades and study the dynamics of its funding. This brings us to the case of Slovakia.

Funding of NGOs in Slovakia

Before 1989, the conditions for NGOs were generally unfavourable due to the undemocratic regime of Czechoslovakia. There is little information on the financing of NGOs from this period (many functioned outside of the official system), and we did not find any comprehensive study on this topic. However, apart from self-financing and small donations from citizens (Huba, 2008), traces of foreign support for parts of civil society date to this period (Demeš, 2014). For example, the CIA financed the establishment of a Charter 77 documentation centre in 1986, and the BBC and Radio Free Europe paid samizdat authors on a per-article basis (Nezbeda, 2017). By 1989, George Soros had already established his institutions in the USSR, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and even China (Soros, 1991).

After the Velvet Revolution, foreign support intensified, and many major NGOs were established as branches of foreign institutions: Open Society Foundation (Demeš, 2014), Transparency International Slovakia (Transparency International, 2022), and Foundation for a Civil Society (today the Pontis Foundation; Foundation for a Civil Society, 2022), to name a few. There is wide consensus in the literature that foreign financing significantly impacted the development of the Slovak civic sector in the 90s (Adolfová, 2008; Ekopolis, 2003; Reichardt, 2002; Trust, 2004). More than 9,000,000 EUR were invested into civil society in 1998 alone to support election mobilisation projects (sum converted to 2020 EUR; Reichardt, 2002).

However, more detailed research into NGO funding in Slovakia that provides exact numbers is surprisingly sparse. One factor is the dearth of data before 2000. Most major NGOs publish their annual reports only back to the year 2000. The Statistical Office collects some data on NGO funding, but it cannot be viewed at the level of individual NGOs. Kuvíková and Vaceková (2009) and Svidroňová and Vaceková (2012) studied the diversification of financing sources in NGOs. They conducted surveys asking NGOs what types of financing they use. Since the authors only asked whether a particular type of financing was used or not, but not to what extent, it is impossible to determine the proportions of contributions from various sources. For example, 84% of NGOs claimed they used self-financing, but this does not mean that self-financing makes up 84% of their overall funding. Svidroňová and Vaceková (2012) mentioned research from 2009 where NGOs estimated the proportions of various sources of income, but these provided only very broad categories (for example, private funding and individual funding are merged into one category). Other publications that we were able to find dealing with NGO financing in Slovakia are either only theoretical in nature or only reference the aforementioned data (Adolfová, 2008; Kuvíková & Svidroňová, 2013; Strečanský et al., 2017; Svidroňová & Vaceková, 2014; Vaceková & Svidroňová, 2014). Thus, we could not find a published dataset that would allow us to examine changes over time in NGO funding. A good opportunity for such analysis is provided by the data on NGOs supported by the CEE Trust.

The CEE Trust

The Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe was established in 2000 by six major American foundations (Atlantic Philanthropies, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Ford Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and Rockefeller Brothers Fund; Trust, 2004). The Trust closed its activities in 2012, dispensing more than 78,000,000 EUR in seven central and Eastern European countries,¹ of which Slovakia was selected as the first for

¹ The countries were Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, and Poland.

programme implementation. More than 10,000,000 EUR was allocated in Slovakia alone over 12 years (sums converted to 2020 EUR; Trust, 2013). During the Trust's operation years, its founders continued to financially support other NGOs independently of the Trust's scheme. By the time of its inception, the CEE Trust was by far the largest programme in Slovakia aimed at developing civil society.

The Trust's establishment presented a paradigmatic shift in NGO funding. In the 90s, Western financial support was largely ad hoc and project-oriented, supporting one-time activities, or simply involved transferring resources from the mother organisation to its local branch. However, the Trust spelt its goals in terms of 'long-term sustainability' by 'building infrastructure and capacity' (Trust, 2004), which should allow the NGO to 'operate independently in the future' (Trust, 2013). Instead of supporting short-term projects, the Trust claimed it took the 'long view' and saw itself as a 'bridge for the nonprofit sector to move from reliance on foreign support to increased indigenous and European funding' (Trust, 2004). Its goal was to cultivate 'self-sufficiency and sustainability' to ensure that 'its work will be felt for years to come' (Trust, 2013).

Over its existence, the Trust supported 25 NGOs and one university. The NGOs' areas of interest were variable, but common topics included ecology, good government, anti-corruption, inclusion, integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the EU, and global learning. While these NGOs are not a representative sample of all NGOs in Slovakia, they undoubtedly form an influential group. For example, nine out of ten of the most quoted NGOs in the media were financially supported by at least one organisation from our sample.² Ekopolis and Open Society Foundation, which were chosen by the Trust as national partnership organisations, also administered NGO support programmes of the EEA funds a few years later, which surpassed the Trust's programme in the overall volume of funding.

² Data aggregated for 2002–2017 based on the analyses of Slovak Press Watch, Medan and Newton Media: <https://spw.blog.sme.sk/c/73682/Kto-su-najcitovanejsi-experti-v-slovenskych-mediach.html>; <https://spw.blog.sme.sk/c/131268/Mediami-najcitovanejsi-experti-rebricek-2007.html>; <https://spw.blog.sme.sk/c/180016/Mediami-najcitovanejsi-experti-rebricek-2008.html>; <https://spw.blog.sme.sk/c/216699/PHorvath-a-VVano-medialne-najcitovanejsimi-expertami-roka-2009.html>; <https://spw.blog.sme.sk/c/252762/Najcitovanejsimi-analytikmi-v-roku-2010-boli-J-Baranek-a-V-Vano.html>; <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1DVTids4sMChJD-KNYi2WbFkALw44d2HzAjvfxzkM7fs/edit#gid=0>; <https://www.medan.sk/jan-baranek-je-uz-stvrty-rok-najcitovanejsim-analytikom/>; <https://www.newtonmedia.sk/sk/pre-media/tlacove-spravy/v-roku-2015-bol-najcitovanejsim-analytikom-jan-baranek>; <https://www.newtonmedia.sk/sk/pre-media/tlacove-spravy/v-roku-2015-bol-najcitovanejsim-analytikom-jan-baranek>; <https://www.tasr.sk/ots/ots-jan-baranek-po-siedmykrat-najcit/21814-clanok.html>; <https://www.medan.sk/top-trojka-najcitovanejsich-analytikov-za-rok-2017/> (all accessed February 11, 2021).

Methods and data

Sample selection

Our sample consists of all NGOs in Slovakia financially supported by the CEE Trust. Over 12 years, the Trust supported 25 NGOs. The NGOs' annual reports and official websites were examined to retrieve financial information for the period up to 2020. If the NGOs were no longer active, archived versions of their websites were examined. At least partial financial information was retrieved for 14 of the 25 NGOs.

Only annual reports that showed a comprehensive picture of the financing of the NGO in a particular year were used. Some annual reports only named the sponsors without specifying particular sums, while others listed particular sums for some sponsors but not for others. After filtering out incomprehensive annual reports, 186 were left.

As can be seen from Table 1, Ekopolis and Open Society Foundations were by far the largest beneficiaries of donations from the Trust. These finances were further distributed to dozens of NGOs, including ones supported by the Trust directly. For example, Open Society Foundation (OSF) provided more than 163,000 EUR to the Fair Play Alliance, and OSF and Ekopolis together provided more than 587,000 EUR to Citizen and Democracy from 2001 to 2012 (sums converted to 2020 EUR).

Financial analysis

In the annual reports eligible for analysis, all incoming transactions, numbering 3,209, were examined. To avoid duplication when analysing all the NGOs as a whole, all incoming transactions stemming from NGOs in the sample were filtered out, leaving 3,095 transactions. In individual NGO analyses, all incoming transactions were considered. Based on the sponsor, each transaction was classified as belonging to one of three sectors (public, corporate, or civic) or as coming from an unknown sector. This classification was not made based on the sponsor's organisational type but on its dominant source of financing (i.e. an NGO majorly funded by EU funds would be classified as public sector). When the dominant source of financing could not be established, the sponsor was classified as belonging to an unknown sector. The civic sector category included citizen donations, self-financing, tax assignment,³ and income from organisations financed

³ In 2002, the Slovak statute on income tax introduced the possibility for income taxpayers (both natural and legal persons) to assign 2% of their paid income tax (under specific circumstances, slightly more or less) to certain types of NGOs. The usage of this form of financing has been increasing in recent years (Ministerstvo financií Slovenskej republiky, 2022; Rebaták & Bartošová, 2020).

Table 1. NGOs funded by the CEE Trust in Slovakia and available information on their funding

NGO	CEE Trust support 2001–2012 (in 2020 EUR, rounded)	Annual reports eligible for analysis	Incoming transactions
Open Society Foundation	4,263,511	21	367
Ekopolis Foundation	4,288,276	19	413
Institute for Economic and Social Reforms (INEKO)	127,140	19	232
Citizen and Democracy	89,399	19	278
People in Need	48,808	18	392
Fair Play Alliance	133,936	17	196
Conservative Institute of M. R. Štefánik	123,156	16	170
Milan Šimečka Foundation	50,668	16	361
Center for Philanthropy	47,765	14	168
Via Iuris	242,568	13	241
Transparency International Slovakia	35,983	6	126
League of Human Rights Advocates*	29,557	4	57
Pontis Foundation	374,935	3	199
The Center for Civil and Human Rights	33,525	1	9
Institute for Public Affairs	289,864	0	0
First Slovak Nonprofit Service Center	107,410	0	0
Slovak Donors' Forum	96,901	0	0
The Charta 77 Foundation	93,124	0	0
Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia	67,403	0	0
Friends of the Earth – CEPA	58,563	0	0
Institute of Economic and Social Studies	57,518	0	0
Project Forum	38,001	0	0
Civic Association TATRY	12,667	0	0
Public Policy Institute	12,667	0	0
ISA Slovakia	5,911	0	0
Total	10,729,256	186	3,209

Source: The CEE Trust's annual reports, 2001–2012.

Note: * Translated as 'Human Rights League' in more recent documents. Throughout the article, for the sake of consistency, we use the term 'League of Human Rights Advocates', as it appears in the CEE Trust annual reports.

predominantly by these means. We refer to public and corporate sector funding jointly as external funding.

Each transaction was further classified as coming either from a domestic or foreign source or a source with an unknown origin. The classification was made not based primarily on the official seat of the organisation but on its dominant source of funding (i.e. an NGO based in Slovakia but financed primarily by an American corporation would be classified as foreign). When the dominant source of funding could not be established, the sponsor was classified according to its official seat. International organisations such as the EU, NATO, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development were considered foreign sources.⁴

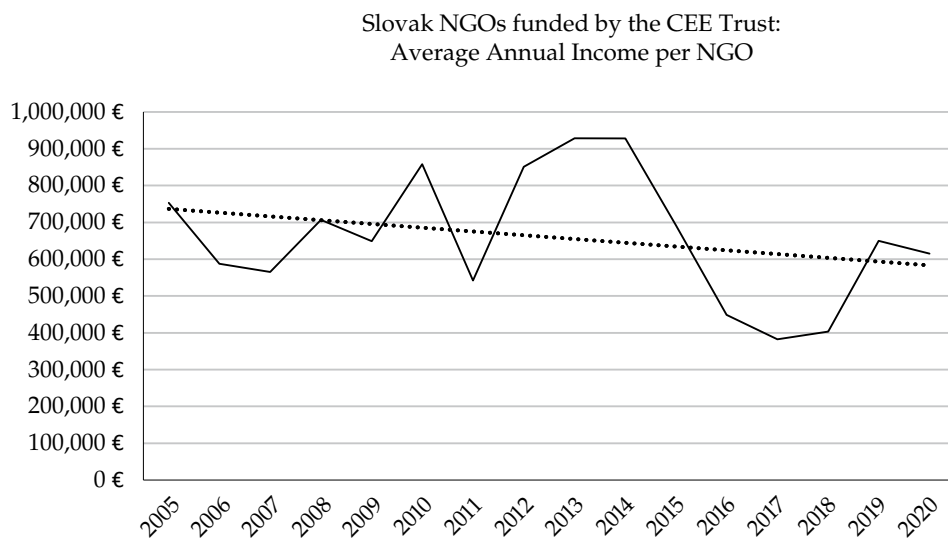
Our method for determining the place of origin differs from that used in some previous studies, which often made the determination using formal accounting categories, where the place of origin is identical to its official seat. Thus, a local branch of a foreign company is classified as a Slovak source. A different approach was chosen for two reasons. First, the annual reports often do not differentiate between local branches and the mother company (only the name of the company is provided), in many cases preventing the distinction from being made. Second, for the purpose of this study, formal accounting categories are not as interesting as real power relations. Since local branches of a company are unlikely to have a major influence on core company values guiding its corporate policies and are subordinate to the mother company in important respects, local branches of a foreign company were viewed as foreign sources.

All transactions were converted to EUR based on the current exchange rates provided by the National Bank of Slovakia. Unless otherwise noted, all sums are in real values, converted to the value of EUR in 2020.

⁴ It could be argued that EU funding should not be considered a foreign source, as Slovakia is a member state of the EU. However, there are several good reasons for considering the EU a foreign source:

- EU and its member states are clearly different entities.
 - EU and its members can, and often do, have competing interests (members of the EU commission pledge an oath to the ‘general interest of the Union’ and not take instructions from any other government).
 - Slovakia’s ability to influence the EU in the case of conflicting interests is limited.
- Similar arguments can be made for other international organisations.

Figure 1. Average annual income per NGO, calculated from eight NGOs with the most complete annual report records (Fair Play Alliance, People in Need, Ekopolis Foundation, Institute for Economic and Social Reforms (INEKO), Conservative Institute of M. R. Štefánik, Milan Šimečka Foundation, Open Society Foundation, and Citizen and Democracy). A simple linear trendline has the R^2 value of 0.08.



Results

Overall funding

When the NGOs funded by the Trust are viewed as a whole, the overall annual funding increased from 7,671,544 EUR to 10,331,481 EUR. However, this sum is mostly illustrative since the number of NGOs and eligible annual reports varies widely over the years, and the NGOs themselves largely differ in terms of income. Analysing the eight NGOs with the most complete annual report records (accounting for more than 83% of the known income of the whole sample)⁵ reveals that between 2005 and 2020, the average annual funding fluctuated significantly around the value of 650,000 EUR, as shown in Figure 1. A simple linear regression displays a decreasing trend overall, but the very low R^2 value of 0.08 shows this to be insignificant.

⁵ Fair Play Alliance, People in Need, Ekopolis Foundation, Institute for Economic and Social Reforms, Conservative Institute of M. R. Štefánik, Milan Šimečka Foundation, Open Society Foundation, and Citizen and Democracy. From 2006 onwards, 96% of their annual reports (115 out of 120) are eligible for analysis.

Figure 2. Funding from foreign sources, domestic sources, and sources of an unknown origin. Taken from the whole sample of 14 NGOs.

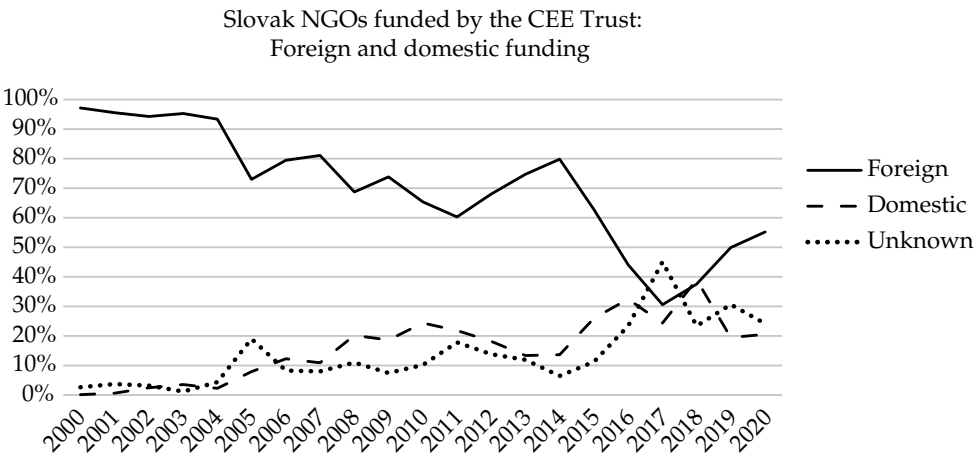


Figure 3. Funding from the USA and the EU. EU funding also includes the EEA and Norway Grants and the Swiss Financial Mechanism. Taken from the whole sample of 14 NGOs.

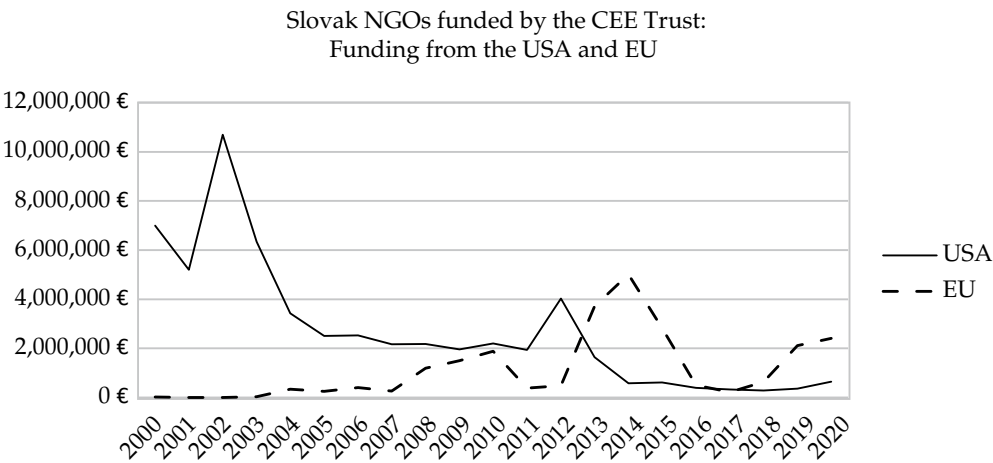


Figure 4. Funding from the first (public), second (private), and third (civic) sectors. Transactions from an unknown sector are not shown, thus not every year adds up to 100%. Taken from the whole sample of 14 NGOs.

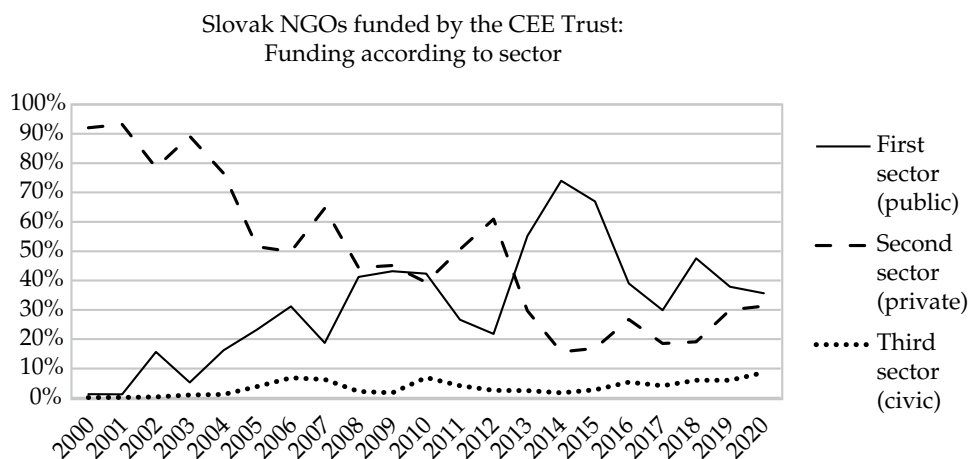
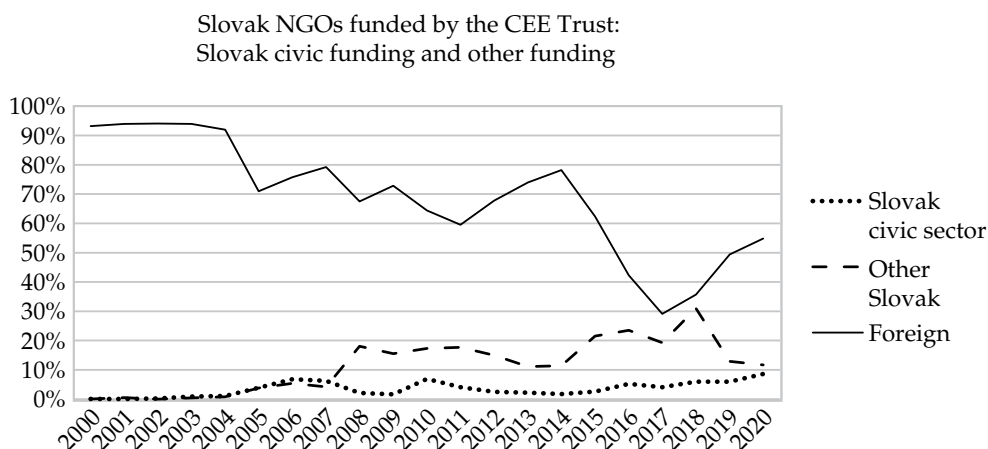


Figure 5. Slovak civic funding compared to other types of funding. Transactions from an unknown sector or of an unknown origin are not shown, thus not every year adds up to 100%. Overall, the Slovak civic sector accounts for only 3.5% of funding. Taken from the whole sample of 14 NGOs.



Regarding the breakdown of funding between domestic and foreign sources, a clear decrease in foreign funding can be seen. While still being the dominant source of funding, it decreased from 97.2% in 2000 to 55.2% in 2020. In the same period, domestic funding rose from 0.1% to 20.5%. However, the sharp decrease in foreign funding occurred partly due to an increase in funding of unknown origin (from 2.7% in 2000 to 24.2% in 2020). If only those transactions where the place of origin could be established are considered, foreign financing decreased from 97.2% to 72.8% (and domestic rose from 0.1% to 27.2%).

Within foreign financing, the share of EU sources (together with EEA funds and Swiss Financial Mechanism) has been continually rising. In 2004, they first exceeded 5% (7.3%). In 2013 – coinciding with the departure of the Trust – they first surpassed US financing (19.5% vs 44%) and rose as high as 62.7% in the following year. Accordingly, funding from the USA has declined significantly – from 91.2% in 2000 to just 6.3% in 2020. The last year US funding was the dominant source was 2013 (48.8%). The development of funding by place of origin is shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Foreign and domestic sources can be further divided by sectors. Financing from the second (corporate) sector clearly decreased, from 92.1% in 2000 to 31.2% in 2020. However, this gap was mostly not filled in by the third (civic) sector but rather by the first (public) sector, rising from 1.2% to 35.6%. Civic sector financing has stayed continually low, rising from 0.1% in 2000 to 8.6% in 2020. If the transactions where the sector could not be established are filtered out, the changes are as follows: 98.6% to 41.3% for the corporate sector, 1.3% to 47.2% for the public sector, and 0.1% to 11.4% for the civic sector. Funding by sector is shown in Figures 4 and 5.

Funding at the level of individual NGOs

A pattern reproduced in almost all NGOs with sufficient data (more than five eligible annual reports) is the gradual decline of the proportion of funding from the USA (the only exception is Citizen and Democracy). Another pattern is the reliance on external funding. For every year and every NGO, civic funding is always a minority source, usually less than 5% (if all years and all NGOs are considered, it is 3.5% of the overall sum). This trend was found in all NGOs apart from the Center for Philanthropy (CPF) in 2020 and the Conservative Institute of M. R. Štefánik (KIMRŠ). These cases will be discussed below.

Some NGOs, such as Ekopolis, People in Need, Citizen and Democracy, Milan Šimečka Foundation, and League of Human Rights Advocates, rely more on public sources. Others, such as Open Society Foundation, Center for Philanthropy, Transparency International, VIA IURIS, Fair Play Alliance, or INEKO, use private sources to a greater extent. Most NGOs are predominantly foreign financed, with two exceptions: Nadácia Milana Šimečku (35.3% foreign, 42.4% domestic) and People in Need (25.4% foreign, 53.7% domestic).

Table 2. Major transitions in dominant sources of funding according to sector and place of origin

NGO	Dominant pre-transition	Transition year	Dominant post-transition
Ekopolis Foundation	Foreign private	2009 (approx.)	Foreign public
Milan Šimečka Foundation	Foreign public	2011	Domestic public
	Significant foreign private		
People in Need	Foreign public	2011	Domestic public
Open Society Foundation	Foreign private	2013 (approx.)	Foreign public
INEKO	Foreign private	2015 (approx.)	Foreign public
			Significant domestic public

The predominant sponsor type (sector, place of origin) tended to remain stable over the years in most cases, but there were several cases in which the dominant source of funding changed. They are shown in Table 2. There seem to be two basic rules regulating these transitions: private funding shifting to public (and never the opposite) and foreign funding to domestic (and never the opposite). Furthermore, there was no successful switch to predominantly civic funding. The dynamic of the predominant funding types is shown in Figures 6–10 for all five transitions identified.

As is clear from Table 1, Open Society Foundation and Ekopolis – national partners of the CEE Trust – relied most on funding from the Trust. How did they fare after its departure? Their stories differ somewhat. Both became the administrators of EEA programmes to support civil society (these started already before the Trust's departure), which contributed to their transition to predominantly foreign public funding, as can be seen in Table 2. Ekopolis was more successful than OSF in compensating for the loss of financing from the Trust using other sources, mostly EEA, EU, and foreign corporate funding. Nevertheless, its average income since 2016 is only roughly half the average from 2000 to 2015.

In contrast, OSF has faced a sharp decrease in funding since George Soros radically cut direct funding to Slovakia in 2014.⁶ Income from EEA projects has not fully made up for this deficit, and in 2016, when EEA funding decreased, OSF's income shrank to less than a quarter over one year. In 2017, the NGO

⁶ This cut-off was not absolute, however. Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, such as by Gehrerová (2018), since 2014, the Slovak branch of OSF has received more than 700,000 EUR from Soros' organisations, according to its annual reports.

Figure 6. Dominant sources of funding for Ekopolis Foundation. The transition from foreign private to foreign public sources can be seen around 2009.

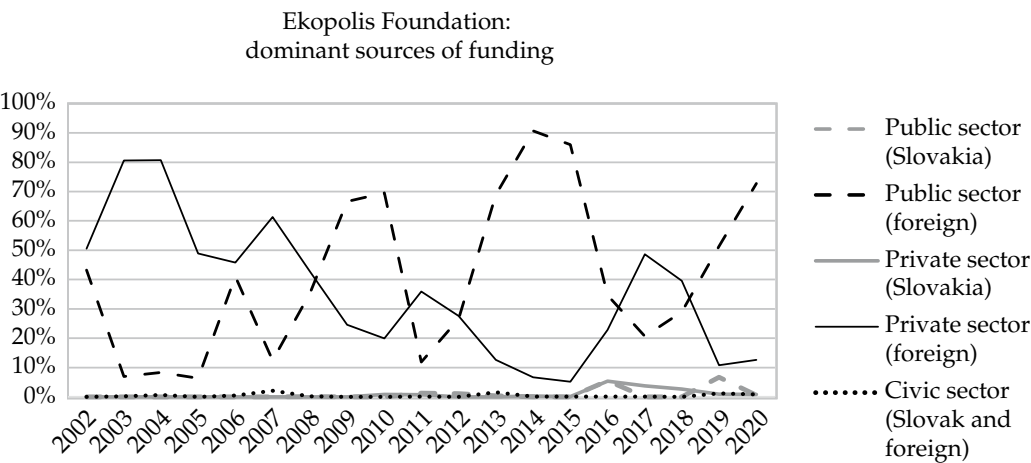


Figure 7. Dominant sources of funding for Milan Šimečka Foundation. The transition from foreign public to domestic public sources can be seen around 2011.

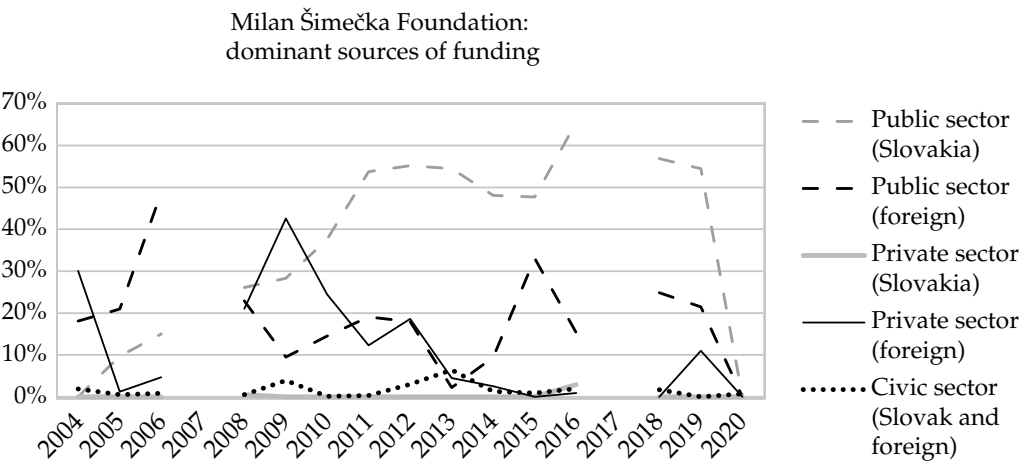


Figure 8. Dominant sources of funding for People in Need. The transition from foreign public to domestic public sources can be seen around 2011. People in Need is the only major NGO in our sample with significant civic funding, but it still comprises less than 15% of its overall funding.

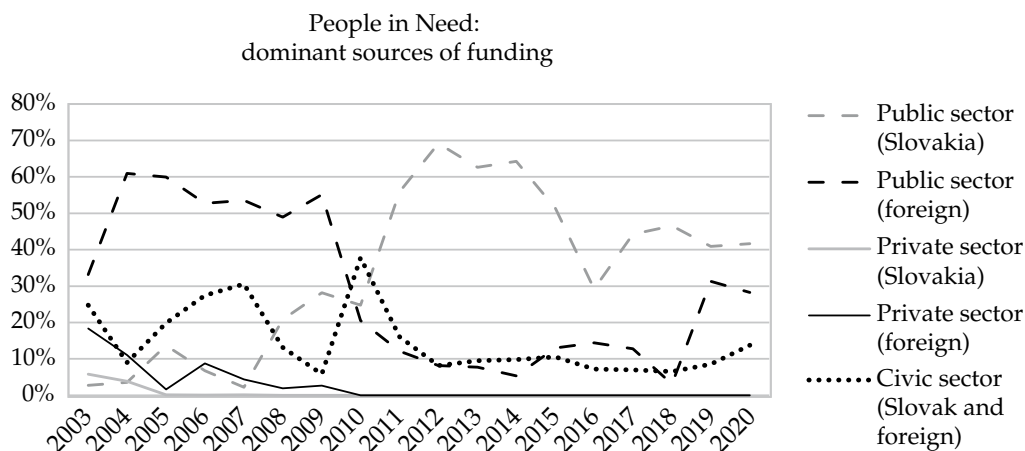


Figure 9. Dominant sources of funding for Open Society Foundation. The transition from foreign private to foreign public sources can be seen around 2013.

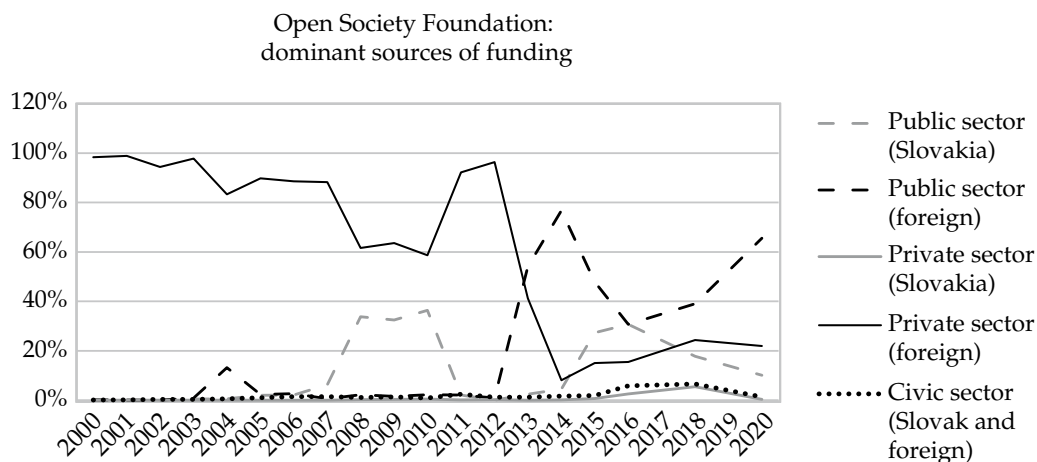
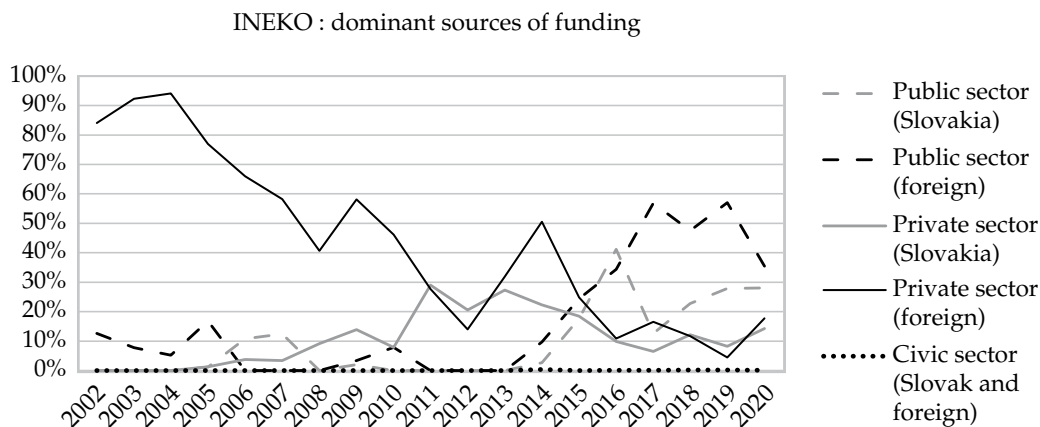


Figure 10. Dominant sources of funding for Institute for Economic and Social Reforms (INEKO). The transition from foreign private to foreign public sources can be seen around 2015.



was even moved to sell more than 600,000 EUR worth of its security portfolio (more than 70% of its income in 2017). In 2018 and 2020, further financial injections from foreign branches of OSF arrived, and in 2020, Ekopolis provided more than 1,000,000 EUR. Nevertheless, the average income of OSF since 2016 is less than a third of the average from 2000 to 2015. Civic funding of OSF has seemingly increased in recent years. However, this is mostly because external sponsors withdrew their support; in absolute numbers, the income has changed little (in the past five years, the annual average was 32,363 EUR, while in the preceding 15 years, it was 31,334 EUR). However, it never surpassed 8%.

Only two NGOs have had at least one year of predominant civic funding (in both cases, domestic civic funding). First is the Conservative Institute of M. R. Štefánik (KIMRŠ). Historically, its largest sponsors are the Trust and the EU. However, after 2009, they stopped their donations completely. Thus, KIMRŠ was left to rely practically exclusively on modest donations from a few companies, tax assignation, and citizen financing. The latter is its most stable source of income and has provided the overall majority since 2013. Since 2013, KIMRŠ has had no foreign funding. Unlike other NGOs, KIMRŠ was unable to find a viable replacement, and its activities were cut substantially. Its average annual income since 2013 is less than one-eighth of the average annual income from 2001 to 2012. Thus, even though citizen funding predominates, KIMRŠ is not a case of a successful transition to citizen funding.

The second case is the Center for Philanthropy. Historically, it has been working with several foreign companies, administering their corporate social responsibility programmes. Foreign corporations have amounted to more than 70%

of overall funding, and the trend has been stable over the years. The only exception is the year 2020 when an unusually large sum was acquired by fundraising on the CPF website, which amounted to more than 62% of its income for the year. It is not yet clear whether this will become a long-term trend.

Comprehensive tables and figures for each year and a breakdown of income types by all categories for the Trust NGOs as a whole and each NGO individually can be found in supplementary materials.

Discussion

The results clearly show that NGOs from our sample (at least those for which sufficient data is available), which were kickstarted by huge external donations, were largely dependent on external funding after 20 years. This period may probably be extended even to almost 30 years for some NGOs since many of them existed before 2000 and were largely externally financed (but annual reports are missing).

Stability of high-level patterns of funding

The high-level patterns of funding (external vs civic funding) generally tend to remain stable over time. Thus, it might be said that the NGOs funded by the Trust are not financially independent after 20 years but rather dependent on a different type of external sponsor.

Data (analysed by the same method as in this article) are also available for several NGOs that did not start with large-scale external financing but bottom-up from civic funding. For example, Forum of Life (a Christian pro-life organisation) was 60.1% civic funded in 2010, up to 69% in 2018. Overall, its public sector financing is 0.6%, private sector financing is 0%, and foreign financing is 5%. Ladislav Hanus Fellowship was 48.8% civic funded in 2012, up to 64.7% in 2019 (however, this rises to almost 100% if transactions of unknown origin are filtered out). Overall, its public sector financing is 7.3%, private sector is 0%, and foreign financing is 3.9%. Detailed tables and figures are provided in supplementary material, along with several other NGOs which follow similar trends. While this is not a systematic comparison, it lends more support to the thesis that high-level patterns of NGO funding remain relatively stable.

Our data contradict the often-stated claim that foreign financing of Slovak NGOs has dropped so dramatically that only 6% to 9% of NGO funding comes from abroad (Gehrerová, 2018; Praus, 2018; Pontis Foundation, 2022). There are two reasons for this contradiction. First, this article deals with a specific group of NGOs kickstarted by large external donations, while the aforementioned claims apply to Slovak NGOs in general. Second, a different methodology of ascribing

the place of origin to the sponsors (with the goal of putting more emphasis on real power relations instead of formal bureaucratic categories) was used in our article, as described in the methods section.

Transition from private to public funding

As noted in the results section, even though the share of external and civic funding changed little, changes in the predominant type of sponsor were quite commonplace. They seemed to follow two basic rules: from foreign to domestic and from private to public funding. A trend of concern in the 21st century has been the privatisation of profits and socialisation of costs. Companies are eager to privatise lucrative parts of the economy, such as select parts of the healthcare or social systems, but often devise ways of transferring their costs to public finances. Several of the Trust's founders were successful businessmen who also worked with politicians and funded political parties. Many top-level politicians in Slovakia (including two prime ministers) hailed from NGOs financed by the Trust and its sponsors (Vladovič, 2008). It would be interesting to study the process by which state funding schemes for NGOs were set up, which, in effect, saved the resources of private companies.

Possible causes of low citizen funding

There are several possible explanations for why NGOs supported by the Trust could not acquire large proportions of citizen funding. The first may have to do with low effort. Organisations that rely on mass citizen funding often use elaborate schemes to elicit small donations (Dauksza et al., 2020). It is possible that the NGOs supported by the Trust might have garnered more civic funding if they put more effort into this type of fundraising. However, this was perhaps not seen as effective (or even needed, but this is unlikely due to the fundamental revenue problem) since external donors provided enough funding.

Another (and related) possible explanation has to do with organisational culture. The six founders of the Trust were predominantly endowment foundations which acquired most of their property from rich entrepreneurs and did not develop (and import to Slovakia) sophisticated fundraising schemes oriented towards ordinary citizens. A similar pattern may perhaps be seen in the Slovak NGOs supported by the Trust, which may be due to the reproduction of a cultural pattern (Konecki, 2006; Patterson, 2010).

A third explanation might have to do with the prevailing values of society. A 'detachment' of foreign-funded activists from the local population has been reported in other CEE countries (Pickering, 2022; Pierzyk-Reeves, 2022; Sundstrom et al., 2022). Profant (2015), writing about the situation in Czechia, stated that

new forms of activism are often interested in ‘postmaterial’ goals (such as human rights), which resonate with the local population less than ‘traditional’ goals (such as social security). He further noted that postmaterial goals are often advocated by small, professional groups and that it is only thanks to their sponsors that many NGOs can campaign for topics that garner little interest in the local populace. The situation in Slovakia may be similar. Assessing the extent to which this factor might be in play in the present sample would require separate research with a more stringent methodology, but some indications can be pointed to.⁷

A case in point to illustrate these three factors is the conservative Slovakia Christiana Foundation (SCF), which stands in contrast to many NGOs funded by the Trust. SCF is worth reviewing as an illustrative example, although, of course, a larger sample and a more detailed analysis would be needed to draw substantial conclusions. SCF was founded in 2016 by the Piotr Skarga Institute of Poland. During its first year of existence, 100% of the funds (11,000 EUR) came from the mother organisation, meaning it was kickstarted by a foreign sponsor. However, SCF launched a large-scale fundraising campaign, essentially copying the Piotr Skarga Institute model (Dauksza et al., 2020) and was able to rise to full financial independence within two years. In 2017, it raised 328,894.54 EUR (74%) from citizen donations, simultaneously acquiring 117,000 EUR (26%) from the Polish mother organisation. In 2018, it raised 695,605.97 EUR from citizen donations (100%) and has had no financial support from Piotr Skarga Institute since. With SCF, there is a great effort towards citizen funding, cultural transfer, and a relatively high resonance with majority values. Two of its key tenets, protecting Christianity and national sovereignty, have strong support in Slovak society, according to public opinion polls (Bútorová & Gyárfášová, 2017).

⁷ On the one hand, the NGOs supported by the Trust covered many topics generally supported by the Slovak society – anti-corruption, rule of law, support of educational infrastructure, and education of minorities. Such activities likely constitute the bulk of their public engagement. On the other hand, many of these NGOs have also taken unpopular stances on several topics often deemed very sensitive. For example, Open Society Foundation (2000, 2021), Pontis Foundation (2018, 2020), Milan Šimečka Foundation (2020, 2023), People in Need (2016, 2023), and League of Human Rights Advocates (2019, 2023) have supported LGBT activists, multiculturalism, and diversity. Slovakia is generally a conservative country (Mikušovič, 2020) where only 36% of people feel ‘close’ to liberal democracy and 32% to multiculturalism and cultural diversity, while 68% feel ‘close’ to protecting national sovereignty and 63% to protecting Christianity from Islam (Bútorová & Gyárfášová, 2017). Moreover, 75% are worried about the possibility of many migrants arriving in Slovakia, and more than 73% would be bothered by a neighbour of Muslim origin (Bútorová & Gyárfášová, 2017). Thus, a non-negligible part of the public may be dissuaded from contributing to these NGOs.

Did the Trust fulfil its goal?

When evaluating the result of its work, the Trust did not spare any praise, writing in 2012, 'The current diversity, vibrancy and strength of civil society throughout the [CEE] region are a testament to the success of the CEE Trust and similar actors in the last two decades' (Trust, 2013). However, from our results, it is clear that neither Slovak NGOs supported by the Trust as a whole nor any individual NGO has become independent in the sense that it is predominantly civic funded; predominantly domestic funding is rare and owes to state support. On the other hand, examples of NGOs were presented that managed to become financially independent without the Trust's support and in an even shorter time.

However, if a somewhat broader view of financial independence is taken, wherein the NGOs draw upon a larger overall number of sponsors and various types of financing and can, to a large degree, acquire sponsors with their own fundraising processes, it might be said that many of these indicators improved. Furthermore, it is true that these NGOs rely, to a greater extent, on indigenous and European financing, exactly as the Trust envisioned in 2003 (Trust, 2004).

Limits

Our research is limited by our sample being unrepresentative (although influential) and the descriptive study design. The data are also incomplete (for many NGOs, eligible annual reports are not available for all years). In addition, it can be argued that 20 years is not a sufficient period for a truly independent civil society to emerge and fully emancipate from its state or corporate sponsors. Another limitation is that the empirical data come only from one country, a rather small one. A final limitation is that the study is narrowed down only to financial independence and did not address organisational independence. Further research in these directions may shed more light on the topic of concern. When interpreting our data, various contexts and pieces of information should be considered. While civic funding is an important principle, other factors need to be considered when assessing the current state of civil society and its trends. High reliance on external funding should not automatically be seen as undesirable in civil society.

Conclusion

Many authors have observed that civil society in Slovakia was heavily influenced by external financing. To our knowledge, this article is the first that analyses this phenomenon in exact numbers and deals with the changes in the structure of financing over two decades. The method used in this article is novel in that it studies primary data and categorises each sponsor and transaction individually and is not based solely on accounting categories which do not reflect underlying

ownership and funding relations. This gives us a more detailed picture. Overall, our data show that NGOs that were kickstarted by the CEE Trust are still largely dependent on external funding. Although some changes in sponsor composition occurred – external corporate funding was largely replaced by another type of external funding (public funding), and the role of one major foreign donor (the Trust) was largely replaced by another major foreign donor (EU and EEA funds) – civic funding remained low (less than 10%). This might be explained by the sufficient financing provided by external donors (so seeking other sources is not felt as effective), the reproduction of the financial model of the Trust's founders, or the limited support for the NGOs in the local population. Further research is needed to determine the extent to which these factors might have influenced the funding patterns. Although the generalisability of our findings is limited due to a rather small sample and incomplete data, they are consistent with the view that the basic patterns of NGO financing generally remain relatively stable over time, at least on the scale of two decades.

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Petra Guasti and Zdenka Mansfeldová (eds.)

Democracy Under Stress. Changing Perspectives on Democracy, Governance and Their Measurement

Petra Guasti and Zdenka Mansfeldová (eds)

Democracy, defined as liberal pluralism, is under stress worldwide. Pluralistic democratic institutions such as: a free press, civil society, and the rule of law all seem to be under attack. Democracies are being hollowed out from within while preserving the fundamental facade of elections.

The strength of this book is in providing a range of perspectives on the study of democracy under stress. The authors, renowned scholars of democratic theory and democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, highlight the potential of different approaches – from comparative meta-assessment using indices and survey data, to case studies focused on understanding context and causal processes – for obtaining a better grasp of the loci of the stress.

Together, we offer the reader the opportunity to assess different conceptual frameworks and approaches, to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, and to advance the study of democracy in the future. This volume is also an invitation for scholars to redirect their attention to Central and Eastern Europe, which offers an opportunity to deepen our understanding of democracy.

We see democracy in Central and Eastern Europe under stress but avoid general labels such as the crisis of democracy and deconsolidation. Instead, we argue that to understand the contemporary situation in the CEE region, we need to move beyond assessing institutional frameworks and to include citizens in our understanding and measurement of democracy.

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Between Politicisation and Depoliticisation: Restitution of Church Property in the Czech Republic*

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Abstract: Elaborating on the process of the restitution of church property in the Czech Republic after the fall of the communist regime, this paper stresses the discursive dimension of this process. To obtain information on the main arguments for and against restitution, we selected two mainstream daily newspapers, the centre-right *Lidové noviny* and centre-left *Právo*, and the 'official' church media of the two largest churches seeking restitution in the Czech Republic: *Katolický týdeník*, the official paper of the Roman Catholic Church, and the monthly *Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren* magazine, *Český bratr*. All selected sources covered the 1990–2019 period. Our analysis of the media debate helps to determine why restitution in the Czech Republic – an interesting case given that it is perceived as the most atheistic country of the Visegrad Four – took its unique direction. It took more than twenty years for the churches to receive their relatively generous compensation and, at the same time, become separated from the state. Linking the theoretical concept of discursive depoliticisation with an argumentative analysis allows us to show that emphasis of the spiritual contribution of churches to society did not play a key supporting role in legitimising the restitution. The enactment of restitution was aided by two widely shared, morally oriented depoliticised sentiments: a neoliberal emphasis on private property and efficient management and an emphasis on the defence of constitutionality reinforced by anti-communist sentiments.

Keywords: restitution of church property, argumentative discourse analysis, post-communism, Czech Republic

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Introduction

In this article, we analyse the thirty-year-long public debate on the restitution of church property in the Czech Republic following the fall of the communist regime in 1989. We emphasise the discursive dimension of restitution, claiming that the arguments contained in the media debate could help us explain what ultimately made it possible to enact financial compensation to churches in an 'atheist' country such as the Czech Republic. Through an analysis of the media debate, we try to identify what narratives and arguments were crucial. Was the approval of relatively generous compensation to churches based on moral grounds as an atonement for communist grievances? Could it be that the churches were needed as key actors in the process of rebuilding civil society, or were other factors involved?

As we explain in more detail in the following sections, it took more than twenty years of fierce public debate before the Act on Property Settlement with Churches and Religious Societies (No. 428, 2012) was adopted, and before the separation of church and state became legally consolidated. The relationship between churches and the state after the fall of the communist regime in the Czech Republic is often explored with an emphasis on the legal and institutional context (Hupková et al., 2015; Nešpor, 2020; O'Mahony, 2003), combining both economic and historical approaches, as well as political science (Minarik, 2017, 2018, 2020). Existing sociological inquiry dealing with the relationship between church and state is mostly concerned with the number of believers (Bunčák, 2001; Hamplová & Nešpor, 2009; Spousta, 2002; Tížik, 2012; Váně & Štípková, 2013), typologies and degrees of religiosity (Hamplová, 2013; Lužný & Nešpor, 2008). In the Czech context, research deals with the discursive aspects of the state-church relationship only marginally (Enyedi & O'Mahony, 2004; Václavík, 2016) or covers only a short (Koudelková, 2021; Šmídová, 2012) or specific case (Lužný, 2021; Rončáková, 2021). Other discursive studies are concerned with agenda setting, elaborating on methodological issues of focusing events (Váně & Kalvas, 2013), or exploring the Roman Catholic Church's ability to set the public agenda (Váně & Kalvas, 2011).

Compared to other post-communist states, the Czech Republic is often perceived in public discourse as a very atheistic country (a perception that is repeatedly mentioned in the above-mentioned studies). Comparative research on religiosity shows that the Czech Republic has a higher rate of declared non-religiousness and atheism than most other countries - for example, in WIN-Gallup International Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism (2012), 30% of Czechs described themselves as convinced atheists, 48% as 'not a religious person' and only 20% as 'a religious person'. This earned the Czech Republic the position of the third-most atheistic country after China and Japan. However, this picture of the Czech Republic is not sufficiently accurate. As the census data shows, while the number of believers who subscribe to a particular church or religious society has been steadily declining in the Czech Republic, from 14% in 2011 to 13.1% in 2021, the number of believers who do not subscribe to any church, religious society, or

denomination has risen slightly from 6.8% in 2011 to 9.1% in 2021 (CZSO, 2021, own calculation). As several authors claim, according to more detailed research, Czechs are more oriented towards privatized forms of religiosity and individualized forms of spirituality (Hamplová & Nešpor, 2009; Nešpor, 2020; Václavík et al., 2018; Vido et al., 2016). We want to show how the debate on restitution took place in this context. Unlike previous studies, our research tries to capture the development of the media debate on church restitution over the entire period, from 1990 (after the Velvet Revolution and the establishment of democracy) to 2019.

The media debate that we have followed throughout this period is highly polarized. It blends justificatory, social, moral and transcendental expectations with purely practical, political and economic ones. To understand the interplay between the different kinds of arguments and to assess their hierarchical relationships, we employed Marteen Hajer's (2002, 2006) argumentative discourse analysis and interpreted our results using the theoretical concepts of politicisation and depoliticisation (Barša et al., 2010). This analytical approach, which combines open-ended and theoretically based data coding, allows us to distinguish between political, pragmatically contextualised arguments and long-term moral arguments. Moreover, it lets us evaluate their discursive effects. Hajer understands discourse as being (re)produced through practices. These include not only strategic interests but also the meanings people attach to events. Practices promote the position of certain types of interpretations ('ideas, concepts and categorisations') at the expense of others (Hajer, 2002, p. 44). In our case, the media's representation of the meaning of restitution can help us to understand how social, institutional, political and legal practices are interconnected with, and affected by, media accounts of church property restitution.

The paper has the following structure. First, the overall historical and legal background of restitution in Czechoslovakia / Czech Republic is examined. The second part explains the methodological approach and introduces the theoretical concepts of politicisation and depoliticisation used to interpret the data. The following section presents the construction of the dataset and describes the process of analysis. The analytical part of the text presents the main storylines of the media debate. We then discuss our interpretations in the final sections and offer a general summary and concluding remarks for further possible research on the topic.

Restitution of church property: a brief overview of legal measures

The Catholic Church has a long and complex history in the Czech lands, dating back to the arrival of Christianity in the 9th century. Over the centuries, the Church has accumulated a considerable amount of property and wealth, which it lost during various periods of conflict and upheaval, including the Hussite Wars and the Thirty Years' War (for a more detailed overview, see Minarik, 2017, pp. 460–462). In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Church gradually recovered some of its

property, but this process was interrupted by the expropriation of all remaining Church property by the Communist regime in 1948. During the communist era, the property of churches in then Czechoslovakia was confiscated, and their members persecuted. The Act 'on Economic Security of Churches and Religious Societies by the State' (Act no. 218/1949 Coll.) also introduced the need to obtain state consent for the performance of the activities of priests and pastors, as well as the payment of salaries for state-approved church officials. The churches thus completely lost their independence from the state. As a consequence, the question of how to remedy the churches' situation took on great importance during the 1989 Velvet Revolution. Immediately after the revolution, in July 1990, the so-called 'enumeration laws' were adopted in order to begin to rectify the injustices committed against the Catholic religious orders by the communist regime. Under the act, approximately two hundred buildings, mainly monasteries and religious buildings, were returned to the Catholic Church. However, a large portion of the properties had already been used for other purposes and were not handed over.

To consolidate the position of religion in the newly established democracy, the law on Freedom of Religious Belief and the Position of Churches and Religious Societies (No. 308, 1991) was adopted in 1991. In the same year, an even more important law (at least from today's perspective) came into effect: The Act on the Adjustment of Ownership Rights of Land and Other Agricultural Property, which included a statement (the so-called blocking paragraph) that 'property owned originally by churches, religious orders, and congregations cannot be transferred to another person's ownership until the laws on such property are passed' (No. 229, 1991). This measure aimed to prohibit the transfer of ownership of original church property until a special law on church property restitution was adopted. It was expected that such a law would be prepared soon afterwards.

Nevertheless, even in post-revolutionary enthusiasm, the restitution of church property failed to be implemented. In 1992, the law was rejected by the Parliament (the Federal Assembly of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic). In 1993, Czechoslovakia was dissolved, and in Slovakia, the settlement with the churches was adopted later that year. In the Czech Republic, several further attempts were made to create a new restitution law. Nevertheless, it took more than twenty years before, in 2012, the Act on Property Settlement with Churches and Religious Societies (No. 428, 2012) was approved. It consisted of two parts: restitution of church property and financial separation of churches and the state. According to this act, approximately CZK 75 billion worth of property is to be returned to the churches and CZK 59 billion (plus inflation) is to be gradually paid to them over 30 years as compensation for property that cannot or, for various reasons, will not be returned. Seventeen of 42 Czech churches¹ signed the agreement with the state and would recover fields, forests and real estate worth about 56% of the total original assets. The churches had to apply individually

¹ See the register of churches and religious societies, http://www3.mkcr.cz/cns_internet/ (accessed 5 March 2020).

for the reversion of these properties and prove their ownership prior to 1948.² Some properties have not been returned for a number of reasons, including private ownership, the inability to trace evidence of ownership and political reasons. Financial compensation is additional to restitution, and its main objective is to alleviate certain property injustices.³ The contribution to the activities of the churches and religious societies concerned is thus principally a tool for achieving a settlement of the relations between the State and the churches and religious societies, which should lead to the separation of the churches and religious societies from the State. State subsidies to churches are reduced by 5% annually and will cease after 2029. As the largest original owner, the Catholic Church was to receive almost the entire amount of financial compensation. However, it agreed with other churches and religious societies to offer nearly 20% in their favour. Payment of financial compensation for property not handed over in church restitution will end in 2042. From 2043, churches will switch to self-financing.

The controversy over restitution law has not completely subsided. On 23 April 2019, the Chamber of Deputies approved the Communist Party's proposal for the taxation of financial compensation that the state pays to churches.⁴ However, in its judgment of 15 October 2019, the Constitutional Court abolished this taxation. As can be seen, the initial willingness to redress communist injustices became a controversial political issue that reverberates within Czech society to this very day.

Methodology and conceptual framework

The article employs an argumentative discourse analysis, as proposed by Marteen Hajer (2006), because this form of analysis is especially suitable for analysing long-term public debates on controversial topics. It reveals the key role of narratives, symbols and metaphors and thus allows us to see what types of argumentative rationality actors use in discussion and how a particular debate is structured into

² In February 1948, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, with the support of the Soviet Union, increased its influence over the Czechoslovakian government and eventually took it over. According to new, radical land reform (Act No. 46/1948 Coll.) implemented after its 'Victorious February', all agricultural and forest lands were confiscated, and the churches were left with only properties of up to two hectares. The churches were torn from their economic base and thus became dependent on state support, eventually leading to state control not only of church property but also spiritual services.

³ The financial compensation eventually affected only sixteen entities as the Unity of the Brethren Baptists renounced it in April 2013.

⁴ The Communist Party forced the ANO-led coalition of Prime Minister Andrej Babiš to support the taxation of the restitution as a condition of its continued support in the parliament. Similar political pressures arose many times during the restitution process; while they go beyond the scope of this study, they would be a great topic for a case study of Czech political negotiations.

different discourses. As a methodological tool, Hajer uses storylines, which function as a shorthand for more complex narratives (Hajer, 2006, p. 69). In the case of the church property restitution, they can, for instance, make the claim 'churches should be poor', which refers to the complex stances opposing the return of property to churches. According to Hajer, the ritual nature of the storylines allows them to act as triggers for the emergence of discourse coalitions. These combine opinions that share an overall direction and common goals, but differ in detail regarding how to achieve them or why. Rather than being connected to persons, discourse coalitions are 'related to practices in the context of which actors employ storylines, and (re)produce and transform discourse' (Hajer, 2006, p. 70).

Given the argumentative richness of the restitution debate, we decided to focus on a more detailed examination of the arguments and narratives that helped shape the main storylines and discourse coalitions. Based on the first outputs of our data analysis, we found the theoretical concepts of politicisation and depoliticisation put forward by Barša et al (2010) to be useful. These concepts allow arguments that reflect specific contextual and pragmatically oriented measures (politicisation) to be distinguished from other types of moral, value-framing arguments about the restitution act and the actors involved in the debate (depoliticisation).

Drawing on Carl Schmitt's (2007) concept of depoliticisation, depoliticisation can be seen as a culture war that converts all disputes into moral and value conflicts (see also Barša et al., 2021; Hunter, 1992; McKnight, 2005; Thomson, 2010). The dispute is perceived as a fundamentalist struggle of good versus evil. The enemy is viewed essentially as a representative of an unchanging identity and is excluded from public debate. By drawing on moral values, the depoliticising discourse provides a stable, difficult-to-question framing. When we use this concept in data interpretation and combine it with Hajer's methodological tools, we can further deepen our insight into the debate over restitution process under scrutiny, especially when assessing the relative power of the multiple storylines and discourses created. To evaluate the influence of discourses, that is, to identify which discourse is dominant, Hajer establishes two kinds of criteria: *discourse structuration* and *discourse institutionalisation*. Structuration occurs when a social unit starts to share the same conceptualisations of the world. To remain credible, actors must base their claims on these shared concepts. If discourse consolidates into concrete institutional arrangements, we call it discourse institutionalisation (Hajer, 2006).

The public debate on the restitution of church property comprises both politicisation and depoliticisation principles. As depoliticised moral principles are widely shared, those who try to politicise the issue by pointing to some concrete obstacles (e.g. missing inventory of expropriated church property) are usually in a worse position when trying to push their agendas (cf. Barša et al., 2010, pp. 198–199). On the other hand, once these politicised agendas become potent, they tend to become stable and transform into depoliticised principles – for example, transparency as a moral principle. The interplay of these principles is presented in the analytical section of this paper.

Data

We aimed to capture the media debate from its beginnings in 1990 to the present day, trying to obtain an overview of the main types of arguments for and against restitution and to learn how strong their discursive positions were. At the same time, our goal was to capture even the small argumentative nuances, going beyond just general information, such as the positive-negative connotations usually revealed through quantitative content analysis. Choosing a qualitative argumentative analysis to examine such a long period of time required a theoretically substantiated selection of data. To obtain information on the main arguments for and against restitution, we selected two mainstream daily newspapers, the centre-right *Lidové noviny* (People's News) and centre-left *Právo* (Justice), which together represent the two main platforms for the left and right political-ideological camps. At the same time, we analysed the 'official' church media of the two largest churches seeking restitution in the Czech Republic: the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB). The sources included *Katolický týdeník* (Catholic weekly), the official paper of the RCC, and the monthly ECCB magazine, *Český bratr* (Czech brother). All selected sources covered the entire 1990–2019 period. After selection, we verified in which years the topic of church restitution was most frequently mentioned. In the beginning, we used simple keywords such as 'church', 'restitution', etc. However, as we read the articles revealed by our searches, we gradually adjusted the keywords to include texts that did not explicitly mention the topic of restitution. For later years, we also added the keywords 'taxation' and 'compensation' as a new public debate emerged in 2018 on whether restitutions should be taxed. We then selected the years with the highest number of articles (1993, 1996, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2018) and supplemented them with years related to key events – 1990, the year of formation of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, and 2019, the year of the debate about possible taxation of restitution.

We used Microsoft Excel and Atlas.ti to analyse the collected data and coded almost 1,500 texts of various types (news articles, opinion pieces, columns, readers' letters, etc.). For each text, we noted the main theme, specific events, key actors and the overall message in relation to restitution. We also monitored the interconnectedness of the texts within and across different types of media. We then coded each text, first descriptively and then analytically.

Media debate on restitution: storylines and discourse coalitions

In the following section, we present a list of the most common storylines. To bring readers as close as possible to the environment of the Czech media debate, we illustrate these storylines with specific quotations selected to represent the statements most typical of a given analytical category.

The media debate was highly polarised around the topic of 'yes' or 'no' for

restitution. The storylines below cover the causes, course and expected consequences of restitution. As such, they are not necessarily one-sidedly economic, moral, or political but rather are comprehensive, meaning that they have the potential to be widely shared among diverse kinds of readership.

Storylines against restitution

Going through the analysed materials, one thing was obvious: a strong discourse coalition of arguments opposing the restitution process was concentrated in the leftist news daily *Právo*. The number of articles far exceeded the number of equally thematised articles in the centre-right *Lidové noviny*. In addition to the editors, occasional critical opinion pieces on the restitutions were written by left-wing experts from various professions, former dissidents, readers and social democratic politicians. The discursive affinity of the different arguments against restitution was so strong that the overall narrative was often reproduced as 'all in one': a patchwork of diverse negative arguments against restitution was made to create one comprehensive narrative of impending injustice. The narrative could be reproduced as follows: the greedy churches, in a conspiracy with the right-wing government, will unfairly and, at the expense of many others (future generations, health and care professionals, retirees, the socially deprived, etc.), siphon off repeatedly vast amounts of property they have never owned before from a meagre state in order to expand their wealth, consolidate their power and spread a right-wing and ecclesiastical ideology.

We could analytically divide the argumentation against the restitution of church property into two sections: (a) explanatory causes related to the character of the churches and their future development should the restitution act be passed and (b) comments on the restitution law approval process and its future consequences. This division also constitutes the main storyline behind the two main types of anti-restitution discourses.

The threat of the ungodly (powerful and wealthy) church

As uncontrolled bullets laden with property, flirting with specific political parties and tending towards command in society, some of the churches, as history warns, may be quite dangerous. (Lukáš Jelínek, a political scientist and member of the Social Democrats)⁵

The first storyline against restitution refers to narratives that already consider the churches 'ungodly' or that see restitution as a threat to depart from the principles and ethics of Christianity in the future. What these Christian values are

⁵ Jelínek, L. in 'Hra s ohněm' (Playing with fire), *Právo*, 5 September 2012, p. 6.

is, of course, indistinct, but some of them were explicitly mentioned: 'The church should be poor'⁶, in reference to the RCC, and it should not crave power. Religious argumentation against restitution was rather marginal and could be summarised as 'no one can serve two masters, God and property'.⁷ From the point of view of believers, churches should be humble and modest, serving God and society, rather than making financial or power demands.

Secular argumentation was even more radical, underlining the threat of a contemporary counter-reformation. Voices commemorating the historical role of the churches as a symbol of power and oppression evoked the role of the RCC in consolidating the Habsburg power over the Bohemian lands during the 17th century (after the Battle of White Mountain)⁸, and reviving unresolved historical resentments. Moreover, this story was sometimes enlivened by images of the Vatican as an economic and power centre that would seek to dominate the Czech state through the Catholic Church. The RCC is seen as an institution which betrays national ideas and identity. According to narratives which see the 'ungodly' values of the RCC as a threat, the RCC should serve the people, not rule them. Giving money to this institution would strengthen its position, which, in a secular society like the Czech Republic, should be rather marginal. Restitution could thus result in the loss of the RCC's 'true' values and mission. This focus on the desired character and position of the RCC was often supported by references to the results of opinion polls claiming that '80% of society is against restitution'.⁹

Concerns about churches being too powerful were related to a desire for them to play a service-giving role. However, according to the most polarised accounts, the supposedly over-privileged position of churches should be drastically downplayed, including the suggestion that churches should avoid using the social and educational services they offer because they seek to spread religious ideology through them. The idea of the churches as the spiritual and moral compass of society was already being opposed in the 1990s. To mitigate their social in-

⁶ According to editor Perknerová, K. in 'Církev má být chudá' (The church should be poor), *Rudé Právo*, 14 January 1993, p. 1.

⁷ E.g. the 14 August 2012 declaration 'Křesťané proti zákonu o církevním majetku' (Christians against the law on church property), <https://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/13730-krestane-proti-zakonu-o-cirkevnim-majetku> (accessed 11 March 2020).

⁸ According to some currents in public discourse, the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620 between the armies of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Kingdom of Bohemia holds a special place in the Czech national consciousness as an irreparable national tragedy. It is regarded as the beginning of one of the most humiliating periods in Czech history as it is believed that by destroying the Czech Protestant nobility, the Catholic Habsburgs destroyed Czech culture itself, which was strongly Germanised after this event (Mamatey, 1981).

⁹ E.g. Pehe, J., a political scientist and writer who regularly contributes to the daily *Právo*, in 'Církevní restituce versus řecká cesta' (Church restitution versus the Greek way), *Právo*, 13 August 2012, p. 6.

fluence, Václav Klaus, then a representative of a liberal and free-market-oriented right-wing political party and Minister of Finance, stated that churches are just one of many leisure associations.

The political game of the right-wing government

There are few things that disgust the majority of citizens as much as church restitutions enforced by the last right-wing government. Because even a dull man understands that this is not just compensation to the churches, but a glorious, unsubstantiated gift, especially to the Catholic Church. (Jiří Hanák, editor of *Právo*, signatory of Charter 77)¹⁰

In the second main anti-restitution storyline, criticism of churches (especially the RCC and its political ambitions and desire for power) continues to play an important role; however, attention shifts significantly away from the churches as agents to the right-wing parties promoting restitution and the right-wing government that approved them in 2012. The main part of the criticism is directed against the law's approval process, which is seen as having been pushed through by the government against the will of the political opposition and the majority of society. Based on the zero-sum game model of critique, restitution opponents criticised the timing of the law: whether during the post-communist transformation in the 1990s or before (2008) and after the economic crisis (2012), restitution has been seen as an unjust enrichment at the expense of civil servants, seniors, children, people in need and the like.

Alongside this socio-economic critique, another statement stresses the lack of transparency in the approval process, especially the origin and extent of the restituted property; this ambiguity or even tactical concealment of this list is repeated throughout the discussion from the 1990s to the present. Referring to the reforms of Joseph II¹¹, restitution opponents claim that the RCC did not own the property. According to these accounts, the ecclesiastical property had a distinctly public character and the Catholic Church only administered it.¹²

This argument goes hand in hand with the claim that 'the churches will acquire immense property', and instead of restitution, we are witnessing the giving of a 'great gift to the churches'. Moreover, without taxing financial compensation, the budget deficit will increase, which will then become a burden for future gen-

¹⁰ J. Hanák in 'Muzikanti' (Musicians), *Právo*, 9 November 2013, p. 6.

¹¹ In 1781, in the Patent of Toleration, the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II, abolished the monopoly of the Catholic Church in the Habsburg Monarchy and extended religious freedom to his non-Catholic Christian vassals. He appropriated the property of the churches and created a religious fund from which churches were supported; however, this originated from assets mainly expropriated from the abolished monasteries.

¹² Uhl, P., an anti-communist dissident and, later, leftist journalist and politician, in 'Biskupové by neměli být zpupní' (Bishops should not be arrogant), *Právo*, 10 January 2012, p. 6.

erations. The legality of the restitution process is also challenged by pointing out that churches are favoured over other restituees since, according to restitution law, only natural persons, not legal entities, can obtain property under restitution; this argument is also sometimes used in criticism formulated from religious positions. Furthermore, it is stated that churches should not have these kinds of privileges and benefits.

Last but not least, anti-restitution accounts criticise the politicisation of the restitution process, which is interpreted as an effort by right-wing parties to win the votes of believers. In interplay with the 'clerical lobby', the restitution process is considered a vicious circle, a non-transparent political game between the right-wing government and the churches, especially the RCC.

Pro-restitution storylines

The statements in favour of restitution were strongly defensive and reactive, coming mainly from the editors of centre-right newspapers, church representatives and right-wing politicians. Ordinary citizens, believers and atheists commented on the topic in letters from readers. The arguments could also be summarised as one 'big narrative' reflecting the whole restitution process: the churches, bearers of spiritual, moral and cultural values, with undeniable justice on their side, continually initiated an explanatory public dialogue. However, as the Nazi/Communist practices of the left-wing parties begin to dominate again, a lie-based campaign is being waged against the churches; the churches will only recover a small fraction of their property, which will be challenging to manage, and will thus continue to bear their natural destiny.

This argumentation in favour of restitution of church property is related to (a) the reasons why restitution should be perceived as necessary and just, and (b) the challenges that churches face due to the restitution process and potential separation of church and state. These arguments constituted the two main storylines of pro-restitution discourses, which we call here, according to their overarching meaning, 'justice goes first' and 'the churches' new deal'.

Justice goes first

I will answer very briefly. It is a pity that the problem of restitution is politicised, and it is not understood as a matter of justice. (Jan Graubner, the Archbishop of Olomouc and Metropolitan of Moravia since 1992 and Chairman of the Czech Bishops' Conference from 2000 to 2010, answers in a *Katolický týdeník* the question of how he perceives the discussion about the restitution process)¹³

¹³ Graubner, J. in 'Musíme více spolupracovat. Rozhovor s arcibiskupem Janem Graubnerem' (We need to work together more. Interview with Archbishop Jan Graubner), *Katolický týdeník*, 24 October 1993, p. 8.

In reaction to the discursive affronts, the pro-restitution storylines emphasise the churches entitlement to compensation because of the injustices committed against them by the communist regime. According to this argument, churches have a moral right to restitution. Opponents should not try to apply a meritocratic principle based on assessing whether churches deserve financial compensation due to their specific characteristics or the services they can provide. The value of moral legitimacy rather than economic benefit should be the primary consideration when speaking of restitution. A related claim stresses that the churches were the rightful owners of the property that is now in dispute.

Restitution was promised by the government directly after the Velvet Revolution and some preparatory legal steps were even taken (see the above subsection 'Restitution of church property: a brief overview of legal measures'). Thus, under the principle of 'agreements must be respected', another argument for restitution is the emphasis on respect for legal conventions. In this regard, the politicisation of the restitution process is criticised, as political struggles, especially populist criticism of restitutions led by the left-wing opposition, have led to the constant postponement of the law's adoption. Because of this infinite postponement, also referred to as 'unconstitutional inaction', the churches find themselves in an undignified vacuum, waiting for the end result. This situation is all the more precarious because it also affects municipalities, which cannot handle unsettled property until the restitution law is adopted. Proponents of restitution also make more subtle claims for justice in relation to the course of restitution negotiations. They understand the media criticism of the churches, led mainly by the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and the Czech Social Democratic Party, as unfair, false, offensive and an attempt to discredit the churches. The emphasis on moral and legal principles is most evident in the way in which the taxation of financial compensation was refused by restitution proponents in 2018 and 2019. From the beginning, this proposal has been described as unconstitutional.

The churches' new deal

We can only have real certainty in heaven. On Earth, the forest can burn down, the monetary system can collapse, a business can go bankrupt and an insurance company can siphon off money. We are in a position like any other family. To live, we need to work and take care of ourselves. But our goal is not to accumulate property; it should only serve the purposes of life. (Jan Graubner)¹⁴

The final storyline refers to the self-reflection of the churches in the time of freedom and to the reflection of their present and future relationships to the state and

¹⁴ Graubner, J. in 'Otázky a odpovědi k zákonu o nápravě křivd' (Questions and answers to the Act on settlement), *Katolický týdeník*, 27 May–2 June 2008, p. 12.

society. In comparison with previous narratives, these are significantly more future oriented. The churches present themselves as bearers of spiritual and moral, as well as cultural, social and traditional values, and they ask a self-reflexive question of how to combine these abstract attributes with the materiality of financial compensation. There are accounts which reflect the discrepancy resulting from the need to manage property and adhere to spiritual contemplation. The answers on how to cope with this challenge are quite consistent: spirituality comes first; however, financial security should help churches accomplish their mission.

Thus, to fulfil their inner and external social expectations, the churches want to be 'neither rich nor poor'. Pragmatically, they consider funding a necessary condition for their work, which includes distinct types of services to the public (religious, social, educational, cultural, etc.). However, they argue (and this is proven by the calculations of some economists) that, contrary to what the opponents of restitution claim, the amount of property returned is far from sufficient for the full functioning of these churches. Nevertheless, as bearers of spiritual and cultural values with a tradition of more than a thousand years, armed with inner strength, moral continuity and the joy of salvation, the churches will be able to cope with this burden.

The measures to help the churches manage their finances and property in a new way are both solidary and purely economic. According to this argument, the amount of property is not immense; solidarity among the churches will be necessary. Moreover, the believers and other members of this discourse coalition see the churches as potentially more efficient financial managers than the state. Churches stress their modesty, transparency and effective property management, which consists not only of taking care of land, but also of historic buildings, monuments and, in particular, churches.

The argument also claimed that transferring fiscal responsibility to the churches themselves will be economically beneficial for the state and taxpayers, as the state will stop paying salaries to clergy. Among strong opponents of restitution, only this separation of church and state, along with the blocking paragraph, was openly accepted as a legitimate argument for restitution approval.

Interplay of storylines: the two ruling principles of the debate

With the main storylines settled, we need to discuss which are crucial to the discussion. How is it possible that financial compensation was eventually approved in such an atheistic society despite the fact that the opponents of restitution repeatedly underlined that 'the church should be poor'? Which arguments contributed the most to this result?

To understand the church-state-society discursive interplay in the restitution debate, two topics – economic neoliberalism and anti-communism – are fundamental as the predominant depoliticised framing sentiments. There is a fusion

of these two principles in the otherwise competing dominant anti-restitution and pro-restitution discourses. The difference, however, is that, whereas the emphasis on economics persists in the restitution debate, the aspect of justice stemming from anti-communism resonates as the debate escalates. Both opponents and supporters of restitution share the neoliberal sentiment and emphasise its socially oriented effectiveness. They accept the neoliberal doctrine of private ownership and merit, and modify it only by stressing the social and moral dimension – money is to serve as a means, not a purpose. It is, however, effective money management which, argumentatively speaking, rules the debate. Arguments about not only growth and investment but also about economic efficiency and transparent management quickly emerged in 1990 as a dominant theme in the discussion.

This finding resonates with Olga Šmídová's conclusions (2012). She analysed restitution (not only church restitution) in the discourse of the daily *Právo* in 1990. Until 1991, this newspaper was called by its full name, *Rudé právo* (Red Justice) – referring to its history as the central press organ of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. This connection was discursively severed in 1991, when the 'Red' attribute was replaced by the subtitle 'left-wing daily'. Šmídová has shown that *Rudé právo* surprisingly and unscrupulously tuned in to the rhetoric of privatisation ideology. According to Šmídová, the market became the link between the then 'right-wing liberals' and the former communists (Šmídová, 2012, pp. 153–154). Although the rhetoric of *Rudé právo* still had reservations about church restitution, it also acknowledged that private property had its place in post-revolutionary Czechoslovakia. As our analysis from 1990 onwards shows, the ideology of the market 'with a human face' persisted as a powerful discursive link for building opinion coalitions. Even the conservative part of the political spectrum used this sentiment to push for church restitution. Churches have tried to avoid concerns about them not being able to manage their property. Since the early 1990s, pro-restitution voices have emphasised that churches will manage their property economically and transparently, with a heavy emphasis on profitable investment. A private owner is perceived as being better than the state. Both the proponents and opponents of restitution additionally agreed that one of the reasons why restitution should take place is that resolving property disputes will allow municipalities to develop and expand their infrastructure.

Anti-communism, as a second shared depoliticised sentiment, could not, of course, be applied across the board since the Communist Party, as a main opponent of restitution, could not deny itself. As Václav Šmidrkal points out in his article on memory discourses about communist state borders in former Czechoslovakia after 1989, two opposing discourses remain in the Czech Republic, reflecting its sharp division along the axis of anti-communism (Šmidrkal, 2017). However, when it comes to the restitution of church property, even contemporary communists rarely question the oppression of churches under communism. And it is this widely shared but long unspoken and materially (via restitution) unresolved injustice which eventually escalated into an emphasis on the procedural aspects of the democratic process, represented by the ruling principle of constitutionality.

Storylines based on anti-communist sentiment came into play at a time of crisis, which with the help of Hajer's methodological tools, can be identified as radical changes in the discursive practices or positions of discursive actors.

The 2012 billboard election campaign of the Social Democrats was one such change, using a caricature of a fat prelate grabbing a bag of money with his hand to illustrate the church's desire for wealth. As we have already mentioned, the anti-restitution narratives were quite durable and compact, and together they formed a coherent 'grand narrative' about the restitution threat. This escalated with the billboard campaign, which was widely referred to as 'anti-clerical' in public discourse. It cleverly linked the two anti-restitution storylines presented above. The billboard shows a fat hand in a robe adorned with a distinctive ring that is about to take a sack from another hand in a blue sleeve. The first hand embodied the greedy church, and the sack full of money was being handed over by the anti-social right-wing government – blue in the Czech Republic is the colour of right-wing parties. In addition, the sign on the billboard facilitated this interpretation: the Civic Democratic Party and TOP 09 (Tradition, responsibility, prosperity 09), two parties on the right, wanted to give CZK 134 billion to the churches. The billboards thus managed to summarise the criticism of restitution by depicting both the 'threat of the ungodly church' and the 'political game of the right-wing government' storylines.

It was also the moment when the discourse of the churches towards the advocates of restitution changed. The billboards functioned as the proverbial last straw, activating the churches' discourse. Readers of *Katolický týdeník* were repeatedly encouraged from that point on to be civilly/politically active¹⁵ and not vote for the Social Democrats because of their manipulation and false practices, despite their social agenda possibly being closely in line with that of Catholic voters. Here, we can again build on Šmídová's (2012) research, which shows that the former communist regime was perceived as the cause of injustice and that Právo also adopted this rhetoric. 'That communism', 'that system', not specific people were blamed for the injustice caused by the past regime (Šmídová, 2012, p. 151). However, it seems that if the culprit is specified, as was the case with the billboard campaign, it is easier to lead the offensive.

The blame for the communist system was widely shared, but at the same time too flat, not offering the possibility of more vigorous action. Suddenly, however, it was possible to name the culprit – the Social Democrats – and relate their billboard campaign to the injustices of the pre-revolutionary communist regime. This changed the church's agenda from defensive to offensive. Only then could it appeal more strongly to the general anti-communist sentiment that everyone understands.

Even in the mainstream media, the sense of injustice was discursively directed towards an 'anti-communist' appraisal of democracy (represented as ac-

¹⁵ E.g. Duka, D. (Chairman of the Czech Bishops' Conference) in 'Předseda ČBK k volbám' (Chairman of the CBK on the elections), *Katolický týdeník*, 22–28 October 2013, p. 2.

tive citizenship and constitutionality) against totalitarianism. By analogy, church restitution is seen here as a democratic mechanism for correcting communism's wrongs and, furthermore, as a means to demonstrate that past totalitarian injustices will not be repeated. As a result of this discursive shift, Act No. 428, 2012, was passed. In its wording, the pro-restitution discourse of the 'justice goes first' storyline, with its stress on anti-communism, was institutionalised, thus confirming its dominance.

The second discursive shift occurred with an even stronger emphasis on anti-communist sentiment in 2018/2019, when the possible taxation of financial compensation was addressed. It was the Communist Party that pushed for taxation in exchange for the support of the populist ruling party. Parliament passed a law to tax the compensation paid to churches. After parliamentary approval, the pro-restitution church discourse was radicalised again. What was only partially visible in 2012 was fully developed in 2018. The anti-communist pro-restitution narrative intensified and turned into a defence of constitutional values. For example, the Ecumenical Council of Churches (ERC) stressed that it is ready to act by all available democratic means against efforts to relativise and legitimise communist injustice. This was also emphasised by the Christian and Democratic Union, which described the Communist Party's proposal as an immoral attack on legal certainties.¹⁶

Thus, *pro bono publico* (see, for example, Reisigl & Wodak 2000) arguments were employed to show not only the churches' right to justice but also that constitutional values in general and, analogically, the democratic rule of law were at stake. As Stanislav Příbyl, Secretary General of the Czech Bishops' Conference noted, 'If we become accustomed to this "elasticity" of the legal environment, it we might soon lose our right to obtain justice and to protect our dignity, and therefore, we might find ourselves outside the scope of the democratic and legal state.'¹⁷

Even restitution opponents have stated that the Act on Property Settlement with Churches and Religious Societies (No. 428, 2012) unfortunately completely followed democratic law procedures and is thus legally unchallengeable. The argument of constitutionality prevailed in opposition to totalitarian practices. The Constitutional Court abolished the taxation of compensation in 2019. These are processes that Marteen Hajer (2006) refers to as the structuration and institutionalisation of key narratives.

In the agency that led to the enactment of restitution, the main role was not played by attributes associated with churches, such as spirituality or social services, but rather by the depoliticized moral principle of neoliberal democracy, symbolized by the defence of constitutionalism based on anti-communism (see also Havlík et al., 2014; Kopeček & Petrov, 2016) and economic efficiency.

¹⁶ 'Poslanci chtějí zdanit náhrady' (MEPs want to tax compensation), *Katolický týdeník*, 6 March 2018, p. 1.

¹⁷ Příbyl, S. in 'Znovu omílané restituce' (Repeated talk on restitution), *Katolický týdeník*, 12 June 2018, p. 8.

Conclusion

The argumentative analysis we have used has allowed us to reveal the nuances of the main storylines in the media debate on the church property restitution. We have identified (past-dependent) intersecting sentiments: (a) anti-communism, with its stress on the principle of democracy and constitutionality; and (b) neo-liberalism, with its emphasis on private ownership and economic efficiency – both of which served as key arguments in realizing the outputs of the restitution debate. These framing sentiments reflect highly shared principles which enable them to set the boundaries of what is acceptable to say. Thus, they serve as discursive limits that are difficult to exceed.

In short, the claims of atheists or believers about the spiritual or social role of churches in contemporary Czech society have not been the key arguments in resolving the fierce media debate about the restitution of church property and have not helped to achieve a legal settlement between the state and the churches. Rather, the key role was played by fears of the disruption of democratic processes and the possible return of a totalitarian regime – a widely shared depoliticizing sentiment in the Czech media debate on restitution. Constitutionality and private ownership were perceived as a shared, unsurpassable moral base, and this brought the two polarised sides of the debate a little closer together.

Further research should focus on a careful comparison of the media debate on the restitution and (potential) separation of church and state in the Czech Republic and other Visegrad countries. It can be assumed that in Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, discursive coalitions are forming around the role of churches in nation-building. This closer connection with the state allows churches to hold a more discursively accommodating position in case they want to continue to be financed by the state, whereas in the Czech Republic, as our research shows, churches come to be seen as moral when they present themselves as responsible neoliberal private owners, able to financially support themselves and finance, or at least co-finance, activities which, in the eyes of the public, are the subject of their business (e.g. charity, care for historic buildings).

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From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of the Roma–Towards Post-Neoliberal Ethnic Welfare*

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Abstract: The article examines how neoliberal reforms can pave the way for welfare racialisation, turning a delegitimised minimum-income scheme into a tool for racial-hierarchy enforcement. We follow the development of Czech minimum-income scheme legislation from 2014 to 2021, after a series of neoliberal (workfarist) reforms reinforced the restrictive and controlling aspects of the system. The analysed period is characterised by the greater involvement of politicians representing the poorest regions of the Czech Republic and by calls for further restrictions. Analysing parliamentary debates from this period, we show that the delegitimised social system is no longer understood as a tool of social protection or even labour market inclusion; rather, it has become a tool of ethnic hierarchisation, which particularly resonates in the context of perceived socioeconomic insecurity. We propose the term ‘post-neoliberal ethnic welfare’ to describe this emerging system, which derives its legitimacy from neoliberal categories of deservingness and reduces social-protection systems into a performative tool of control over the Roma population.

Keywords: welfare, Roma, neoliberalism, race, socially excluded localities

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Introduction

In recent decades, the influence of neoliberalism on social policy has created new categories of deservingness and entitlement. The neoliberal conviction that dependence on social benefits negatively informs the behaviour of the poor has not only legitimised the retrenchment of welfare support but also propagated

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the idea that the behaviour of the poor requires state regulation and monitoring. Welfare systems are increasingly judged not from the perspective of social justice or economic efficiency but, rather, from the perspective of their allegedly harmful effects on beneficiaries and society (Jensen & Tyler, 2015). The impact of neoliberalism on the retrenchment and increased conditionality of welfare has also been described by several authors in the Czech context, particularly during so-called social reform period of 2011/2012 (Mertl, 2016; Sirovatka, 2016). These reforms led to the reduction of protective functions in the country's welfare system and the increased stigmatisation of beneficiaries.

The present text focuses on the period after the wave of changes brought by the social reform. In contrast to the previous period, when changes in the social system had been initiated mainly through the central government, the analysed period is characterised by the greater involvement of politicians and other actors representing the poorest regions of the Czech Republic. Seemingly paradoxical, their demands accelerated restrictive approaches to welfare.

This article is intended to increase our understanding of these processes by analysing the narrative of parliamentary debates on the minimum-income scheme during the 2014–2021 period. We approach these debates as an arena in which the categories of deservingness, moral values, and hierarchies in society are being performed and contested. In line with Kóczé (2020) and Powell and van Baar (2019), we explore how the logic of neoliberal reforms intersects with an imaginary of the Roma as the main beneficiaries of welfare. We show how neoliberal changes paved the way for a rapid racialisation of welfare, turning it into a (performative) tool of control over the Roma population. To describe the emerging system, we introduce the term 'post-neoliberal ethnic welfare' in the conclusion of this paper.

Neoliberal welfare and ethnic governmentality

The distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor is, to some degree, inherent to all social-protection systems; however, it is central to the neoliberal approaches to welfare. The ability to sustain oneself is treated as a civic responsibility, while 'welfare dependency', unemployment, or low wages are understood as the outcomes of individual deficiency or failure. In a narrative that ignores the structural causes of poverty and individualises the responsibility for one's well-being, the provision of social support can be treated as benevolence on the part of the state, contributing to the unequal status of its recipients (Kourachanēs, 2020). Such beliefs legitimise linking social benefits with strict work requirements and regulations on the behaviour of recipients. Despite the rhetorical emphasis on individual freedoms and the minimal state, neoliberal welfare policies strengthen illiberal and paternalistic approaches to the poor, normalising intensified labour market competition (Greer, 2016; Standing, 2014; Wright, 2016).

Social policies turn into a moral project in which the poor are inevitably seen as outsiders and problematic groups and excluded, because of their behav-

ious, from the 'community of value'. To describe the experience of poor, low-income, unemployed, and precarious welfare recipients, various authors use terms such as 'sub-citizens', 'second (or third) class citizens', 'conditional citizens', or 'undeserving citizens' (Edmiston & Humpage, 2018; Morgen & Maskovsky, 2003; Seemann, 2021). The poor/unemployed/benefit recipient has become the 'other' of neoliberal policies, in opposition to whom one can construct his or her own status as a good, deserving citizen (Anderson, 2013). The more targeted and disciplinary the system of social benefits is, the more stigmatising it is for the poor to receive state support. This process decreases empathy for the least well off (Jensen & Tyler, 2015; Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005).

The impact of neoliberalism on the stigmatisation of welfare and the low status of its recipients is often intertwined with racial stereotypes. The omission of structural causes and an emphasis on individual moral responsibility, which are inherent to neoliberal reforms, render invisible both current social conditions and the historical origins of the marginalised position of ethnic, racial, or other minorities. At the same time, the outcomes, such as unemployment and low-quality housing, become more visible, criminalised, and pathologised (Powell & Van Baar, 2019). This situation contributes to the calls both for the retrenchment of social support, which is being given allegedly undeserving groups, and the increased securitisation and policing of ethnic and migrant minorities. According to Wacquant (Wacquant, 2009, 2010), policing and coercion become the main tools with which to maintain control over the 'troublemaking' racialised poor, as well as core mechanisms of neoliberal governance. Social problems are turned into security issues, while performative securitisation creates to an impression of control in the context of increasing 'objective social insecurity' (Wacquant, 2010, p. 17), impacting all strata of society. The 'vilification and humiliation' of the criminalised black (ethnic) poor is not only acceptable but can even bring immense symbolic profit. Fassin (2014) introduces the term 'petty states of exception' to describe local policies of non-respect for the rule of law within democratic regimes targeting the supposedly 'troublemaking poor'. While such policies often reflect undeniable locally experienced anxieties, the legitimacy of the repressive reactions is embedded in national and supranational discourses and practices and serves to confirm the existing (racial) social order. Powell and van Baar (2019), follow the processes of invisibilisation in the historical context further. Based on their research on the European Roma, they speak about postracial reversibility (2019, p. 95–96), a process in which the ethnic criminalisation of poverty and its consequent territorialisation and culturalisation are narrated as a problem of the preferential treatment of the Roma and the inadequate protection of the 'real victims', who are, in this case, the immediate non-Roma neighbours, who 'suffer the most' (2019, p. 102). legitimising further penalisation and corrective treatment.

The authors mentioned above have inspired multiple studies on controlling and punitive penal policies targeting the racialised and criminalised poor. The imaginary of a racialised poor 'who have violated rights and failed in their du-

ties' (Powell & Van Baar, 2019, p. 96) while also being the main recipients of social support is also a powerful cognitive structure that guides perceptions and choices in poverty governance (Soss et al., 2011). Analysing US welfare policies, Soss et al. (2011) shows how neoliberal attempts to turn recipients into 'better citizens' who will 'govern themselves in a better way' accelerate the transformation of social policies into a tool of minority governance. In Slovakia, van Baar (2012) examined the role of the allegedly neutral neoliberal discourse of so-called 'activation' promoted by international institutions in the introduction of labour market policies (public work schemes) that had turned into a tool of ethnic governance. More recently, Seemann (2021), who focused on Danish systems of social protection, demonstrated how increased and spatially targeted restrictions or conditionality within social systems can be used as a tool for the protection and promotion of 'national values' among people with non-Western migrant backgrounds.

In CEE countries, the transformation of welfare into a disciplinary tool of minority governance had been described locally, even before the main wave of neoliberal/workfarist reforms, pointing to continuities between racial stereotypes and the understanding of work as a moral value under socialism. In many CEE countries, the poverty of the Roma increased during the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, pushing them into the position of a highly racialised underclass (Ladanyi in Kóczé, 2020). Research from Hungary and Romania from the 2000s has shown how municipalities used the payment of welfare or public works as a symbolic way of reproducing local hierarchies (Schwarcz, 2012; Thelen et al., 2011). 'National social citizenship rights are adapted by local state actors to local notions of belonging, manifesting the long-standing subordination of minority populations more blatantly than was the case under socialism' (Thelen et al., 2011, p. 524). Nearly a decade later, Kóczé (2020) observes similar patterns in multiple CEE countries at the level of national policies: the increasingly racialised and gendered character of welfare policies, especially the wave of 'activation' labour market policies during the mid-2000s and early 2010s, which were constructed based on the notion of 'welfare dependency', referring to implicit norms and the tacit assumption of deserving white and undeserving racialized, Roma poor. According to her observations, restructured neoliberal welfare re-produces these racial categories, as a core state mechanism that differentiates the 'worthy' from the 'unworthy' (Kóczé, 2020, p. 146).

Neoliberalism and the Czech support system for poor households – from central government to local players

The Czech system support for low-income households is built on two main principles: means- and income-tested social assistance (*pomoc v hmotné nouzi*), which was originally intended to serve as temporary protection, and means-tested state social support (*státní sociální podpora*), which is designed to support low-income working households and families with children. Since the 1990s, both

systems have undergone a series of changes, which reduced them to the minimum safety net, covering only small proportion of inhabitants facing economic insecurity (Saxonberg et al., 2013). In this text, we focus, analytically, on social assistance, a minimum-income scheme that ostensibly provides basic, constitutionally guaranteed social protection for all citizens. Social assistance underwent significant modification in 2007, after the new Material Distress Assistance Act (MDAA), which was drafted under a left-wing government, entered into force. The MDAA emphasised labour market efficiency and the 'activation' of benefit recipients and was closely linked to employment policies (Trlifajová & Hurrle, 2019). These premises were closely intertwined with the stigmatising notion of 'work-avoiding', morally and culturally failing welfare recipients, which was particularly pronounced in the later 2012 social reform¹ introduced by centre-right administration at the onset of the 'economic crisis' (Rakocszyová & Horáková, 2014). These reforms were based on proposals originating at the national level and followed approaches and policies that, at the time, dominated European political debates and centred around the logic of austerity and the conditionality of social support (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017). The reforms also changed the power relationships surrounding benefit payments at the municipal level. In 2012, the responsibility for social assistance payments was transferred from municipalities to the national Labour Office, with the goal of closer coordination between benefit and employment policies. In reality, this transfer reduced municipalities' ability to influence social-benefit payments to individual clients.

During the same period, changes were also introduced to the state social-support system (the abolition of the social supplement and the reduction of child allowances), which pushed many low-income households out of this system. Only those with the lowest incomes became eligible for already-restrictive and -stigmatised social-assistance benefits (Horáková, 2013; Průša et al., 2014). Automatic indexation against inflation for all types of benefits had been revoked, and their real value was dropping. The minimum wage also stagnated between 2006 and 2013. By the end of the 2010s, 30–40% of households were in an economically insecure situation, but only a small segment of them received support through any type of social benefit (Trlifajová, 2021).

A new left-wing government that took office in 2014 placed greater emphasis on increasing the minimum wage. However, in relation to social assistance and other benefits targeted at poor and low-income households, the adopted legislative changes were characterised by further restrictions and the increased involvement of municipal actors. While, prior to 2012, nearly all significant changes were based on proposals prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

¹ In practice, the most punitive measures, such as attendance control at Post Offices or unpaid obligatory public work, taken by the 2012 reforms were later revoked or ruled unconstitutional (Sirovátka, 2016); however, punitive approaches to benefit recipients remained part of the system of social assistance (Gründelová, 2021; Mertl, 2016).

Table 1. Overview of core adopted amendments to the Material Distress Assistance Act (2014–2021) – part one

Title	Original proposal		Main adopted MP initiatives			Date sub- mitted – date adopted	Support for- against (abstain)
	Author	Proclaimed objectives	Main (adopted) measures	Affiliation	Proclaimed objectives	Main measures	
(Part 1)							
252/2014 Sb.		Experience from praxis.	Standards of housing quality (as a condition of benefit payments).	ODS	Tool for mu- nicipalities to control the presence of dormitories.	Right of municipality to decide on housing assistance payments.	89-13 (64)
Housing Assistance Reduction and Municipal Consent (Municipal Consent)	MPSV (ČSSD*)	Increased benefit payments as a problem, benefit misuse. High amount paid through benefit to landlords offering low quality housing.	Stricter control of benefit payments, increased conditionality, changes in benefit calculations. Lower cap on housing assistance payment outside flats (90%).	ČSSD	Protection of seniors living in summer houses.	Possibility to pay full housing assistance to those living in recreation houses.	

Table 1. Overview of core adopted amendments to the Material Distress Assistance Act (2014–2021) – part two

Title	Original proposal			Main adopted MP initiatives		Date submitted–date adopted	Support for–against (abstain)
	Author	Proclaimed objectives	Main (adopted) measures	Affiliation	Proclaimed objectives	Main measures	
367/2016 Sb. Renewal of Public Service (Public Service)	Group of senators (ODS, Severočeský KSČM)	Enhancing the 'motivation' for employment	Renewal of 'public service', semi-obligatory work for benefit recipients.	ANO, ČSSD, TOP 09	Detail on benefit payment conditions (exclusion of voluntary work), exceptions (health), contributions to municipalities organizing public service, etc.	2014–2016	129-13 (16)
		Fight against welfare dependency, social exclusion	Reduction of benefits after 6 months of receiving them, increase conditional public service / labour market activity, small bonus for more hours of public service.				

Table 1. Overview of core adopted amendments to the Material Distress Assistance Act (2014–2021) – part three

Title	Original proposal		Main adopted MP initiatives			Date submitted– date adopted	Support for– against (abstain)
	Author	Proclaimed objectives	Main (adopted) measures	Affiliation	Proclaimed objectives	Main measures	
(Part 2)							
098/2017 Sb.		Administrative problems with the implementation of 'municipal consent'.	Consultation with municipalities in the process of benefit payments		Award municipalities the right to prevent the spatial concentration of benefit recipients.	Municipalities can declare 'areas with an increased incidence of socially undesirable phenomena' (bezodplatkové zóny), in which new housing assistance benefits are not paid.	
No Housing Assistance Zones	MPSV (ČSSD)	Support municipalities, prevent the migration of the 'social weakest' organized by landlords.	Lower cap on housing assistance payment outside flats (80%)	ODS	Fight against business with poverty	Further technical limits on housing assistance payments.	2016–2017 127-0 (58)

Table 1. Overview of core adopted amendments to the Material Distress Assistance Act (2014–2021) – part four

Title	Original proposal			Main adopted MP initiatives			Date sub- mitted– date adopted	Support for- against (abstain)
	Author	Proclaimed objectives	Main (adopted) measures	Affiliation	Proclaimed objectives	Main measures		
				ANO	Benefit recipient should not be seen buying alcohol and cigarettes. Prevent benefit misuse	People who have been receiving benefits for over 6 months receive up to 65% of the benefits in vouchers.		
				SPD	Problem of non-payment of services to house caretakers or partnership of house-owners.	Possibility to send housing benefit directly, without the consent of recipient.		

Table 1. Overview of core adopted amendments to the Material Distress Assistance Act (2014–2021) – part five

Title	Original proposal		Main adopted MP initiatives		Date submitted–date adopted	Support for–against (abstain)
	Author	Proclaimed objectives	Main (adopted) measures	Affiliation	Proclaimed objectives	Main measures
327/2021 Sb. Three Offences and Enough	Group of MPs (ODS)	Protection of people who are living in the neighbourhood of ‘excluded or complicated’ localities. Support municipalities, provide them with a tool.	Possibility to seize fines from social assistance benefit payments for repeated offences against public order, civic coexistence, low school attendance.	ODS	Technical detail—type of fines, offences, evidence, sharing of information.	112-23 (15)

Notes: The titles are based on the name under which an amendment became known in the public debate (abbreviated titles used in this text are in brackets) Proclaimed objectives are based on the explanations of the proposition’s authors provided during the debates or in the accompanying materials.
MP initiatives are not elaborated in cases where they introduced minor changes or technical details.
*ČSSD ‘Czech Social Democratic Party’ – centre left, in opposition 2007–2014, head of government between 2014 and 2017, member of government 2018–2021.

and no MP-initiated proposals for amendments (*pozměňovací návrhy*) were added to them, this practice changed considerably around 2013/2014. The central government no longer initiated the changes. The ministry² presented the two major reforms (2014 and 2016) as directly reflecting the demands of municipalities. Other adopted amendments were initiated by various groups of deputies, which had not been the case for even a single proposal in the previous period. These deputies were also active in debates around draft legislation, which they modified according to their own initiatives, introducing significant changes to some of the government's original proposals. The authors of these amendments often presented themselves as representatives of poor regions characterised by the presence of 'socially excluded localities'. Many of them had experience with municipal policies in these regions. Their affiliation with political parties varied from centre-right (liberal-conservative parties, ODS³, TOP09⁴) and populist centre (ANO⁵) to far right (Úsvit/SPD⁶, Severočeši⁷), communist (KSČM⁸), and Christian democratic (KDU-ČSL⁹). The table below provides an overview of the amendments introduced between 2014 and 2021.

Local context—anti-Roma protests and demand for control over the Roma

The researched period is characterised by local ethnic conflicts that drew national media and political attention to deindustrialising regions situated on the economic periphery of the Czech Republic. These regions have experienced a significant deterioration of labour availability and quality, a decline in infrastructure quality, and the outflow of more educated groups of citizens in recent decades. Moreover, due to the prevalent dependence on employment in industry, the regions were

² Under a minister from the ČSSD, 'Czech Social Democratic Party' – centre left, in opposition 2007–2014, head of government between 2014 and 2017, member of government 2018–2021.

³ ODS – 'Civic Democratic Party', head of government between 2006 and 2013, in opposition 2014–2021.

⁴ TOP 09 – 'Tradition Responsibility Prosperity', established 2009, member of government 2010–2013, in opposition 2014–2021.

⁵ ANO – 'Action of Dissatisfied Citizens', established 2012, member of government 2014–2017, head of government between 2017 and 2021.

⁶ SPD – 'Freedom and Direct Democracy', constituted after split from similarly oriented party Úsvit ('Dawn of Direct Democracy') in opposition in the whole analysed period.

⁷ Severočeši – 'North Bohemians', a regional party, represented only by one person in the Senate of the Czech Republic.

⁸ KSČM – 'Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia', in opposition in the whole analysed period.

⁹ KDU-ČSL – 'Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party', member of government 2007–2009, 2013–2017, in opposition 2017–2021.

severely affected by the 2008 economic crisis. Starting in the 1990s, many poor Roma were pushed out of economic centres and into these regions due to vacant housing capacity. The situation of the most vulnerable groups has thus shifted from a national (state) issue to a local (neighbourhood) problem for municipalities with limited capacities and will to address it. By the mid-2000s, these spatial concentrations of Roma, whether they consisted of individual houses or entire neighbourhoods, had come to be referred to as 'socially excluded localities' and became targets of specific-state policies (Hurrle et al., 2016). The presence of the Roma in these localities was understood as a symbol for overall decay, the deterioration of the living conditions and other processes that were often beyond the control of municipal policies (Trlifajová, 2021).

From 2011 to 2014, at the peak of the economic crisis, anti-Roma demonstrations took place in many towns in these regions. Framing the situation in terms of reverse racism (Powell & van Baar, 2019), the protesters identified Roma as the cause of often complex problems in the region (Trlifajová, 2021). In the discourse of the protest, a key distinction was made between 'decent/normal citizens', 'decent Czechs,' and 'old residents' and 'gypsies', 'inadaptables', 'idlers', 'brown Czechs', and 'immigrants', who are responsible for perceived decay (Hejnal, 2012; Kluknavská & Zagibová, 2013). Though protestors were often unemployed themselves, the idea of Roma as undeserving recipients of welfare benefits resonated strongly with them (Janebová & Valová, 2016). The polarising anti-Roma rhetoric, which was initially used by far-right actors during the protests, was taken up by local politicians, local non-Roma residents, and the media—and sometimes even by the Roma themselves (Křížková, 2013; Trlifajová et al., 2015). Demonstrations and the media coverage of such at the local and national levels reinforced historically anchored stereotypes about Roma, including their 'unwillingness to work', 'inadaptability', and 'abuse of benefits'.

In this period, the spatial concentration of poor Roma was associated with a 'business with poverty' (*obchod s chudobou*). This notion appears in the Czech public discourse in the late 2000s, gradually becoming synonymous with the provision of precarious housing for people receiving welfare benefits (Kupka et al., 2021). Business with poverty has been associated with 'parasitism' on the social system and 'abuse' by disadvantaged groups via landlords acting for their own enrichment. The narrative follows the logic of racial reversibility (Powell & van Baar, 2019). It is centred on 'victims' who need to be defended against the negative effects of the business: 'old residents'; 'decent citizens' and 'concerned, uninvolved observers of the localities' into which (Roma) welfare recipients are allegedly moving. Other groups, such as the recipients of welfare benefits, are portrayed much more ambivalently (Kupka et al., 2021).

Anti-Roma protests have highlighted the perceived link between the social benefits system and the spatial concentration of Roma. This way of thinking was also reflected in the government's programme statement pledging to 'prevent business with poverty, which consists of renting out overpriced accommodation

covered by social housing benefits' (Vláda České republiky, 2014, p. 37). Such arguments have paved the way for amendments to the MDAA.

Locally, anti-Roma protests were often followed by the intensification of existing municipal anti-Roma policies (Trlifajová, 2021). Several Czech towns, especially post-industrial municipalities with a higher proportion of Roma inhabitants, introduced these policies under the 'zero tolerance' banner in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Zero tolerance drew on security policies introduced in the United States and other countries in the 1990s and the following decades. However, the Czech version of zero tolerance differed from their models in the close cooperation of the security apparatus and the social services sector and attempts to use social benefit payments as a tool of control over the Roma (Pospíšil & Trlifajová, 2023; Trlifajová, 2021). Many of the measures had a performative character intended to demonstrate a city's ability to control the movement and behaviour of the Roma. These policies, as well as narratives legitimizing them, strongly resonated in the legislative proposals of the period under examination.

Methodology

In examining the interplay between neoliberal policies and the above-described local, racist discourses, we consider the parliamentary debates regarding the amendments to the MDAA for the 2014–2021 period (Table 1 above). Our analysis focussed only on successful amendments to the MDAA (i.e., those proposals that were adopted into legislation). Each amendment was read and debated three times in parliament. In the case of the No Housing Assistance Zones Amendment, the second and third readings were repeated. The transcripts of these debates were retrieved from the website of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic.

Here, the parliamentary debates are approached as an arena in which a policy narrative is being performed and contested. The creation of a narrative is a constitutive part of the policy process (Lowdnes, 2016) in which recent problems are addressed through storytelling, describing a particular version of the past whereby the causes and character of contemporary problems can be defined, in addition to an imagination of the future. These narratives activate cognitive and moral resources to delineate the right things to do. Narratives may be employed strategically to strengthen collective identity or unreflectively as a practice of collective boundaries (Polletta, 2006). The debates in the Parliament of the Czech Republic are public, streamed, video recorded, and transcribed, so they are an arena of performativity. As such, they might not tell us everything about the policy process or power actors that shaped the content of the legislation, nor do they reflect the (counter)narrative of those who are underrepresented in the policy process. They also do not represent all potential framings and actors present in the public

space. However, they represent an ultimate public space in which discourse on and modes of legitimation for public policies are performed and contested.

Analysing policy narratives about social benefits can thus help us to understand the struggle to delimit the boundaries of membership and normative values in a society. While formal membership is crucial, modern states often portray themselves as communities of value, which are composed of people who share common ideals and exemplary patterns of behaviour, creating both the basis for the protection of those perceived as deserving, as well as the demand for the control, discipline, or expulsion of groups that represent a threat (Anderson, 2013). 'Failed citizens' not only fail to live up to the ideals of the society. They also, allegedly, threaten social stability and the order of society and endanger its moral values. It is not only the transgression of norms and rules but also fear and the image of common threat that allow the introduction of regimes of control and discipline. According to Anderson (2013), such measures are especially attractive to those with legal citizenship, who feel that they are at risk of failure/non-belonging. To prove their own status in society, they feel that they must dissociate themselves from those 'failed' citizens who are excluded from the community of value. In an attempt to prove their own deservingness, they are keen to support the discursive distinctions between themselves and failed citizens and noncitizens, as well as restrictive measures against the latter two groups.

These processes are particularly pronounced in the approach to social rights. In reading the parliamentary debates, we have thus searched for the ways in which problems and their causes are described, proposed changes are legitimised, and the categories of deservingness and threats to society are used in this process. We first identified the main narratives employed by those who proposed and supported the legislative changes. We focussed particularly on phrases and terms that were used repeatedly. In this way, we identified several analytical categories of the legitimisation and explanation of the proposals and two main categories of deservingness. For each category, we identified several keywords, such as 'normal' or 'decent' for the deserving category. Consequently, we coded both the segments identified in the first reading and the segments identified through keywords using Atlas.ti software. This helped us to verify the identified narratives and their frequency and to further examine the context in which they are used. We used the same method to search for narratives identified as unrepresented in the first reading, such as economic efficiency or a rights-based approach, to verify their occurrence. Particular attention was paid to counternarratives—the ways in which opposition to the proposed changes was framed. We coded and analysed these in separate analytical categories. The findings are an outcome of these analyses and are clustered into thematic groups. Unless mentioned otherwise, the quotations used in the following text have been selected because they represent a narrative that was repeatedly presented in the debates.

Findings

The first part of the analysis concentrates on the main narratives used to legitimise the analysed amendments (see Table 1 for an overview) in the parliamentary debates. In the last subsection, we also examine the counternarratives.

Local knowledge and practical experience

As described above, the significant legislative changes in the analysed period were not typically driven by the national government. This was mirrored in the construction of knowledge in the debates dealing with the proposals. The analysed parliamentary debates were characterized by a lack of references to professional policy knowledge. The proponents of the legislative changes, as well as those involved in the debates, legitimised their opinions based on local experience. Members of Parliament often referred to their previous political experience at the municipal level, visits to the municipalities, and consultations with their representatives. Expert policy knowledge, international experience, and data-based analyses were rarely mentioned. The arguments of opponents of legislation, meanwhile, were dismissed because these opponents did not have sufficient personal experience with the localities. The possession of relevant knowledge and local experience were particularly ascribed to municipalities characterised by a spatial concentration of Roma. In most cases, the Roma are not mentioned directly. Instead, neighbourhoods where they live were in the debates referred to as ‘ghettos (of inadaptables)’, ‘(excluded/risky) localities’, and containing a high ‘concentration of (‘those’) people’. Municipalities with higher proportion of poor Roma are often located in a post-industrial or deindustrialised part of the Czech Republic, where a high level of general unemployment impacts a large portion of the population. However, the relevance of local expertise is constructed predominantly not based on experience with poverty but, rather, on the spatial concentration of Roma.

The exclusivity of local experience among political representatives from the municipalities with these ‘localities’ becomes more pronounced in the debates surrounding the Three Offences and Enough Amendment (2019–2021). The inability to understand the situation and, thus, have opinions that were relevant to the debate was explicitly framed in terms of the different experiences of the centre and the periphery, ascribing a certain naiveté to the economic centre:

In Prague 7 [one of the municipalities of Prague], you may have a few dozen homeless people, some drug addicts, but other than that [...], *you are living in paradise*. We who are from northern Bohemia, from Karlovy Vary, Ústí nad Labem, northern Moravia, *we have hundreds, thousands of these people*. [...] who don’t complete anything that they are supposed to, who do not work, *who only receive benefits and laugh at decent people*. (Kohoutek, ANO, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)

Personal-experience-based, often emotional, argumentation was employed by the majority of parliamentarians, whereas arguments concerning a lack of data-based evidence made by the amendments' critics did not produce any reaction.

Socially excluded localities as a core problem

The legitimacy ascribed to 'practical,' 'local' experience was closely linked to the definition of the problem. Despite coming from the country's poorest regions, the amendments' proponents did not consider poverty, unemployment, or social exclusion a problem *per se*—the problem was the existence or growth of socially excluded localities inhabited by the 'inadaptable'. The existence of these localities is described as interconnected with the social benefit system.

The enormous social benefits that the state pays to those entrepreneurs—they are a paradise for the clientelist octopus running ghettos for the inadaptable [...]. They buy houses for a penny, accommodate the inadaptable in them, and collect a generous state subsidy. (Havlová, SPD, Municipal Consent, 2014)

This understanding, as illustrated in the quote above, was prominent in the debates surrounding the Municipal Consent and No Housing Assistance Zones Amendments (2014–2017), which focussed on the housing benefit within social assistance (housing assistance/*doplatek na bydlení*). The discussants linked the existence of 'localities' to an under-regulated, 'overgenerous' benefit system that contributes to the expansion of business with poverty. While several Members of Parliament acknowledged there may be complex structural and historical processes affecting the formation of the 'localities', they still pushed for a restrictive approach to social benefits as a universal solution:

Certain things have happened throughout history; [...] these houses were offered to be transferred to the municipalities sometime in the 90s. [...] municipality did not strive to acquire the buildings, but it is hard to blame anyone for that today or to punish the municipality for it [...]. The solution must be found elsewhere. And the state must ensure that the construction of social assistance benefits [...] will prevent the formation of localities. (Vilímec, ODS 2017, No Housing Assistance Zones, 2017)

In the later debates around the Three Offences and Enough Amendment (2019–2021), the link between welfare and business with poverty became less pronounced. Socially excluded localities are now described primarily as a problem of inhabitants profiting from an overgenerous welfare system. Compared to previous debates, the reasoning has become more openly racist, though it still contains concealed reference to Roma as 'inadaptables' or 'those people':

The inadaptables have adapted to this kind humanistic approach [...] that the money belonging to those who go to work is being handed out to those who do not go to work. And they are terribly content with this situation, so the numbers are growing. (Foldyna, ex-ČSSD/SPD, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)

The proponents of the new legislation further emphasised the inability of the municipalities to address these growing problems:

The most terrible feeling for me, as a former mayor, *is the feeling of helplessness, of not knowing how to deal with the situation*. And I guarantee you, not for myself but for everyone else I spoke to today, that everyone in those localities is doing the best they can, but when they run out of tools, *any measure ceases to be effective*. (Kalátová, ANO, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)

Protecting deserving citizens

Throughout these debates, the existence of 'localities' is primarily framed as a problem from the perspective of those 'proper citizens' who live within the neighbourhoods there. These are the 'real victims' (Powell & van Baar, 2019), as they are, according to the descriptions offered, facing increased insecurity and criminality and a decline in housing prices and overall quality of life. Specific examples often refer to small neighbourhood conflicts, such as late-night noise, which considerably worsen quality of life but often are not even minor offenses according to the law. Neighbours in these 'localities' are often described as 'citizens'¹⁰, thus emphasizing their (moral) right to be protected and make claims. Citizenship is constructed not as a legal category but as a moral category.

It is indeed a *problem that is troubling the citizens* [...]. The people living there are rightly critical [...] there is a high crime rate, and the prices of the surrounding real estate are deteriorating. This must be said. The citizens are afraid to leave their children unattended. The place is in public disorder. *We have a chance to help them*. (ODS, Stanjura, Municipal Consent, 2014)

Repeatedly, the speeches emphasised the unfairness of state policies towards people outside the 'localities', referring to an inability to protect them:

They are being disturbed at night, their belongings get lost, and *they feel like they cannot get justice*; [...] The worst thing this state can do is allow people to feel *like there*

¹⁰ The term 'citizens' was sometimes used with an ironic subtone to refer to the Roma/inhabitants of the localities. Similarly, note the ironic use 'our citizens' or 'co-citizens' to refer to the Roma.

are those who go to work and try hard, pay for their garbage and everything that comes with living in a city or a town, and then there is a second group of people who live with the feeling that they have no commitments, they don't have to do anything, and it is normal, and it is tolerated. (Bartošek, KDU, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)

The right to protection is constructed based on adherence to the values of the community and contribution to the community (Anderson, 2013). As the quotation above demonstrates, deservingness was often based on employment ('going to work') and, thus, proper behaviour ('getting up in the morning'). While speakers occasionally admitted that some groups of the poor should have access to social protection (the elderly, single mothers, and young working families with children), those who are actually receiving social benefits were constructed within a strong dichotomy and contrasted with 'proper'/'normal'/'decent' citizens. In some cases, the distinction becomes explicitly racist:

Something really should be done about this because you don't realize what we're igniting here in terms of hatred between white and black people if I must put it this way. And this is where racism originates. (Rutová, ANO, No Housing Assistance Zones, 2016)

The 'undeserving' benefit recipients and the inhabitants of the 'localities' were often treated as overlapping categories. The threat they represented was most vividly and emotionally illustrated in the most recent debates on the Three Offences and Enough amendment:

Those people are laughing in your face, [...] they are laughing at the officials, the police; they are simply not afraid of anyone here any longer, and they are doing whatever they please. [...] Until you touch their money, the benefits, those people are going to do what they want! That is the reality! (Aulická, KSČM, Three Offences and Enough)

The proponents of the amendments also emphasised the need to publicly demonstrate support for those labelled 'decent':

What about the rest of the decent people who live in those neighbourhoods? They have the right to have peace. They have the right to sleep in peace. They have the right not to have their shoes stolen all the time. They have the right to ride a decent bus [...] The law is about them; it gives the problematic people some sort of a stop sign! (Fialová, ANO, Three Offences and Enough)

The perspective of welfare recipients was nearly absent from the debates, with the exception of one critic during the Three Offences and Enough debate in 2021, and even then, the experience was framed as that of a single mother; thus, one could expect her to be perceived as deserving of support. The perspective of the Roma inhabitants of the 'localities' was never represented. Their social situation and its cause were rendered invisible.

Despite most of the debates on the Three Offences and Enough Amendment having taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic, its social impacts and the potential role of social assistance as a tool of protection were hardly mentioned.

The benefit system as a tool of control

The framing of socially excluded localities and the behaviour of their inhabitants as (a) an outcome of a poorly constructed social benefit system and (b) a threat to municipalities and their deserving inhabitants contributed to the argument that greater control over socially excluded localities could be achieved through the introduction of new restrictions on the benefit system. Many of these measures were balancing on the verge of constitutionality—the right of a municipality to prohibit housing benefit payments on its territory was, for example, ruled unconstitutional 4 years after its introduction, and some legal experts expect a similar decision on the newly introduced right of a municipality to seize social benefits from those who owe fines.

In the debates surrounding the amendments aimed at housing benefits (Municipal Consent and No Housing Assistance Zones), most participants agreed that those who are financially profiting are, primarily, not the benefit recipients themselves but private landlords. The propositions aimed to limit their ‘business’ by limiting housing benefits so that tenants, particularly in low-quality housing, could pay less for rent or ultimately stop receiving support altogether, consequently depriving private landlords of the main income source.

There had been some debate as to which types of housing should be affected by these restrictions. However, the central debates on housing benefits were not about housing conditions but, rather, the demand on the part of municipalities to have ‘adequate rights’ to make decisions about the residences of its inhabitants:

The essence [...] is the right of a municipality [...] to identify the localities within its territory where further concentration of people with housing assistance could mean significant social impacts on the municipality's territory and, eventually, to recommend the maximum number of persons to whom housing assistance should be provided in that locality. (Vilímc, ODS, No Housing Assistance Zones, 2016)

The right of municipalities to make decisions about benefit payments was portrayed as a tool of control over their potential misuse:

It is indeed the mayor who has the best knowledge of the situation [...]. It should be in the mayor's interest to ensure that benefits are not abused in his/her town and that there are no problems in excluded areas. (Havlová, Úsvit, Municipal Consent, 2014)

The Three offences and Enough Amendment was aimed at ensuring direct, performative control over the behaviour of welfare recipients through the introduc-

tion of the right to seize social benefits from those who owe fines (see Table 1). These measures were presented as a tool used to boost the repressive power of the municipality:

We need to give mayors, towns, *municipalities some tools to finally do something about it*. We can't just keep waiting for something, shielding ourselves with human rights. And, in fact, *the municipal police* who are coming in are literally being ostracized, ridiculed because they have no tools to do anything. (Juchelka, ANO, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)

Several supporters of the measure presented it as response to allegedly overgenerous social benefits and ineffective, costly social work. The call for repressive measures was accompanied by an appeal for the suspension of various welfare tools, and it was more pronounced on the populist far right:

If we keep giving them more and more subsidies, we will not educate them. We need to find restrictive measures to force them to comply. I do not see any other way. And I repeat, if we keep spoiling them, that is the road to hell. (Holík, SPD, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)

Others presented the repression of welfare recipients as a measure to make existing tools, including social work, efficient. However, there was a consensus that restrictions are the only way to discipline 'those people' and teach them to engage in proper behaviour.

Prevention is good, I agree [...] *we are talking about a group of people where prevention has completely failed*. And if prevention doesn't work, then restriction must come [...]. And I'm pleading on behalf of the Ústí region. Let's approve this bill. Let's pass it. (Fialová, ANO, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)

During the long hours spent on it, the debate on the Three Offences and Enough Amendment became more heated and emotional. The proponents of the amendment openly warned of an imminent ethnic conflict between the Roma, who are the supposed beneficiaries of existing generous policies, and the majority society, which is threatened by welfare recipients' behaviour:

The other group of people are totally outraged. *So, who's creating the tension in this society? We are*. The Roma don't come here to vote on the laws. We do it, like a bunch of thickheads. We're giving away working people's money to those who don't work! (Foldyna, ex-ČSSD/SPD, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)

Two years after the introduction of the No Housing Assistance Zones Amendment in 2017, 'zones' where it was not possible to receive Housing Assistance (see

Table 1) were introduced in a hundred municipalities—in some cases, across entire municipal territories (Zieglerová, 2019). By 2021, however, these had been ruled unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. It is expected that, once the issue reaches the Constitutional Court, a similar decision will outlaw the right of municipalities to seize social benefits to pay fines, though no such case has been presented as of this writing.

Work ethic continuities

As mentioned above, work ethic was emphasised in the parliamentary debates as central to the character of those deserving protection. Conversely, people portrayed as undesirable were characterised as those who ‘do not lead normal lives’ and who ‘do not work’. However, as described above, most of the amendments presented in the parliament since 2012 were not aimed at facilitating participation in the labour market but, rather, at controlling population movement and behaviour portrayed as having a negative impact on neighbourhoods.

Only one amendment was targeted at employment: the reintroduction of public service (2014). Proponents on this amendment from a centre-right political party emphasised the maintenance of ‘labour habits’ (*pracovní návyky*) and motivation to work. There was a consensus regarding the importance of maintaining ‘labour habits’, a continuity within workfarist reforms from 2006–2012. However, for many of the Members of Parliament involved, the debate was constructed around the notion of the undeserving unemployed (the Roma) and the deserving workers. Public service was presented as not only a tool for labour-market inclusion but also a performative act:

We will support this so that our fellow citizens, who haven’t worked for a long time, don’t lose their work habits, and *the majority of society, who work on a daily basis, will see the state’s endeavour to bring those citizens back into the workforce and ensure that they do not live at the expense of others.* (Vystrčil, ODS, Public Service, 2014)

A controversy in the parliamentary debates arose regarding the amount of money granted for public service. Eventually, the more repressive/punitive version prevailed. Calls for higher rewards for public service within the benefit system were, by the majority of parliamentarians, perceived as support for those who do not deserve it. This stance was often most pronounced among those who presented themselves as representatives of the disadvantaged regions. One of the Members of Parliament described the situation as follows:

Novák family [...] have three kids, they do not work even though they are fit for work, and they are receiving benefits [...], which earns them approximately CZK 21,500. At present, they do not have to work; they do not have to participate in public service; they do

not have to pay their debts, because the benefits they are receiving from the state are not subject to seizure. They do not have to pay health insurance [...] [they] devote their time to dishonest activities—thefts or frequent parties late at night [...].

The second family [...] lives on the earnings of both adult parents who have two children [...]. Their net income is CZK 25,200. [...] They have to get up in the morning, and therefore [...], there is no room for daily celebrations, dishonest activities [...]. They have to pay their debts, as their wages are subject to possible seizure. The parents are definitely good role models for their children. They show that it is normal to work and to take responsibility for their own life and the life of the whole family [...].

The difference in income between the two families is about CZK 4,000. With the other advantages of a family living on benefits [...], such as school supplies, school trips, etc., this difference is further reduced. (Pastuchová, ANO, Public Service, 2014)

Again, in line with a neoliberal understanding of deservingness, the quote demonstrates an understanding of employment as a foundation of ‘proper’ behaviour. The speech also points to the problem of low wages, the difficult situation of indebted workers facing wage seizures, and a lack of social support for low-wage working households—a reality impacting a large portion of the population in many poor regions of the Czech Republic (Trlifajová, 2021). However, the answers presented in Parliament to these problems are not proposals for adequate wages or debt relief but, rather, lowering the income of those on social benefits.

Counternarrative

While the amendments introduced in 2014 did not produce many debates, the debates surrounding an ‘increased incidence of socially undesirable phenomena’ (2016–2017) and, especially, the Three Offences and Enough amendment (2019–2021) were heated. Opposition to the proposals came primarily from centre-liberal parties¹¹. Their argumentation was, in many respects, embedded in neoliberal discourse, emphasising individualised support, approaching welfare as a minimal safety net targeted toward helping the poorest (*‘I don’t think anyone here wants them to just be dying on the streets’*¹²), and maintaining a focus on social exclusion as a core problem.

One of the main arguments against the proposed restriction on housing benefit payments warned that the proposals did not provide any protection for those who would lose access to housing benefits or would have their benefit payments limited:

¹¹ Piráti (Czech Pirate Party), centrist liberal party, and liberal wing of KDU-ČSL.

¹² Čížinský, liberal wing of KDU, Three Offences and Enough, 2021.

The consequence [...] will be that a significant number of people will lose their housing because, once the business with poverty stops paying, many people will stop doing it. [...] we need to move quickly and start planning and mapping out where we are going to put these people so that they don't end up on the street. (Gabal, KDU, Municipal Consent, 2015)

Some of those who opposed the Three Offences and Enough legislation argued from a similar position, claiming that the proposal ignores the potential negative impact on the situation for benefit recipients and that the law deprives people of a minimum income:

I am also aware of the catastrophic situation in the excluded localities [...] this law will worsen the situation rather than improve it, although I understand the reasons [...]. The idea that these people will not meet their basic life needs for a certain period of time is an illusion [...] there are risks, such as higher criminality in those localities. (Ferjenčík, Pirates, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)

Some opponents emphasised the lack of a cost-benefit analysis, particularly the fact that the proposal does not consider long-term costs, attempting to criticise it from the perspective of financial ineffectiveness. Others argued that the measures would not be effective, as they replicate existing sanctions. None of above-mentioned arguments, however, were treated as relevant and addressed by the proponents of the legislation.

The narrative of those opposing the restrictive measures mostly replicated the stereotypical description of excluded localities and presented the behaviour of their inhabitants/welfare recipients as the core problem. Proposed alternative solutions targeted alleged individual causes; individual social work and complex support were presented as the main solutions. In line with neoliberal understanding, they often stressed the importance of social inclusion through employment:

This law will not solve it, and neither will further tightening. What will solve it is better enforcement of what is valid and what makes sense, just getting able-bodied people to work. (Richterová 2021, Pirates, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)

There were only rare exceptions—attempts to shift the narrative from excluded localities and failing benefit recipients. In the debate on public service, only one Social Democrat Member of Parliament emphasised the structural context of the low-wage labour market (*'It's not the high welfare we should blame. It's the low wages.'*¹³), and he was unsuccessful in doing so. However, such a perspective was absent from other Parliamentary debates. Similarly, a social-rights perspective, as an alternative to a neoliberal focus on minimum protection for the poorest

¹³ Kailová, ČSSD, Public Service, 2014.

people, was mostly missing. It was present in a written position offered by the public defender of rights, but it was explicitly mentioned only by one Member of Parliament:

Please don't vote for this act [...] because of some theoretical minority that you have been presenting here as bad; [this is] why *we cannot support legislation that could be applied to all [citizens] in other areas, negatively affecting the rights of inhabitants.* (Dolínek, ČSSD, Three Offences and Enough, 2021)

Based on our analysis, it is not possible to assess whether the above-described framings were used instrumentally or reflect the personal beliefs or the attitudes of those representing them. Nonetheless, the findings reveal the prevalence of neoliberal framing in Parliamentary discourse.

Conclusion

In this article, we analysed the development of Czech minimum-income-scheme legislation during the 2014–2021 period, after a wave of workfarist 'activation' reforms were introduced in the mid-2000s across East Central Europe. We have explored how the neoliberal logic of these reforms intersected with and amplified the racialised hierarchies present in society (Kóczé, 2020; Powell & van Baar, 2019). Based on our findings, we believe that we have observed the formulation of a new regime, one that is embedded in the narrative of neoliberal reforms but has different proclaimed goals, measures, and primary agents. We term it '*post-neoliberal ethnic welfare*'.

In Czechia, this regime is shaped by actors from municipalities characterised by spatial concentrations of Roma (so-called socially excluded localities), which are often situated in poor, deindustrialised regions of the country, with a large proportion of the population facing economic insecurity. Benefit recipients and the inhabitants of these 'localities' are often treated as overlapping categories in the analysed Parliamentary debates. These localities are seen as a public threat and a result of a broken and overgenerous social benefits system. The proponents of the new legislation emphasised the inability of the state to protect the 'deserving' working people, who are portrayed as members of the ethnic majority that live in the areas surrounding the 'localities' and are forced to tolerate the unacceptable behaviour of the Roma inhabitants.

These debates reflect strong feelings of losing control and powerlessness in a deregulated, deindustrialised environment. They are also characterised by a dichotomy between the image of the social-benefit-recipient Roma inhabitants of a locality, who are portrayed as a threat, and their neighbours who are member of the ethnic Czech majority who are described as 'decent', 'normal' citizens. (The Roma did not have any voice in the analysed debates.) The ethnic Czech neigh-

bours are 'real victims' in the sense of Powells and van Baar's (2019) postracial reversibility, blaming the Roma for not only their situation but also the overall decay of their neighbourhoods. The 'decent' inhabitants are discursively characterised by employment and, thus, proper behaviour – in this sense, the debates apply neoliberal categories of deservingness, in which employment is presented as a core feature of full citizenship (Anderson, 2013).

Despite the centrality of work in this narrative, the newly introduced measures did not primarily aim at labour-market inclusion or economic efficiency (austerity) but at strengthening municipal power over local populations by awarding municipalities the right to make decisions on the residence areas for benefit recipients, with the possibility of limiting housing-benefit payments, and providing them tools with which to control the behaviour of welfare recipients (the right to seize fines for minor offences from benefits). Policies that enable local actors to discipline, punish (via deprivation of social benefits), and ultimately remove Roma from the municipality have previously been possible only as a temporary, local 'state of exceptions' (Fassin, 2014). Now, they are entering the core of national policies. What we observe is an attempt on the part of municipal actors to transform the national social system into disciplinary and performative power on the part of local authorities over racialised populations.

Post-neoliberal ethnic welfare is embedded in a cognitive structure that links welfare recipients with the image of a minority, in this case the Roma, as the primary and 'unworthy' recipients of support (Kocze, 2020; Soss et al., 2001). Post-racial reversibility, the dominant logic of these policies, results from the long-term invisibilisation of the historical and structural factors that shape the position of minorities (Powell & van Baar, 2019; Wacquant, 2009). In this sense, our research fits into the literature on the criminalisation and vilification of the racialised poor and the consequent expansion of punitive and panoptic logic as a political strategy for maintaining the impression of state sovereignty (Wacquant, 2009, 2010). However, in our case, this logic does not primarily translate into strengthening the penal role of the state nor into welfare retrenchment or the imposition of workfarist discipline. Social benefits are presented—at least discursively—as the central tool of control over the troublemaking poor. In this process, the emphasis of the measures shifts from workfare to control over the presence (movement) and behaviour of the racialised poor in public spaces. The confirmation of racial social order and performance of control at the municipal level become more important than the push towards employment.

All these processes build on neoliberal reforms, and the neoliberal discourse on deservingness remains present within them. However, this discourse serves primarily as a vehicle for the legitimisation of racial divisions. Here, we confirm Kocze's (2020) observation regarding seemingly colourblind neoliberal categories of deservingness that can be used to legitimise ethnic hierarchies. The fact that the distinction between the undeserving poor and decent citizens particularly resonates in the post-industrial periphery, with a high proportion of

people facing economic insecurity, fits into Anderson's (2013) observation about the need for confirmation of membership in the 'community of value' between those who feel that they are at risk of failure/non-belonging. Because neoliberal framing portrays the poor, the unemployed, and benefit recipients as failed or second-class citizens, the assignment of such a status to the Roma, portraying them transgressing against norms and being responsible for the perceived decay, provides an impression of control and confirms the status of the non-Roma poor as members of the community of value.

The focus on 'localities' as a core social problem was often replicated even by those who opposed the adoption of restrictive measures. The critique was embedded in the neoliberal narrative, highlighting the role of targeted welfare as an incentive for individual improvement and labour-market inclusion.

By narrowing the debate on welfare to the problem of 'localities' and their Roma inhabitants, the neoliberal ethnic welfare regime delegitimises the already diminished social system. It furthers demands for restrictions on social benefits while depriving poor people of a voice in this debate. Its narrative antagonises various groups of people that are impacted by the same process of precarisation and privatisation ('objective social insecurity' in Wacquant's terms). As 1) social protection is no longer understood as a tool of social protection for the general population but, rather, as one that can help to enforce racial order and 2) the racialised poor person/benefit recipient becomes the 'other' of post-neoliberal social policies, in opposition to whom the non-Roma poor person can construct their status as a good, deserving citizen, it becomes impossible to address the structural context of the low-wage labour market and widespread economic insecurity affecting a larger proportion of inhabitants.

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Amanda C. Cote: *Gaming Sexism. Gender and Identity in the Era of Casual Video Games*

New York 2020: New York University Press, 264 pp.

Playing video games has become a popular leisure activity over the last two decades, as personal computers and home consoles have replaced arcades and dominated the gaming market. Gaming and gamers have also attracted academic interest, with fields such as media studies focusing on them the most. However, gaming is also relevant to sociology despite it having been somewhat overlooked in the field. In her book *Gaming Sexism: Gender and Identity in the Era of Casual Video Games*, American scholar Amanda C. Cote (2020) intertwines these two disciplines by focusing on fundamental sociological concepts such as identity and gender while also drawing on her knowledge as an assistant professor of media/game studies at the University of Oregon. As an avid gamer herself, Cote's interest in the gaming industry has permeated her academic work since she wrote her dissertation. And although *Gaming Sexism* is her first book, she has also (co)written numerous articles centred around gaming, gender, identity, and representation. She also co-leads the Esports and Games Research Lab at the University of Oregon. Even though *Gaming Sexism* is her first book.

The aim of *Gaming Sexism* is to look at the game industry and gaming culture and to critically explore trends towards both greater diversification and discrimination via discursive analysis of video game-related materials and interviews with over thirty female gamers. It should be noted that Cote's interviewees all had higher education, which is only mentioned at the end of the book, even though it should be highlighted, considering the influence education has on the gaming. Higher education often goes hand in hand with a certain socio-economic background that not only en-

ables one to spend leisure time more freely, for example, playing video games, but also provides one with a platform or internet access in the first place. According to the data presented below, the gender gap between male and female gamers is slowly closing, and education plays a role in this, which is demonstrated through Cote's book, though only implicitly.

In recent years, video gaming has rapidly grown and expanded its audience, transforming itself from a formerly masculinised and therefore male-dominated space to a more diverse one. According to the annual Essential Facts Report conducted by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA. 2006. Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry. Princeton Library. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from <https://library.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/2006.pdf>; ESA. 2022. Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry. Entertainment Software Association. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from <https://www.theesa.com/resource/2022-essential-facts-about-the-video-game-industry/>), which draws data from large-scale surveys, in 2006, female gamers already made up a significant proportion of gamers (38%), and by 2022, this number had increased to 48%. Race and ethnicity proportions also changed slightly, as in 2021, nearly 73% of gamers identified as white, and just one year later, that number dropped to 71% (ESA, 2022).

However, this diversification goes hand in hand with the aforementioned discrimination. Cote's main point in the introductory chapter of the book could be summed up in one sentence: the more diverse gaming becomes, the more exclusionary its fandom becomes. To explain this seemingly paradoxical phenomenon, Cote works with Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony to describe core and casual games as hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces. The former, derived from words hardcore and masocore, is a

reference to the video game industry's historic attention to male audiences, console games and masculinised genres, whereas the latter constructs the sphere of gaming as frivolous and less serious. However, this is in itself problematic, and the concepts are not, in fact, so dichotomic. Take, for example, a player who spent hundreds of hours, which is a sign of being a core gamer, playing *Candy Crush*, a game that fits the casual category.

Cote uses these concepts to show how discourses in the gaming industry position both new and traditional gamers in a hierarchy that prioritises the core and dismisses the casual. She refers to this conflict as a crisis of authority that occurs when core hegemonic gamers feel threatened by new, casual fans, who could possibly undermine the notion that gaming is a masculine hobby (and thus promote a real shift in power). Because a major proportion of new fans are women, male gamers are trying to (re)establish their hegemony via misogynistic behaviour and hostility towards women. Hence, *Gaming Sexism* emerged.

Each of the six chapters is centred on Gramsci's theory, making it a fundamental theoretical and analytical framework in the book. However, Cote is, as the reader quickly understands, outstandingly well read. She builds up her most brilliant contributions around the works of many scholars, including classical sociologists such as Michel Foucault and Stuart Hall, as well as the most well-known game studies researchers, namely Mia Consalvo, Adrienne Shaw, Carly Kocurek, Lisa Nakamura and many others. The main objective of Cote's book is, in her own words, 'to demonstrate how, despite gaming's perceived diversification, many barriers to true equality between different types of gamers persist' (p. 22). To accomplish this, Cote conducted a discourse analysis of magazines related to the game industry and interviewed thirty-seven women who self-identified as gamers.

The first chapter covers the previously mentioned difference between core and casual, showing that, in reality, the stereotypical views of core meaning masculine, committed gamers and casual meaning non-serious, shallow gamers do not match the lived experiences of players. While this argument might be highlighted as the central notion of the book, it is the second and especially the third chapter that I consider truly exceptional for the reasons presented below.

In the second and third chapters, Cote draws on Stuart Hall's work on overt and inferential racism, adapting the framework to her central topic: sexism. The second chapter focuses on overt sexism in games, which most often manifests as hypersexualised, overly girly and less powerful female characters (or the complete absence of them). A content analysis conducted by Teresa Lynch et al. (Lynch, T., Tompkins, J. E., Van Driel, I. I., & Fritz, N. 2016. *Sexy, Strong, and Secondary: A Content Analysis of Female Characters in Video Games across 31 Years*. *Journal of Communication*, 66(4), 564–584) showed that, compared to male characters, which are quite often hypermasculinised, the majority of female characters are represented in a way that draws attention to their underdressed bodies rather than their skills. This only reaffirms the masculinised core of gaming, making it harder for female gamers to navigate through the gaming spaces or identify with the character. Another aspect of overt sexism is the harassment that women face. While trash talking other players is rather normative in gaming culture, female gamers are typically insulted with sexual comments, including rape threats and derogatory names. Inferential sexism, by contrast, describes an event or policy that rests on naturalised assumptions that have a sexist basis, such as female gamers being praised or treated extremely nicely just because of their gender. This initially turns a woman gamer into an 'other', which fur-

ther reinforces the masculinisation of gamer identity.

The fourth chapter delves deeper into the fact that female gamers are already core. Cote's interviewees describe what pleasure they find in gaming and how they manage to embody a gamer identity through adopting proactive identity fluidity. Chapter five shifts the focus to the strategies female gamers employ to choose content and manage their encounters with the community. While the strategies for selecting what to play, including genre conventions or social network recommendations, are neither revolutionary nor surprising, strategies for coping with online harassment include rather drastic and exhausting mechanisms, such as camouflaging their gender or even avoiding online gaming and focusing solely on single-player games.

In 2014, two years after Cote conducted her initial interviews, a movement that would later be called #GamerGate emerged. A female game developer was accused of exchanging sexual favours with a game journalist for a positive review of her game (the claims were later disproven). Because of this incident, Cote reached out to her interviewees once again and managed to conduct follow-up interviews with 11 of them in 2017. Chapter six, aptly named 'In the aftermath', reveals that events like GamerGate are not particularly significant for women, who dismiss it as just another instance of the sexism they already face. Despite this, Cote remains hopeful, as she sums up in the conclusion alongside suggestions of how to address the problems introduced in previous chapters.

Gaming Sexism is a brilliant book. Cote shows deep expertise in the topic and writes with a certain lightness, which makes the book accessible to both lay and scholarly audiences. I assume that this is the reason why the methodology chapter is placed in the appendix. Although this is understandable, placing it at the beginning might have given readers a clearer overview of its

limitations, such as the interviewees' characteristics (e.g. the fact that most of them were US residents). The clarity of this otherwise exceptional book would have been even greater. That said, *Gaming Sexism* has rightfully earned its place on the bookshelves of not only media studies and games studies students and scholars but also sociologists specialising in gender studies and media consumption – and, of course, gamers as well.

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Louisa Allen: *Breathing Life into Sexuality Education*

Cham (Switzerland) 2021: Palgrave
Macmillan / Springer Nature
Switzerland AG, 197 pp.

Discussions about the form and objectives of formal sexuality education have become increasingly important in recent years in both academia and public policy arena. Louisa Allen, a professor at the University of Auckland, has consistently been a prominent voice in this discourse, presenting her perspectives from a feminist vantage point. Her work focuses particularly on the disembodied nature of sexuality education, illuminating discourse that prescribes certain (heterosexual) futures while it neglects students as sexual subjects in the present. In her latest monograph, titled *Breathing Life into Sexuality Education*, she extends her critique through the lens of new materialism. This approach represents a unique departure from the poststructuralist perspective that dominates feminist scholarship on sexuality education, and it has the potential to foster new ideas for a rethinking of this curriculum subject. Unfortunately, this potential has only been partially fulfilled.

The aim of the book is to breathe life into sexuality education. The metaphor of breath and all the book's philosophical endeavours are inspired by the work of educational theorist and practitioner Sharon Todd. Todd critiques the stifling effects of contemporary education's focus on efficiency and measurable outcomes and proposes a shift towards a more sensuous and embodied education. Todd builds her argument on the ideas of continental ethicists, in particular Levinas, who challenge the traditional view of morality as a set of predetermined values, a position based on the recognition that what is considered conventionally moral may, in fact, lead to unethical results. For continental ethicists, the ethical (moral) arises in interpersonal encounters and in our engagement with the world, which goes beyond mere cognition. The main point for both Todd and Allen is that education should not be concerned with imparting values and knowledge that prepare students for a predefined future, but should be reconceived as a site of ethical practice, in which the focus is shifted from students' imagined futures to their embodied present. Such an approach departs from the Western rational approach, as it doesn't prescribe the identities, values, and 'types of sexual subjects students should become' (p. 84). The educational event becomes *uncertain*, opening up spaces for students' subjective becoming, and, as such, it has, unlike current pedagogical practices, real transformative potential.

These ideas should resonate with scholars of education, and Allen articulates a compelling argument for the reimagining of sexuality education along the lines of Todd's thinking. Drawing on the insights of feminist scholarship and her own research, Allen identifies the stifling effects of sexuality education in its focus on imparting factual knowledge (about STIs, unplanned pregnancies, contraception, healthy sexual behaviour) and its framing of sexuality as

a risky, reproductive, and predominantly heterosexual matter that should concern students in their predetermined futures, not in their present life. With the metaphor of breath, she then embarks on a philosophical exploration of Todd's work with the aim of expanding sexuality education's epistemological and ontological borders. Individual chapters stem from Todd's various conceptual frameworks for education (e.g. education as a sensuous, embodied, material, uncertain, ethical, or aesthetic practice) and attempt to elaborate these concepts by integrating perspectives from feminist new materialism, geography, social anthropology, and sound studies.

Allen contends that these thinkers and theories may seem disciplinarily and theoretically disparate, but that they share a common emphasis on the sensuous/embodied, and 'can be characterised loosely as falling within the field of sensory studies' (p. 10). Subsequent chapters explore each of these theories in more detail, arguing for a reimagining of sexuality education as a 'sensuous event' and as a 'site of ethical practice', and proposing a rearrangement of conventional educational settings 'via aesthetic practices, which invite students' creativity and encourage an opening up to materiality and uncertainty' (p. 25). Rather than developing an argument, however, the chapters often skim the surface of complex theories without the author providing her own synthesis and discussion. This is likely due to the author's choice to follow their formal similarities (attention to the sensuous and the embodied), rather than addressing their deeper connections in an interdisciplinary ontological turn. A well-established approach in the social sciences (in social anthropology since at least the 1990s), the ontological turn entails understanding agency as something that emerges from material and embodied encounters, departing from the conventional notion of agency as given or essential. Had the author chosen to centre her discussion

not on Todd but on the ontological turn and to engage in an interdisciplinary debate, the book might have avoided a convoluted structure, repeated conclusions, and occasionally simplistic arguments.

Scholars in the field of sensory studies, for instance, are well-acquainted with the work of Tim Ingold, whom the author addresses individually. Theoretical concepts such as 'dwelling with', 'embodied knowledge', or 'embeddedness in the world', discussed in different parts of the book, have long been employed to challenge the rationalising and individualising view of agency. Continental ethics and phenomenology are among the philosophical ideas informing both Todd and the broader ontological turn in the social sciences, but in the book they are discussed separately. The author seems to be building thick walls between thinkers according to their disciplinary or philosophical affiliations, only to break those walls down in different chapters by emphasising the thinkers' shared focus on the sensory and the material. For example, in the first chapter, the author chooses to incorporate the new materialism of Karan Barad and Jane Bennett into the amalgamation of different scholars, arguing that although it 'may feel anomalous from the work of the scholars above, as it offers a theoretical rather than disciplinary approach' (p. 11), their inclusion is justified, because, like Todd, they pay attention to the materiality of things and their intra-action. Perhaps if the author had moved beyond the formal aspects of Todd's concepts to reveal and provide a synthesis of their underlying foundations, the book could have engaged in a deeper discussion.

Instead, the book tends to stay on the surface, occasionally resulting in the author's misguided or uninspiring reflections on these theories within the field of sexuality education. For instance, in chapter three, titled 'Attention and Openness', the author aims to address the question of how to respond to cultural and religious differ-

ence in sexuality education. She draws on Todd's thinking about the reconfiguration of teacher-student roles and the importance of openness to the Other, illustrated by Ingold's metaphor of walking. After explaining Todd's and Ingold's theories, however, the author uses them not to provide an answer to the original question – how to account for cultural diversity in sexuality education – but to illustrate her biases and the limitations of her research position in her participatory observation of a sexuality education class. Allen details how she identified 'difference' in a student of a different ethnicity and how her predefined categories reduced this research participant to a mere set of characteristics, a generalised Other. The implication is that as researchers we should do what Todd calls for in educational practice, which is to displace our selves, be open to, and not categorise others. This conclusion sounds somewhat trivial in the context of ethnographic research and its foundational principles taught in undergraduate social anthropology courses. The more intriguing question of how to apply Todd's and Ingold's philosophical considerations in sexuality education is not answered. Allen's theorising here entails a more significant paradox though. While the chapter begins with a critique of sexuality education policies that place the burden of addressing cultural difference solely on teachers (requiring them to possess the knowledge and skills to deal with students' different ethnicities and cultures and to undergo training), the author seems to fall into the same trap – teachers around the globe surely have their ideas and moral convictions about sexuality, but here the author asks them to displace their selves, without offering much insight into the ways this can be achieved other than by being a well-read feminist scholar.

Similar confusion arises in Chapter 5, which aims to develop Steph Ceraso's multimodal listening pedagogy from a new

materialist perspective and consider sound as an agential intra-active materiality. The chapter sets out to explain the materiality of sound with a number of academic citations, leaving the reader wondering whether a detailed introduction to new materialism and sound studies is needed to demonstrate the idea that sound vibrates and can therefore be seen and felt. Nevertheless, the point is eventually made that sound has a material agency, and that it is not a separate entity that is merely *heard*; rather, it is *felt*, and through embodied affect, it *does* something to our intra-actively shaped subjectivities. To illustrate sound's agency, the author points out how shopping mall music increases customers' enjoyment of shopping, making them linger longer. How this example illustrates the embodied nature of sound beyond the mere 'hearing' of it (however subconsciously or unconsciously), remains unclear. In another section, the author finds the agential power of sound to be demonstrated by the ringing of a school bell, prompting everyone in the classroom to get up and deem the lesson over. Yet it seems that in this case, meaning doesn't necessarily derive from an embodied, intra-actively shaped affect – the focus the author seeks to emphasise based on new materialist theories. Instead, the meaning here appears to arise from culturally shared textual interpretations of sound, a perspective the author had previously argued for moving beyond. Yet, these considerations lead Luisa Allen to a new materialist conclusion, that we should unlearn traditional ways of listening and bring our perceptions of the body into the research situation. Moreover, she argues that embodied details are usually omitted in data analysis. This claim seems misguided in the field of social anthropology and the social sciences, where the influence of the researcher's embeddedness and embodiedness on the research situation and data production have been the subject of much methodological discus-

sion. Nonetheless, the author offers detailed descriptions of the sensory (embodied) experiences she has while listening to her research recordings of a sexuality education classroom. We 'witness' the author as she closes her eyes while listening or as she puts on noise-cancelling headphones to hear better. The connection of these descriptions to the 'listening as a holistic and immersive act' (p. 110) that goes beyond merely 'ear-ing' (p. 110), which the author argues against in her theoretical framework, is not clear. Further attempts to apply new materialist thought seem somewhat mechanistic, and their relevance for sexuality education research or practice, or for expanding its ontological borders, remains obscure. For example, when describing her research recordings, Allen writes that some of the sounds were mundane and went unnoticed by her on the first listening, which she argues only testifies to their power in creating the educational space. What we should make of this power, however, is not explained. Similarly, her descriptions of feeling the vibrations of her desk (caused by a passing helicopter) while listening to the research recording, or her recognition that the walls, the ceiling, or any open or unopen windows affect the way sound resonates in the classroom and consequently contribute to the intra-active generation of 'embodied student affects' (p. 117) lack relevance to the overarching research question: 'What might multimodal listening offer sexuality researchers that is more expansive than traditional approaches to listening to participants?' (p. 100). The answer seems to be: not much.

In the following chapters, which further argue for a more 'sensuous education' and 'ethical engagement with the world', the author seems to run out of proverbial breath, failing to introduce any fresh intersection or ideas and instead revisiting formulations or quotations that have already appeared (sometimes word for word) throughout previous chapters.

We do not, in fact, progress beyond the ontological and philosophical inspirations that the author purports to expand upon; rather, we listen to their reverberations (as the author herself calls her philosophical experiment in the concluding chapter). That 'reverberations' on their own do not form a sufficiently stable basis for theorising proper is made more evident in the application of these ideas to the pedagogical practice of sexuality education. To demonstrate the 'agential intra-active materiality of sound' (p. 105), for instance, the author gives an example of a lesson in which the lecturer performs a pop song, exposing herself to student evaluation and making herself vulnerable. Clearly, this example relates more to the reconfiguration of teacher-student roles than to the new materialist ontology of sound as 'agential intra-active materiality'. Elsewhere, Allen draws from the geographer Pyry and her photo-walks pedagogy, in which students photograph the everyday life that surrounds them, moving beyond the visual and disembodied cultural interpretations into the domain of the embodied and lived. Unlike Pyry, however, Allen does not propose a practice necessarily devoid of predefined cultural meanings and interpretations. She suggests students take photographs of '(1) How they learn about sexuality at school [and] (2) How they learn about sexuality outside of school' (p. 158). While Allen trialled this exercise in secondary schools and claims that students' 'success in taking photographs relating to sexuality at school attests to the viability of this as an exercise' (*ibid.*), she does not reflect on the fact that students were only asked the first question, possibly restricting their explorations within the boundaries of the dominant discourse. Furthermore, her statement that 'students took photographs successfully' does not demonstrate how this activity may 'challenge or expand their understandings of sexuality shaped by the dominant discourse' or how it awakened students' 'dwelling with the

world', 'enchantment', or 'ontological immersion in spatial-material reality' – concepts repeatedly theorised on the preceding pages. These are only some of many examples and Allen herself acknowledges that 'some who read this experiment in thought for re-organising sexuality education pedagogy will be sceptical of its practical feasibility' (p. 140). Unfortunately, she does not attempt to address these doubts.

The topic that Allen discusses is of undeniable academic and political importance, and the link she draws between sexuality education and Todd's ideas on the ontology of education provides fertile ground for a reimagining of this curriculum subject. However, the book suffers from a collection of uncontextualised thoughts, which, upon closer inspection, reveal themselves to be rooted in the same ontological framework. This results in the author reiterating her (and Todd's) arguments and ultimately arriving at conclusions that fail to significantly push the boundaries of the ontological and epistemological borders of sexuality education. This is not to say that sexuality education should not move in a more sensory/sensual/embodied direction as suggested by Louisa Allen, but it undermines the need to dedicate a substantial portion of the book to philosophical thought, which is not utilised.

While the claim that providing students with the right knowledge will not lead to desirable ethical behaviour comes across as clear and well argued, it would be beneficial to gain the author's perspective on current public policies and educational documents. Some of these documents themselves criticise frontal teaching, the authoritative role of teachers, and the transmission of predetermined moral values in sexuality education and suggest a course of action that is not based on aesthetic/sensuous/embodied practice.

Concluding this review, it is essential to raise a question as to who is the intend-

ed reader. As far as the philosophy of education is concerned, the book does not present a novel synthesis of ideas; it is rather a collection of various concepts that often fail to establish meaningful connections with each other and remain underdeveloped throughout the book. If the intended readership is practitioners in the field of sexuality education, much of the theorising and concepts ring hollow. Why do we need to delve into considerations of new materialism if the ultimate conclusion is that attention should be directed towards the material attributes of a classroom?

Additionally, the book's desired outcome is to open up 'more expansive understandings of sexuality and the related experience of gender' and to create spaces for 'expressions and manifestations currently designated "unnatural", "uncommon", or "stigmatized"' (p. 161). However, the author seems to overlook the fundamental fact that sexuality education does not take place in a socio-cultural vacuum, and that two critical factors come into play. First, the school as an autocratic institution with fixed hierarchies is a point acknowledged by Allen but not explored further in terms of how it may affect the realisation of her philosophical ideas. Second, the intensifying culture wars over the definition of sexuality education (whether the sexuality of children and young people is spoken about at all and whether it is a public matter) link the curriculum subject to broader sociocultural structures that significantly shape sexuality education. This point does not feature in the book at all. The author wraps her sexuality education in an approach that presumes if not the same view of sexuality, then a mutually shared respect for the right of children and adolescents for sexual and gender self-determination. Ignoring the ever-growing anti-gender movements that challenge the very inclusion of sexuality education in formal education and exert significant pressure on public in-

stitutions will not make this cultural conflict go away. It is precisely in a book of this kind, written with an activist tone of voice, that different socio-cultural perspectives on sexuality and sexuality education need to be reflected and a platform for communicating different perspectives needs to be opened. Otherwise, we will risk committing the very forms of egoism Allen condemns in her book – the colonisation of other people, other ideas, and other cultures.

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Elisabeth Anderson: *Agents of Reform. Child Labor and the Origins of the Welfare State*

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Although a rich body of scholarship has gradually unpacked how the umbrella concept of a 'welfare state' emerges from the multi-faceted challenges of modernization, the common denominator has remained a macro-structural approach predicated on testing the causal strength of individual variables. Picking up the gauntlet, Elisabeth Anderson 'refocuses attention on the modern *regulatory welfare state*' and argues that its emergence, as a key component of overarching social states (to use the terminology of Moses, J. 2018. *The First Modern Risk: Workplace Accidents and the Origins of European Social States*. Cambridge University Press), cannot be explained without accounting for the role of agency (pp. 1–3). By focusing specifically on child labor laws, understood as an early a component of the worker protection that underscores modern welfare states, Anderson's book dissects how 'middle class and elite reformers'

fundamentally warped the 'proper relationships between state, market and workers' (p. 3). While agency features prominently in other studies of welfare state emergence (Moses, 2018), Anderson uses seven in-depth studies across 19th century Europe and the United States to develop a 'general theory of individual reformer influence' (p. 13).

A first key component of the argument is that centralizing agency does not equate to a sequential account of 'historical great men' (p. 7). Rather, Anderson carefully delineates that macro-level economic and political transformations opened up space for individual reformers to devise institutions for social issues they viewed as requiring state intervention (pp. 7–8). It is precisely in this line of thought that Anderson carefully dissects the limitations of conventional theories of welfare state development to carve out analytical space for agency. For instance, whereas the 'logic of industrialism' struggles in explaining timing of policymaking even in countries with similar levels of development, power resource/class-based explanations overestimate the internal homogeneity of groups, particularly in early capitalism development (pp. 8–10). Similarly, virtually all institutionalist accounts are argued to struggle with the gradual, endogenous change that seems more common in welfare policymaking than exogenous shocks (pp. 10–11). Although the literature review misses important branches such as sociological theories of social policy (Kaufmann, F. X. 2012. *European Foundations of the Welfare-State*. Berghan Books) or recent interdisciplinary historical research (Moses, 2018), which do allow some space for agency, it does nonetheless highlight a key point: whereas conventional approaches test variables across national cases, a more holistic picture can be drawn by focusing on episodes of grappling with the common challenges associated with modernity (similar to Moses, 2018).

Drawing on Bourdieu-inspired concepts of field and capital, Anderson identifies two main types of reformers – policy entrepreneurs, aiming to primarily influence legislative outcomes, and administrative entrepreneurs, typically seeking to determine how policies are practically implemented (pp. 14–15). The common denominator is that both types of actors seek to blend in strategic alliance building with creative problem solving, so as to attain key positions in the field that allow ideas to play causal role(s) in policymaking (pp. 16–18). Because actors are problem-solvers, they resort to creative use of ideas embedded in strategies such as framing, citation, compromise and signaling expertise (pp. 16–18). Although not explicit, the intended dialogue is with political science studies on the role of ideas in welfare policymaking (e.g. Beland, D., & Petersen, K., eds. 2014. *Analyzing Social Policy Concepts and Language. Comparative and Transnational Perspectives*. Bristol University Press), which are seen as limited to the macro-level of 'national cultures', thus missing micro-level ideational debates (p. 20). By carefully delineating between the micro-level of 'problem definitions' and the overarching level of a 'policy program', Anderson argues that actors have a range of options for action that transcends typical policy window arguments (p. 22). While the theoretical framework operates with a somewhat rigid boundary between intrinsic and instrumental action, it does raise the crucial point that agency matters in both structural and unconventional ways.

All cases contribute key facets to 'theory-based patterns' regarding the causal role of agency (p. 23). Let me illustrate this with Chapter 2 on Child Labor in Prussia and Chapter 3 contrasting the success of policy creation in France and lack thereof in Belgium. This specific selection highlights some of the book's strongest points – a more coherent explanation of early historical periods than the one offered by con-

ventional theories; a comparison of failure and success that highlights some of the scope conditions for agency; highlighting the underexplored connection between education and welfare states.

Conventionally, the Prussian child labor law of 1839 is argued to stem from state-building, either in the classical sense of raising capacity for war or in the sense of assuaging class conflict (pp. 42–44). Yet, as Anderson argues, neither explanation is fully satisfactory. On the one hand, adult workers themselves did not want restrictions on child labor as it would increase their own workload. On the other hand, a more intellectual-history style reading of the policy documents and debates shows that the militaristic arguments were only used pro-forma (pp. 44–45). Rather, the author highlights how, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, the Prussian state underwent intertwined processes of state-building and a capitalist economic transformation that created space particularly for the high bureaucracy to flourish. Against this background, a key issue became the tension between children's role as economic agents in factories and the modernizing project of mandatory child education (pp. 47–52). Within the overarching ideology of nation-building qua modernization, this tension provided the specific ideational toolkit for would-be reformers.

Altenstein, for instance, an otherwise wealthy member of the landed aristocracy climbing the ladder to the rank of Minister of Religious, Education and Medical affairs, argued that protecting working children contributed to a more modern form of national citizens (pp. 59–60). According to Anderson however, while Altenstein's specific framing of the 'social question' did bank on the widespread trope of nation-building, eschewing direct contact with topoi from key stakeholders (p. 60) and failure to adequately note how the program was a bottom-top creation from multiple local bureaucracies (p. 61) created a rheto-

ric strategy that failed to get traction. Thus, Altenstein's concrete power as a minister did not translate into sufficient alliance-building to enable the project to pass (pp. 61–62). Conversely, by blending in economic arguments pertaining to employers with humanistic tropes not unlike those of Altenstein, Bodelschwingh managed to carve out a more solid policy alliance, from a lower administrative position (p. 65). That framing matters is further evidenced by the fact that Bodelschwingh did not in fact solicit as thorough an opinion from employers as Altenstein (p. 65). Similarly, the contrasting fate of the two proposals also perfectly highlights the importance of field position. While Altenstein may appear to have wielded even the power of a 'veto player' (p. 69–70), he was in fact at a rather isolated level of administration, whereas Bodelschwingh was so enmeshed in multi-level bureaucratic networks that he could constantly build alliances for his specific framing.

The comparative analysis of Belgium and France further strengthens the idea that agency and field position matter, by looking at divergent outcomes in relatively similar economic and socio-political contexts (pp. 78–88). In France, the 'parliamentarization of contention', which implied a porous state-society divide (p. 94), opened up analytical space for a range of actors to selectively and gradually put forward the framing of child protection as a social question. While this meant that policy entrepreneurs could appeal to a wide audience, it also implied the presence of stake-holders (such as employers) stronger than in Prussia and as such impossible to bypass (pp. 94–95). As such, according to Anderson, the key to Dupin's successful policy introduction was a 'three pronged framing,' blending in academic and political language with adept citation of employer opinions, signaling that the policy would be a top-down political encroachment on the dominant liberal ethos (p. 100). The wide embedding al-

lowed multiple potential veto-actors to be swayed (pp. 102–103). The end result was that while the French child law of 1841 may have appeared as a functional response to structural issues such as labor unrest, a key role was in fact played by Dupin's creative alliance-building that spanned political and economic actors.

Conversely, while Ducpetiaux in Belgium was also embedded in some key networks (academic and political – p. 106), he framed his project at a relatively high level of abstraction that could not foment alliance-building, particularly among fields that were less porous than in France (p. 112). Whereas Dupin framed child protection using many of the topoi provided by employers themselves, Ducpetiaux used a terminology of rights that was mostly confined to the academic realm (p. 112). In the absence of a wide framing that allowed for alliance-building, the policy window created by labor protests did not automatically lead to welfare intervention as in neighboring France. This re-strengthens

the key point that while agency is not sufficient, it is quite clearly vitally necessary for welfare state development.

Broadly speaking, Elisabeth Anderson's book impresses through analytical clarity and an in-depth historical narrative that sheds new light on an otherwise poorly explained area of welfare state history. By carefully dissecting macro-level economic and political structures, the author offers a finely tuned analysis on the causal role of agency in social policy development, focused at the level of child employment protection. In drawing particularly from anthropology, while seemingly neglecting well-known political science and sociology tropes, the book sends out the strong message that the creation of modern welfare states requires a highly intricate ideational construction, above and beyond an underlying social-democratic thinking (Kaufmann, 2012).

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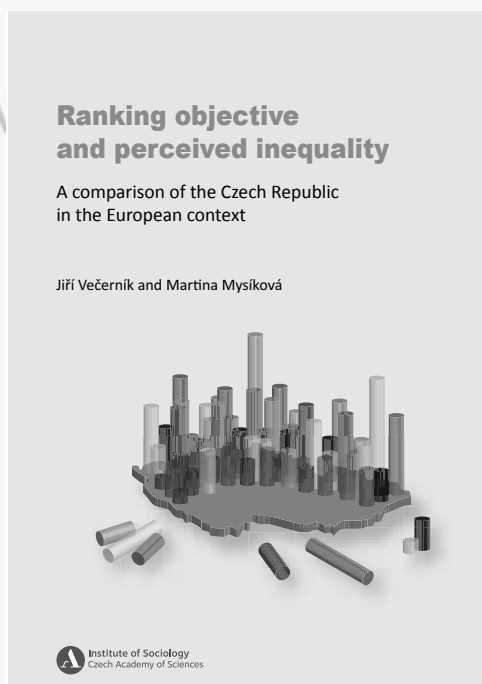
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Ranking objective and perceived inequality. A comparison of the Czech Republic in the European context

Jiří Večerník and Martina Mysíková



In Czech public and professional discourse there is strong rhetoric about the rooted egalitarianism of Czech society and its extremely low socio-economic inequality. This study thus traces various objective and subjective dimensions of inequality in an attempt to examine the validity of this rhetoric. The study uses various sources of data on the levels and trends in earnings, household income, and living conditions in the Czech Republic and compares them to other European countries. It appears that although the country ranks among societies with a low level of social inequality, Czechs are not particularly 'exceptional' when it comes to objective economic equality, nor are they remarkably egalitarian in their attitudes.

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FROM THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIOLOGY CAS IN PRAGUE

Contemporary Czech Society

Pat Lyons and Rita Kindlerová



Do Czechs want equality?
What do Czechs think about
migrants and do Czechs
fear foreigners? Are Czechs
a nation of grumblers? Are
Czechs prejudiced? How do
Czechs spend their time?
Czexit? Answers to these and
dozens of other questions are
used in this unique book to
paint a broad interdisciplinary
portrait of Czech society for
an international audience.

Pat Lyons and Rita Kindlerová (eds). 2016. Contemporary Czech Society. Prague: The Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences. 552 pages, ISBN 978-80-7330-299-3.

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<https://www.soc.cas.cz/en/publication/contemporary-czech-society>



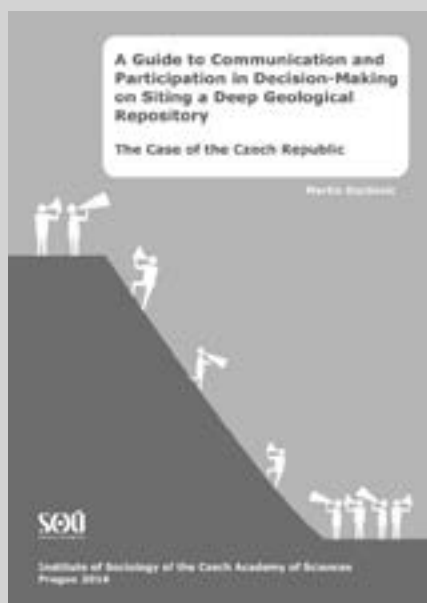
A Guide to Communication and Participation in Decision-Making on Siting a Deep Geological Repository: The Case of the Czech Republic

Martin Durdovic

The Czech Republic is currently confronted with the need to select a site for the construction of a deep geological repository for spent nuclear fuel and high-level waste.

The processes of siting and building such a facility are comparable in scope and significance to the construction of nuclear power plants in the country in the past, the decisions for which were made by the communist regime. Now, by contrast, the process must respect democratic principles. This guide is the outcome of a qualitative and quantitative empirical research project that sought to examine the social embeddedness of decisions about the location and construction of a deep geological repository in the Czech Republic.

The principles and procedures elaborated in these pages are centred on the idea of organised dialogue among all stakeholders.



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