

mercialisation, professionalisation and managerialism have become the new trends of non-profit organisations, a development that is particularly interesting to observe in the new member states. Barbara Wasner's chapter on the integration of civil society organisations of the new member states into European networks is complementary. It shows how the European institutions (especially the EU Commission) try to establish layers of European networks in the new member states, on issues like employment, the environment, education and justice, in order to facilitate the implementation of regulations. The interesting point is that organisations are sometimes just 'planted' and have no real anchoring in the 'third sector' of the new member states, making misfits out of domestic institutions and European regulations. Several political scientists have also observed this in the old member states. Thus the research community is invited to continue its reflection – with enlargement – on the viability of the Commission's policy to implement integration through European networks.

In the end, this book –which is somewhat of a patchwork – contains relevant chapters, which help provide a look at the societal dimension of European integration. But it is only an invitation to go further.

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Sandrine Devaux: *Engagements associatifs et postcommunisme – Le cas de la République tchèque*

Paris 2005: Éditions Belin, 319 pp.

The topic of civic engagement is unquestionably very popular in contemporary sociology and the political sciences. To a large degree the focus on civil society is linked to the fact that social scientists are interested in understanding the process of democratic transformation in post-communist countries. Amidst

the boom in 'civil society studies', it is legitimate to ask: what can another book on civil society in a post-communist country add to our understanding of a topic already so substantially analysed?

In *Engagements associatifs et postcommunisme – Le cas de la République tchèque*, the French political scientist Sandrine Devaux persuasively demonstrates that another approach to the topic can provide an impressive array of new information. Her book shows that despite the abundance of literature and empirical research on post-communist civic engagement, the mainstream Anglo-American approach of 'civil society' prevails, and that we are overlooking other, alternative approaches that could facilitate a deeper understanding of the real social processes behind post-communist civic engagement.

Sandrine Devaux specialises in the study of the political and social transformation in Central and Eastern Europe and focuses on new forms of civic and political participation. She is also the author of books on the relationship between civic associations and political parties in the Czech Republic, on collective identities in post-communist Europe, and on the new civic and political activities in enlarged Europe. The reviewed book is based on her doctoral thesis.

The author opens the volume with a very instructive and systematic critique of mainstream approaches to the study of democracy, especially the Anglo-American approach of 'civil society', which according to her has reached an impasse. The author largely criticises the use of such terms as 'social movement', 'civil society' or 'non-profit sector' in any analysis of post-communist societies. She labels them as normative and functionalist, remarking that this kind of approach can obstruct the effort to obtain a real understanding of social facts. Even if this criticism is probably apt, it must be admitted that these terms 'imported' from the West are used owing to the lack of 'indigenous' terms or original concepts developed by scientists from post-communist countries. (The

criticism moreover points to the enduring 'battle' between Anglo-American and French political science.) For the above-mentioned reasons the author has chosen for her analyses the more general and neutral term 'associative life'.

The author's second critical observation targets another mainstream 'transition approach', which, according to the author, treats the actors in the transition as though they were tied to the old system and without any active power, and it represents a normative understanding of social change. This criticism of transitology leads Sandrine Devaux to choose for her own research a combination of analyses that take into account the heterogeneity of Soviet systems (a reference to Zdeněk Strmiska) and draws on the path dependency theory (not in the sense of determinacy but in the sense of the importance of past for understanding the present).

Finally, but importantly, the author's third critical objection concerns the fact that democracy in post-communist countries has been studied more from above than from below, which means that research has focused mainly on phenomena like a country's first elections, the crystallisation of political parties, and elite studies. By contrast, Sandrine Devaux has decided to focus on 'associative practices' in order to grasp reality from the point of view of ordinary people, asking how they perceive change and how they really experience it.

Her approach can therefore be defined as the sociology of practices of association in the context of political change. She pays special attention to the link between individual behaviour and systemic, political, economic and social modifications. She tries to find out how individual actors use the freedom of association that comes with the new regime and what the impact of regime change is on everyday practices in associations. This even allows her to formulate some new hypotheses about the functioning of Soviet-type society.

The main thesis of her research can be summarised as follows: There is no specific model of post-communist associative engagement, but only some connection between individual behaviour and collective behaviour inherited from the communist period on the one hand and modes of creation of associations and associative sociability on the other. Her goal is more ambitious than just measuring the level of democracy by the development of civil society (the number of NGOs). The author aims to understand how communist associations were re-converted into democratic ones, which means finding out how different civic associations are constituted in the transition from one regime, where individuals were not free to choose their interests or motives, to another, where not only can they gather freely but they can also construct the objective of their mobilisation and declare it publicly.

To study the phenomenon of associative life in post-communist countries Sandrine Devaux selected Czech society as her case study, looking at the period between 1968 to the middle of the 1990s. She gives the following reasons for her choice: First, the case of the Czech Republic challenges the prevalent assumption that civil society in post-communist countries is weak. The author points out that different associations existed even in the period of normalisation (after the Prague Spring in 1968) and that the revival of civil society after 1989 was quite strong. Second, concentrating on one post-communist society allows the author to apply a qualitative approach and thus to make a more detailed analysis of specific processes in the domain of associations. However, whenever possible she compares the Czech case with that of other post-communist countries, specifically Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. This comparison offers readers a broader view of the situation in the post-communist region and at the same time allows the author to comment on 'post-communist associative life' in general.

The author uses qualitative methods to examine the ordinary practices of actors: face-

to-face semi-structured interviews, analyses of the documentation of relevant associations and of the recent public discourse on civic engagement.

For the interviews the author chose three categories of associations: youth organisations (scouts, pioneers), social assistance associations focused on children, and groups of parents of handicapped children. She examined the following phenomena in particular in these associations: how actors deal with the past; how membership in associations forms resources or constraints for the actors; the logic of continuity, interruption, transformation or innovation of old organisations; the different types of capital mobilised by social actors, their experience with the communist regime and the way they view the new opportunities in democratic society.

The book is well structured and is comprised of two main parts. The introductory chapter outlines the path from communist mass organisation to freedom of association. The author familiarises readers with the principles of mass organisations under the communist regime in Czechoslovakia and the incorporation of traditional Czech organisations into the Soviet system. The reader learns about the process through which the laws on freedom of association adopted after 1989 were created, moreover in comparison with similar laws in France, Hungary, Poland and Romania. The comparison shows, for example, that Czech law is centred more on distinguishing civic organisations from other political parties or business organisations rather than on setting out a positive definition of civic organisation.

In the introduction the author substantiates her choice of theoretical background, which includes the above-mentioned criticism of other approaches. The first part of the book goes on to describe the revival of associative actors and the process of reconfiguration of communist heritage. The first chapter looks at the restoration of traditional organisations – such as the Scouts move-

ment – and their trajectories, and shows, for example, how the Scouts functioned under the communist regime and in the process of re-defining Scout identity after 1989. In the second chapter the author describes the conversion of old official organisations, in this case the communist youth organisation known as the 'Pioneers', and the formation of their new identity and their legitimisation in the democratic system. The author shows that the communist Pioneers organisation became a reference point after 1989 for other youth organisations. Moreover, even if from the ideological point of view the continuation of the pioneer organisation, which is still considered a symbol of the communist regime, is illogical, from the perspective of associative practices it plays an important social role in Czech society today. Chapter three provides the reader with information about the effects of competition in the sector of youth organisations since 1989 and about the emerging conflicts and stigmatisation.

The second part of the book deals with associative engagement as a vector of social innovation. Chapter four covers the formation of associations by mobilisation and the transfer of actors' professional competences. Chapter five explains the different modes of socialisation and engagement in the post-communist period, indicating personal trajectories and disposition as determinants of participation, as well as the actor's perception of collectives and the new civic engagement. It also reveals the perception of a symbolical break point in 1989 in social practices.

The book is accompanied by informative tables and graphs (the number and types of organisations over time, an international comparison of civic associations, the structure of communist organisations) and illustrations (posters of organisations).

In my opinion the book is accessible to the general public, thanks to the clear explanations of the terms used and the detailed historical and political descriptions of circumstances in both communist and post-

communist Czech society. Even readers who experienced communist and post-communist reality will not be bored by the description of 'well-known facts' but may often be surprised by unusual discoveries about communist and post-communist social reality, depicted in depth and colour.

Sandrine Devaux's study of 'associative life' definitely adds a new perspective to our understanding of how authoritarian regimes became democratic ones, focusing on political and social change from the 'bottom up'. The key strength of the book lies in the fact that the author has dared to address the mainstream theories of democracy and civil society. It is in the Tocquevillian tradition that the development of civil society is closely related to the establishment of a democratic system. The author challenges this prevailing thesis, showing that in its own way 'associative life' existed even before 1989 and in some cases became the bases on which the 'new democratic civil society' was formed after 1989. Here it is important to mention that the case of youth organisations is specific, and that is why the conclusion about the foundations of civil society in communist associative life cannot automatically be applied to all types of organisations.

Another finding Sandrine Devaux presents, which could be a source of future debate, is that if the new democratic regime brought about a radical change at the juridical level (new laws on associations), the change was not as radical at the level of the daily routines of associations, inherited from old system. This finding suggests for example the use of new theoretical tools in the study of post-communism: no system can totally control or organise a whole society.

The originality of the approach also lies in the fact that new associations do not come from nothing (*creation ex nihilo*) but from the re-configuration or re-modelling of already existing resources. This perspective shows that the past matters, which on a theoretical level confirms the path dependency

theory. Also, people's testimonies show that the representations of past experience and antecedent socialisation affect the vision of democracy and that they are often more important for associative practices than new structural factors. Even if people declare freedom of expression of opinion or group identity, the author notes that it is surprising that on the level of the description of associative practices before and after 1989 the perception of regime change is so weak. Though the conclusion about the weak perception of regime change sounds very pragmatic, I consider it to be quite remarkable, especially in comparison to the philosophical reflections on the change of the regime. For example, Václav Havel distinguishes sharply in his books between 'living a lie', referring to a person's hidden identity under the communist regime, and 'living in truth', referring to the free expression of opinions in a democratic regime. This study clearly shows that there is a gap between the philosophical and moral democratic theory and the everyday reality of democracy.

The above-mentioned general conclusions genuinely challenge some of the widely accepted notions about the transformation in post-communist societies. The study's bold criticism is not built on sand, but it is very well argued and documented. The study should be considered the first step in an alternative reflection on civic engagement as the vector of social innovation, but not necessary only in democratic regimes. Moreover, the author shows that the process of democratisation has not always had just positive effects on associative life at the level of everyday practice.

Even if the book cannot conceal its French provenience, reflected especially in its severe criticism of culturalism, communitarism, the notion of 'civil society', or the theory of democracy and social capital, this 'French wind' is refreshing and must be appreciated. Given the predominance of the Anglo-American paradigm of 'civil society' in the studies on post-communist transforma-

tion, the existence of alternative approaches creates a balance and preserves the necessary multi-paradigmatism in the social sciences. For this reason, this book, presenting an original reflection on the role of civic associations in the process of transformation in the Central and Eastern Europe, warrants se-

rious attention and should be of great use and interest to a wide range of social scientists.

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(This review was supported by the project GA ČR 403/04/1007.)