

Croatian civil society on the pathway to becoming a legitimate public actor

ABSTRACT: This article deal with issue of civil society development in Croatia as transitional and post war country during 1990s. Civil society development in this time is very much related to the humanitarian crisis caused by the War and involvement of international and foreign organisation. Beside that, civil society in Croatia has a poor tradition, its development has been hindered by half a century of communism and totalitarian ideology, coupled with the lack of experience with the concept of freedom of association. In the second part of article, using the concept of CIVICUS Index on Civil Society Project, we analyse four dimension of civil society in Croatia: the structure of civil society; the legal, political and socio-cultural space in which civil society operates in the larger regulatory, legal and social environment; the values civil society represents and propagates and the impact civil society has on social and community development as well as on the public policy process. The most critical area of civil society development in Croatia is related to the limited space it has to operate, as defined by the legislative, political and social-cultural framework. With legislation we do need to deal more with public policy issues trying to institutionalise a place for CSOs social capital building activities. The negative attitude of the state, restrictive legislation, a lack of social responsibility on the part of the corporate sector and the absence of a culture of volunteering and public spiritedness are vital problems. Regarding its impact, civil society organisations seems, at least in their own perceptions, to contribute significantly to solving specific social, economic and political problems and furthering the public good. However, influence on the public policy process is very limited.

KEY WORDS: civil society, non-profit sector, Croatia, post-communist countries

1. Introduction - development of civil society in Croatia during 1990s

Civil society in Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic, has a poor tradition, its development has been hindered by half a century of communism and totalitarian ideology, coupled with the lack of experience with the concept of freedom of association. Citizens' civil engagement, for solving both individual and community problems has not been a common practice among the vast majority of citizens in Croatia. Most citizens consider the government/ state responsible for solving their problems (Salamon, et al., 1999: 33). Thus passiveness and apathy exists in Croatia because of this belief.

Civil society in Croatia was substantially established during the Homeland War of 1991-1995, encouraged by the foreign organisations and foreign donors.¹ Civil society organisations, mostly associations, played a significant role in solving war-related problems, assisting in overcoming crises related to refugees and displaced persons, and in meeting the needs of losers from process of privatisation of economy. Such development, the serious role of religious organisations, especially Catholic Church, can be explained with supply-side theory (Salamon and Anheier, 1988). Government failure/market failure theory is also applicable to some extent. At that time a sense of solidarity among the citizens remained at a considerably high level. Researches have found that in the mid 1990s this solidarity began to decline and citizens formerly engaged in civil organisations began to withdraw, focusing instead on solving their personal problems (Bežovan, 1995). The citizens' withdrawal and declining sense of solidarity was subject to both escalating economic crisis and focus on family problems, leading to a standstill in civil society's development.

Foreign organisations thus initiated the establishment of a number of associations in Croatia, and provided these associations with much needed technical support.² According to Stubbs (1996) these programmes emphasised relief-based activities, rather than encouraging sustainable social development.

The development of CSOs in Croatia is largely driven by the non-critical acceptance of foreign experiences and goals, that is not respond to the interests and needs of local stakeholders, what is regional phenomena (Kuti, 2001). The problem is that these people speak of civil society using foreign concepts and terms that are not necessarily applicable to Croatian tradition (Stubbs, 2001). In this context only few individuals, with academic background, in CSOs are able to advice the importance of civil society in general public. Due to such an environment, civil society in Croatia had to be partially developed, through foreign funding programmes, from above.

During 1990s the right wing government of Croatian Democratic Union had an extremely negative attitude toward CSOs, especially these dealing with human right ad democratisation issues, declaring them enemies of the state. Under these circumstances some of the non-governmental organisations became an active part of the political opposition.³ The fact that today, many citizens have a negative attitude toward non-governmental organisations is partially a consequence of this past political environment. According to research performed by the International Republican Institute (2001) 38% of citizens report having a negative attitude to non-governmental organisations, 44% positive, and 18% were ambiguous.⁴ The negative attitudes toward non-governmental organisations among students and secondary school pupils, as well as the lack of knowledge on the concept of civil society, was recognised in research of Ledić and Mrnjauš (2000).

The 16 provisions of the Law on Associations, restricting the freedom of association, were abolished by the Constitutional Court in February 2000.⁵ The inadequate legal framework and the patronising attitude of the state toward the non-profit organisations is, according to Barić (2000:47), a significant obstacle in the development of the sector. Relatively small amount of philanthropic and charitable giving is largely due to the

absence of foundation tradition, unfavourable tax regulations and distrust toward civil society felt by corporate sector and citizens (Bežovan, 2002).⁶

Activities of CSOs have been conditioned with the war, economic crisis, relief and political crisis oriented foreign funding programmes. Real co-operation and partnership with the Government, for a larger part of sector was impossible. Media controlled by the Government made negative public image of CSOs getting funding from outside⁷ and it effects perception of ordinary citizens towards such organisations like public enemy.⁸ Civil society is not a part of mainstream transition agenda in Croatia⁹.

Limited missions of foreign funders were not supportive for conducting of empirical researches on civil society development. Significant lack of literature on civil society in the native language is evident, which poses an obstacle to systematic efforts to develop curriculum for civil society on university level. The research by the World Bank (2000:32) reveals that the main political and academic mainstream has little respect for the activities of CSOs in the wide area of social care and consider them as not professional and rather politically engaged.

Beside mentioned, the following aspects have been recognised as the most significant issues for civil society development in Croatia: sustainability, transparency, effectiveness, non-professional approach, leadership, identity, inexperience with civil society-oriented advocacy activities, low level of co-operation between the organisations themselves and with the mass media (Shimkus, 1996; Barić, 2000; Stubbs, 2001; Ledić, 1997; Bežovan, 1997; Coury, Despot-Lučanin and Bežovan, 1998).

The Croatian pattern of civil society development was to larger extent similar to that in other post-communist countries. During 1990s, in processes of civil society development in Central Eastern European countries, very similar problems like in Croatia were emerging (Siegel and Yancey, 1992; Salamon, et al., 1999; Kuti, 2001; Pinter, 2001; Johnson and Young, 1997; Szeman and Horsanyi, 2000; Regulaska, 1999 and 2001; Jenkins, 1995; Kolarič, et al., 1995; Laiferva, 1995; Potuček, 2000; Lagerspetz, 2002). Non-eligibility of Croatia for Phare programme, European Union support programme for Central Eastern European counties (Laiferova, 1995), and the war made a difference.

Civil society development in Croatia means democratisation of societal associations which indirectly influence the state and economy, and promote idea of pluralism in public sphere (Cohen and Arato, 1992). In other aspect, civil society mobilising new resource and took a limited part in restructuring of welfare state (Salamon, et al., 1999: 33).

2. Recent development in Croatian civil society and the CIVICUS index

Since the elections of 2000, preceded by an extensive campaign involving a number of CSOs,¹⁰ the new coalition government with the majority of Social Democratic Party has, in early 2000 addressed the problems facing civil society development in Croatia with more responsibility. The government adapted a new liberal Law on Associations.

Three persons, in earlier law ten, can establish association. Unregistered associations are recognised as legal persons. This new policy resulted in the design of the "Programme of Co-operation between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Non-Government, Non-for-Profit Sector in the Republic of Croatia," adopted in December 2000. Through the efforts of the Government Office of Associations, established 1998, the government has developed a transparent National grant programme from the State Budget with involvement of civil society representatives.

Since 2001 citizens and corporate sector can provide up to 2% of their income as tax free donation to the non-profit organisations. The Government encourage foreign funders and strengthened indigenous recipients with new tax provision of not paying VAT of 22% for purchasing goods and services from foreign money. With such incentives the government is increasingly aware of the merit of civil society.

In 2002 the Government Office for Associations initiated establishment of the Council for Civil Society Development with mix membership of state administration representatives and "elected" people from civil society. Council is advisory body of the Government for implementation of mentioned Programme. Some critical observations see such involvement as a top-down approach in this sensitive matter.

Stakeholders need a foundation of knowledge concerning the current state of civil society in Croatia. Thus, CERANEO,¹¹ in partnership with CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation has embarked on the CIVICUS Index on Civil Society Project.

The Index project is a diagnostic tool for assessing the current state and health of civil society at a national level, and to provide a basis for dialogue among civil society stakeholders so they might set goals and develop an agenda for the future development of civil society. The project was carried out in two general phases:

1. All existing information and previous research concerning civil society in Croatia was compiled and analysed
2. A stakeholder mail survey (April-May 2001) was conducted among 353 key civil society stakeholders from a variety of sub-sectors. Table 1 (in Appendix) outlines the sub-sectors and the number of respondents from each.¹²

The assessment process made use of the CIVICUS Diamond Tool¹³ as a general analytic approach. This tool breaks the complexity of civil society into 4 dimensions:

1. The **structure** of civil society
2. The legal, political and socio-cultural **space** in which civil society operates in the larger regulatory, legal and social environment
3. The **values** civil society represents and propagates
4. The **impact** civil society has on social and community development as well as on the public policy process

To assess these dimensions, a set of indicators was chosen for each.¹⁴ The scores obtained from the survey for each of these indicators are mapped to form a diamond shape, lending itself to useful interpretations concerning the current state of civil society in Croatia.

3. The findings of the CIVICUS index on civil society in Croatia

3.1 The Civil Society Diamond

Civil society in Croatia, as a post war and transitional country, according to a respondent, "...is still in the infant stage with a big progress made in the last ten years". The visual representation of the findings from the stakeholder survey form a status diamond, representing the current state of civil society in Croatia as having a moderate health (Figure 1) with respect to its structure and impact. Civil society's values are also rated rather positively, however its legal, political and socio-cultural space is regarded as quite negative.

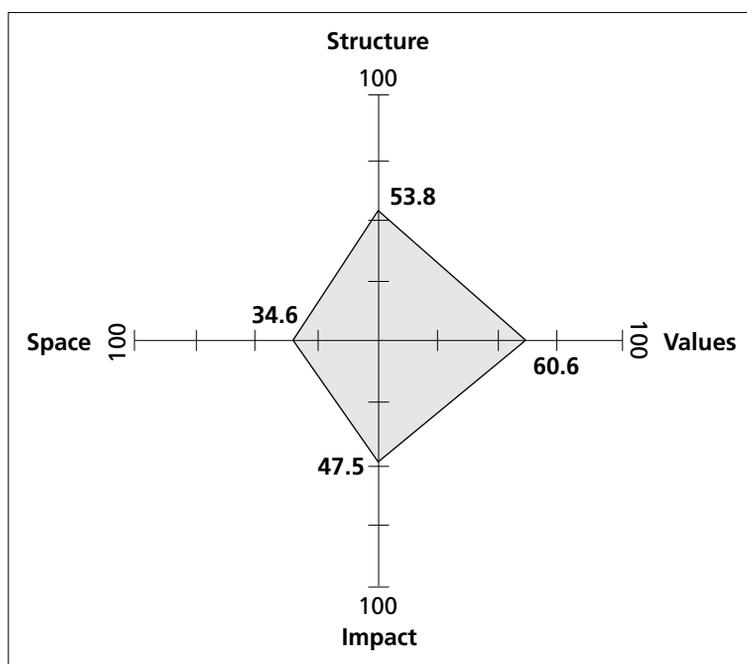


Figure 1: Croatian Civil Society Diamond

3.2 Structure of Croatian Civil Society

The structure of civil society in Croatia is not sufficiently transparent. Little attention has been paid for collection and dissemination of respective data about civil society, profiles, activities and its achievements.¹⁵

A respondent observed the following:

"Civil society in Croatia undergoes the period of "children's diseases". However a significant progress has been made in the last ten years, referring to both shaping and organising of civil society and initiating network connecting and co-ordination between organisations (inevitable for producing significant impact on society development)."

3.2.1 General features

Croatia has about 20.000 registered CSO, of which 18.000 operate on a local level. A vast number of these organisations were established following the political shift in 1990. While these numbers exist for registered CSOs, there are currently no reliable indicators to assess how many of these are really active. However, based on the previous research experience of the author, the number of active associations should presumably be assessed as significantly lower.

Croatia has about 60 registered foundations, and over 150 public benefit companies with private status, having the status of non-profit organisations. Further data indicate that the vast majority of associations in Croatia, that is some 10.000, are registered in the area of sports and recreation. At the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 431 humanitarian organisations have been registered as for 2001.¹⁶ According to an estimate by The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, Croatia has some 290 associations active in environmental protection. Additionally, Croatia has 1.752 volunteer fire stations and 529 registered labour unions with approximately 550.000 members. Thus, domination of sport, recreational, fire station and cultural organisations are like in other transitional countries (Salamon, et al., 1999; Jenkins, 1995; Kolarič, et al., 1995).

An important part of the CSOs structure, resulting from foreign funding programmes, are several training organisations, three regional resource centres and, in general, innovative civil society organisation activities is part or regional development (Pinter, 2001).¹⁷

A national survey conducted by the CERANEO in 1997 of 548 newly established CSOs indicated the following breakdown (Table 2) for fields of activities of CSOs in Croatia what is very different from traditional, pre 1990 organisations.

Table 2: Fields of activities of CSOs

Field of activity	Percentage of CSOs
Advocacy	24%
Social care	20%
Environmental	13%
Culture and arts	9%
Professional associations	9%
Community development/housing	8%
Health care	7%
Education and research	5%
International organisations	3%
Religious organisations	2%

3.2.2 Membership in CSOs

Previous research indicates that a few CSOs in Croatia have active membership base. These organisations used to be represented by their leaders and had few active

members. They were thus considered organisations with a constituency and consequently without a legitimate basis for their advocacy work. The Index project supports these findings, but indicates that it is not as pronounced today as it has been in the past. The indicator measuring the extent to which there are active CSO members scores 51.1 out of a possible 100.¹⁸ According to results of the World Value Survey 1995, 38% of the Croatian population is a member of at least one association, which is significantly higher than in most other post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

3.2.3 Geographic distribution

Within the dimension of structure the indicator assessing the distribution of CSOs throughout all regions of the country turned to be extremely negative (24,5). This fact is also recognised as a problem in the research undertaken by the World Bank. The majority of civil society organisations are located in the four larger towns, with a lack of CSOs in areas with less than 20 000 inhabitants (World Bank, 2000:33). Like in other post-socialist states, (Kuti, 2001; Regulska, 2001; Lagerspetz, 2002) Croatia has an insufficient number of community based organisations.

3.2.4 Network and alliances

Networking among CSOs has also been recognised as problem for civil society development in Croatia by previous research. The findings here indicate that the existence of umbrella bodies with specific scopes of interest is moderate, with stakeholders providing an assessment of (58,5). These organisations, however, insufficiently encourage membership and participation (42,61) and are rather unlikely to promote the common interest of the sector they represent (41,92). The reluctance of civil society organisations to associate, co-operate and represent common interests was also recognised by Ledić (1997). The networking process is blocked by the fear of most organisations and their leaders that the activities of umbrella organisations might reduce the autonomy of individual CSOs.

The fact that CSOs do not co-operate on issues of mutual interest is (47,85) not so much due to mutual conflict, but to the lack of experience and awareness that information exchange and mutual co-operation can be beneficial to all organisations involved. Also, CSOs rarely join broader alliances of social forces. Larger organisations do not always work closely together with local grassroots organisations. The smaller organisations are marginalized and only partially join in activities of big organisations (44,14). Co-operation inside civil sector is a weak side in transitional countries (Siegel and Yancey, 1992; Kuti, 2001).

Croatia lacks a tradition of co-operation between civil society organisations and the private sector (40,96). The private sector hardly recognises its interests in civil society and CSOs still lack the power to solicit attraction from the private sector. In order to enhance such co-operation, as a significant indicator of civil society development in Croatia, an award shall be granted for *Croatian Donor of the Year in the Corporate Sector*, beginning in 2001.

3.2.5 Political Participation

Contacting political party officials from the side of CSOs to express their interests in the public sphere is rather underdeveloped in Croatia as many CSOs are not acquainted with the mechanism of interest representation and lobbying (50,15). The problem is dependent on political parties as well, as their representatives lack a willingness to listen to the citizens they represent and to take up their concerns.

Unlike trade unions, CSOs are hardly used to articulating their interests using non-violent demonstrations or boycotting tactics (49,25). Such activities have recently been adopted by some social groups as a means of attracting public attention to the problems involved. The most active social groups here are environmental organisations, organisations representing vulnerable social groups, women and human rights groups. In the case of reduction of payment for maternity leave affected groups made a protest that attracted the attention of the general public. On such occasions they seldom use violent means, such as damage to property or personal violence to express their interests in the public sphere (92,74).

3.2.6 Financial Resources

This research, similar to previous research (Bežovan 1997) indicates that financial sustainability is one of the key problems facing CSOs. This problem, like in other transitional countries (Kuti, 2001), has persisted during the last ten years; consequently, a number of CSOs are forced to close their operations each year (42,77). The problem very much lies with the burn out of the key persons, inadequate or inefficient management structures of organisations, as well as the impossibility of CSOs for adaptation to the actual needs of community. CSOs are not dependent on indigenous public funding only. Previous research (Bežovan 1997) indicates that only 7% of organisations have received state subsidies. It is important to note here that the system of state funds allocation on various levels used to be completely non-transparent, although this has improved over the past years. Findings also indicate that few CSOs depend on indigenous private financial supports (83,23), largely because there was no favourable tax framework for donations.

There is a growing consensus that CSOs mostly depend on foreign funding to maintain operation, although the survey indicator shows a very positive picture of availability. (74,62). Foreign funding programmes, as in other transitional countries (Pinter, 2001; Kuti 2001), have such a fundamental role in financing CSOs that the development of a civil society infrastructure strongly rests upon this source of funding. The CSOs receiving foreign grants are mostly located in bigger towns or in areas affected by the war. Only 12% of CSOs in Croatia received donations from foreign resources (Bežovan 1997) and usually they are bigger and they create public opinion about availability of foreign funding. It should be pointed out that 45% of organisations generate income from membership dues and 15% from their own activities through service charges etc. The problem of financial sustainability is likely to remain one of the vital issues of each organisation. To improve this situation, CSOs will have to find indigenous financial resources, like: donations, subventions and income from services.¹⁹

Evidence from this part of the research suggests developmental inconsistency in Croatian civil society.

3.3 Space for Civil Society Development in Croatia

A respondent observed the following:

“The State provides only formal / symbolic support, both financial and other. It looks like such support is likely to only meet the requests of the international community, and does not reflect the real inclination to make the social-cultural environment in Croatia perceptive for the operations and development of civil society.”

Space was an important developmental issue for CSOs during last ten years in terms of legislation and policies, as well as socio-cultural norms. The problem of legitimacy for civic actions and obstacles for civic culture development have been primary factors in the inability of CSOs to expand the civic space and to build social capital (Putnam, 1993).

Most variables of the space dimension received a low score. This is a complex area, deserving comprehensive analysis outside this paper. There is some pressure on CSOs to join or endorse certain political groupings (50,32); however, the activities of several CSOs can hardly be separated from those of political parties. In fact a number of political parties have organised their own associations and have used them extensively in their pre-election political campaigns.

3.3.1 Registration procedures

The only unquestionably positive indicator within this dimension is the unproblematic registering of associations as civil society organisations (73,08). According to respondent experiences, the association’s registration procedure requires 4,5 weeks on average. Unlike associations registration procedure the process of foundation’s registration is unnecessarily complicated and long. Favourable registration procedure has been identified as important factor of increase of CSOs in Hungary (Jenkins, 1995).

3.3.2 Tax laws

The tax regulations in Croatia used to be a serious obstacle for the flourishing of civil society. Mentioned fiscal changes promote Croatia as a very competitive county in the region in this part of legislation. In general, CSOs’ representatives have a problem to understand tax system and, in fact, they are not satisfied with “taxation” of non-profit organisation because of high pay-roll in Croatia.

3.3.3 Co-operation with the state and parliament

The local authorities and the national government usually do not invite CSOs to be involved in public policy formulation (33,31), even at a local level, policy was rarely influenced by CSOs. This is an indication how unreformed the Croatian system of public administration is at present and how immune it has been from the influence of new public management. Such poor impact on local levels is due to citizen perceptions that the government is the most important decision maker.²⁰ In government’s Strategy of Croatia’s Development,²¹ ⁸ the importance of civil society, the principle of subsidiarity²²

and partnerships with civil society organisations have all been recognised as important hallmarks of modernisation and civil society development in Croatia.

The problem of co-operating with government is evident in the fact that it is impossible for CSOs to access the legislature to articulate their points of view (29,73). There are some recent positive experiences recorded in this area, especially with Law on Associations, and it is not likely that progress will be achieved soon. The proposals of various laws are made through informal contacts with politicians and mostly in the last moment.²³

3.3.4 General state attitude towards civil society

In the last ten years, the state has neither respected the activities of civil society organisations nor recognised those who have shown great public service in civil society (24,77). Only in the area of environmental protection does the ministry award prizes to deserving persons for their achievements. Civic engagement with societal and community problems is simply not valued, neither by the state nor by society, and correspondingly, the state does not recognise individuals for their public spiritedness and dedication to making Croatia a better society (25,22). The previous government neither recognised the vast potential of CSOs in benefiting the public good, nor the need to invest in civil society to better utilise its resources. According to a respondent:

“...work in civil society is not recognised by the authorities. Awards are rare, mostly related to protocol purposes. This results from a troubled relation of the public authorities with regards to an appraisal of social values.”

Additionally, a citizen who joins a civil society organisations is not respected for that action by society (31,09). There is an absence of the use of associations as a means to solving both social and community problems, as well as an absence of individual citizen attention to these problems. It seems that active citizenship is common issue in transitional countries (Potuček, 2000). Consequently, volunteerism and work for the public good are not recognised as positive social values. On the contrary, society mistrusts and is suspicious of the motivation of citizens to engage in activities for public good. It is obvious that in such an environment public spiritedness is not an admirable character trait (36,04). A respondent comments that,

“...the main characteristic of the social - cultural space is a traditional, deep-rooted apolitical attitude. The non-profit activities of private organisations (associations, public benefit companies, funds, foundations) for the public purpose are hardly being recognised.”

3.3.5 The attitudes of businesses towards civil society

The links between businesses and CSOs in Croatia are poor. Companies almost never support the role of their employees as activists in civil society organisations (17,81). Following the experiences of socialism, privatisation of the economy and high pay-roll, the business sector does not see any reason for supporting civil society. Businesses are also not actively engaged in philanthropic programmes supporting civil society organisations (21,99). Previous research (Bežovan, 2002 a) indicates that some companies tend to support sports and recreation organisations, health care institutions, cultural organisations, schools, the church and in rare cases, some small civil society

organisations. Some large companies have recently started inviting public tenders for granting donations.

Evidence and comments of respondents suggest that in case of local governments and public policy institutions willingness to develop partnership with CSOs they might be too limited to fill-up the new opening space. Some recent debates raised issue of CSOs capacities as key bottle neck in sector development.

3.4 Values of Civil Society in Croatia

Values are an important element of the foundation of CSOs. Compared to other dimensions, the values dimension proved to be the most positive element of civil society in Croatia.

3.4.1 Promoting Values

CSOs play a rather active role in promoting harmonious relations between different political, cultural, religious and ethnic groups in society (62,83); their success in achieving these relations received a slightly lower rating (54,07). We have to keep in mind perception that Croatian society is not integrated and relatively divided among different groups of people. Whereas CSOs do not promote conflicts between members of different cultural and religious groups (86,62), they, however, should become more engaged in the process of social integration. Human right groups could be seen as close to the left parties and those representing war veterans and displaced persons as associated with right party's supporters. The written comments of respondents clearly indicate a divisiveness of organisations into extreme left and extreme right political ideology. Such experience exist in the region (Jenkins, 1995). Some respondents consider political engagement of these organisations harmful to development of civil society:

“... in general CSOs in majority cases are not acting in autonomous and independent way, in larger part they are servants of political ideologies while they use term “civil society” to hide their real activities....., politisations of CSOs' activities should be avoided.”

CSOs respect fundamental human rights (77,01) and are active in the promotion of human rights (74,78). The latter is in fact a significant part of the mission for most of civil society organisations.

The cultural groups in Croatia are relatively split up along the lines of ethnic communities. The indicator measuring the peaceful promotion of their interests in civil society receives a mixed rating (54,76). Intolerance between cultural groups in civil society may appear only in respect to competitive cultural programmes of ethnic groups.

CSOs promote gender equity, both within their organisations and in the wider social environment (gender equity (1) 67,39). According to the result of this survey, gender equality is mostly accepted value in civil society organisations (gender equity (2) 66,67). It is very hard to estimate to what extent do they really do this.

3.4.2 Accountability & transparency

Many CSOs make information about their general and programmatic activities publicly available (57,30). By informing the public of the activities and achievements

of civil society, public awareness of significant social issues is being created. Informing the public is highly dependent on the interest of the mass media to co-operate with CSOs. CSOs are facing serious problems in this regard.²⁴

The most problematic indicator in the value dimension is that of financial transparency of civil society organisations (36,03).²⁵ Few organisations make their financial reports publicly available; the financial reports may be not available even to the members of the organisation. It is suspected from some sides that by having non-transparent financial reports, CSOs actually try to cover high wages and honorariums paid to staff. Public and political confidence is vital for sector development. This is likely to become a significant concern of CSOs in the future, as corruption within CSOs or self-interest regarding their internal management is also regarded as a sensitive issue (45,67). These problems used to generate severe conflicts and consequently instability in some organisations. Scandals in larger organisations is a part of development in the region (Kuti, 2001).

3.4.3 Internal Democracy

Previous research has shown that there is insufficient involvement of members in activities of CSOs and weak organisational structure and consequently a series of problems related to management and decision-making within CSOs exist (63,85). The role of boards and the participation of the members in the management of an organisation omit management were the most critical issues. Results from this survey do not identify the involvement of members and stakeholders in CSO activities as a problem (63,85). The internal democracy in these organisations seems to be of no big concern, as many CSOs use elections to select leaders (60,57).

The level of trust among CSO members in Croatia is, according to the World Value Survey, at a rather low level. Only 30% generally trust others, still this is a 7%-higher score than for non-CSO members indicating the positive role civil society can play in generating social trust. According to a respondent,

“Mutual links between CSOs and the public are insufficient and the so called ”civil society” in Croatia has no support in public, that is in ”society” in wider terms. The prerequisite for effective participation in civil society and creating of its system of values from the ”bottom” is a developed social and civil commitment, i.e. a civil society of responsible individuals. The Croatian society can hardly be considered as a responsible society, involving just a part of ”socially committed elite” (and those who make bad(?) copies) in creating of civil society values.”

3.5 Impact of Croatian Civil Society

There is always a problem in Croatia in explaining how CSOs benefit society and to whom they can contribute solutions for problems. A large part of general public sees members or activists in CSOs acting for their own benefits (Siegel and Yancey, 1992).

3.5.1 Public Policy Impact

In the following, we present findings on the perceived impact of civil society on the several stages of the public policy process, namely agenda-setting, policy-making, policy-implementation and policy-monitoring.

According to the survey, CSOs only partially succeed in representing their constituents' interests and putting these interests on the public policy agenda (45,39). Linked to this finding, representatives of civil society are rarely invited to participate in the generation and discussion of legislation (26,08). Legislation, vital to the interests of CSOs, is most often passed without their involvement (24,03). Civil society's participation in the generation and discussion of legislation is only recently being recognised as important by CSOs in Croatia. Generally, it can be said that CSOs have no impact on government's policy. According to a respondent,

“Government and the responsible ministries are rather shut off from civil society organisations willing to co-operate, particularly regarding the passing of vital laws and resolutions.”

Within the impact dimension the indicators measuring successful co-operation of CSOs with government in implementing policies is at the lowest level (22,28). Government people do not trust capacity of CSOs and they see them like artificial institutions (Kuti, 2001) There are only a few areas where the government is actively co-operating with CSOs, like: environment protection, social issues, gender issue, victims of the war. Current process of social policy decentralisation is caring out from above without consultation with local authorities or civil society representatives (Bežovan and Zrinščak, 2001).

CSOs are also not very successful in monitoring government commitments and policies (47,09). This area of activities requires a lot of additional effort and mutual understanding. People from the Government do not like any independent monitoring and they do have idea about importance of such CSOs' roles.

3.5.2 Service delivery

The respondents agree that CSOs are able to provide services in a manner that would not be possible for the state or for businesses (73,60). This is an encouraging point, requiring additional analysing, however, someone who is better informed can be suspicious about this score. Such development require trust created by social legitimacy grounded in cultural norms and tradition. CSOs are insufficiently critical and objective on capacity they have and achievements they made.

3.5.3 Public Image

CSOs have been presented in a rather unfavourable way by the mass media (49,42) and have also not attracted enough media attention (46,17) with respect to their contribution to society. These findings are related to a not very respectable public image of civil society organisations (51,89). According to a respondent: *“The only way for civil society organisations to get support and create more favourable public image is to achieve concrete results.”*

CSOs play only a modest role in resolving conflicts in Croatian society (38,87). This potential field of work for CSOs is not considered to lie within their area of competence, neither by the public nor by most of the organisations themselves.

3.5.4 Effectiveness

The vast majority of respondents believe that the goods and services produced by CSOs reflect the needs and priorities of their constituents and communities (59,71). CSOs are seen as succeeding in improving the lives of the people they are working with i.e. users of their services (71,06). They also are considered as successful in benefiting the public good (64,12). In contrast to the positive contribution in creating public good, they are less successful in mobilising the disadvantaged groups in society to take part in public life (44,42). Most of these groups have a passive position, being a scope of activities and interest of different organisations and initiatives. It means that most of CSOs take such groups as objects of their activities without efforts to mobilise them for public life.

According to a respondent:

“Growing democratisation of social and economic relations is inconceivable without development of civil society. The necessity to develop initiatives is in our country still not adopted as means of civil organisations’ operations, and the Government considers them accordingly as opposition or frequently as undesirable competition”.

A respondent with experience in international relations concludes that “... *no accession to Europe could be imagined without developed civil society.*”

On the side of impact, besides the problem of co-operation with other stakeholders, effectiveness of CSOs is key developmental issue.

3. Conclusion

This research provide us with the very useful facts and framework for analysis of civil society development in Croatia. It should be important to do it on the longer term base. Croatian civil society developmental issues are very similar to the other transitional countries.

This research has evidenced that the most critical area of civil society development in Croatia is related to the limited space it has to operate, as defined by the legislative, political and social-cultural framework. With legislation we do need to deal more with public policy issues trying to institutionalise a place for CSOs social capital building activities. Socio-cultural norms in fact currently inhibit civic engagement and active citizenship. This problem is very much related to the status of middle class people in Croatia. Frustrations with everyday life problems and decreasing living standard are not fertile soil for the flourishing of civil society.

The negative attitude of the government during 1990s, restrictive legislation, a lack of social responsibility on the part of the corporate sector and the absence of a culture of volunteering and public spiritedness are vital problems. Further step in civil society development are related to the real commitment of CSOs and how prepared and willing some of them are to take responsibility, with acceptable level of knowledge and skills, for some problems in society. New changes in the National grant program are targeted for sustainable development of the better developed organisations in hopes of encouraging and supporting such development. Without partnership with local authorities this concept will have limited achievements.

Regarding its impact, civil society organisations seems, at least in their own perceptions, to contribute significantly to solving specific social, economic and political problems and furthering the public good. However, influence on the public policy process is very limited. Openness of government and local authorities to CSOs on the whole is only on a declarative level. Mobilising of more respective human resource and prominent persons through a collaborative approach is one way that CSOs can have real influence in public policies and in mobilisation of the new resource for the sector.

The structure of civil society needs to be improved by stimulating the establishment of CSOs in rural areas and small towns. Funders should encourage larger organisations to develop their programs in the regions knowing the importance of CSOs' activities for mobilisation of resources on the local level. Development of CSOs in small communities could be a part of innovation in the National grant program.

The financial transparency and accountability of civil society organisations should contribute to enhancing their reputation and credibility. It can be helpful if funders dedicate more attention to this issue by requiring an evaluation plan as a part of the funding application process.

We would like to end with two opposing comments made by two survey respondents. A 25 years old male makes the following observation:

"The civil society in Croatia is still developing. However, recording a slight progress after the change of government, we should be optimistic with respect to further development of civil society in Croatia."

In order to continue the development, i.e. progress of civil society in Croatia a lot of work has to be done both by authorities and activists in civil society organisations as well as the public in the whole. This is the only way to enhance the development of civil society in Croatia, what should be the common concern."

A female respondent, 40 years old concludes:

"I think that people living in Croatia have little concern in creating and developing civil society and do not care about it. Having a 23% unemployment rate, the basic needs are to be met. Only people who have met their existential needs and the needs of their family, who have time and mood for it, can survive through engagement in development of civil associations. In the first place people are concerned for solving of economic issues. It seems that development of civil society in Croatia shall have to wait for better times."

A majority of the Croatian population considers that the Government is responsible for solving their own personal problems. They are without experience or a sense that individuals along with the people from their community can associate and mobilise some resources to help themselves. This research give us evidence to conclude that civil society development in Croatia, like in other transitional countries, is very much path dependent (Putnam, 1993). Beside that, it is clear that the number of citizens who, being members of CSOs, have gained such experience and feelings do not have continual problems in legitimating their initiatives and actions. They are the ones who are able to freely say that it is everyone's own obligation and responsibility to join in CSO endeavours for the public good. More and more citizens are taking it seriously. Because of that, we can say that Croatian CSOs are on the pathway to become a legitimate public actor even though certain important scores of diamond are low.

Acknowledgement:

This article is a part of CIVICUS research project “The CIVICUS Index on Civil Society”. The author would like to thank CIVICUS for their financial and technical assistance. The author is grateful for comments made on an earlier draft of this article by Siniša Zrinščak, University of Zagreb; Finn Heinrich, CIVICUS; Joanne Coury, State University of New York at Buffalo and Arthur Williamson, University of Ulster, Coleraine.

Appendix**Table 1: Sub-sectors in survey**

Subsector number	Sub-sectors	Quantity	Percent
1	Faith-based organisations	13	3,68
2	Trade unions	16	4,53
3	Grant-making foundations	11	3,12
4	Training & research	18	5,10
5	Environmental CSOs	22	6,23
6	Advocacy CSOs	19	5,38
7	Women's associations	13	3,68
8	Student and youth associations	20	5,67
9	Social service and health associations	38	10,76
10	Ethnic/traditional/ethno-cultural/indigenous CSOs	13	3,68
11	Culture & arts CSOs	15	4,25
12	Social and recreational CSOs & sport clubs	14	3,97
13	Professional and business organisations	18	5,10
14	Community-based and informal associations	22	6,23
15	Victims of war, war veterans, displaced persons	12	3,40
16	Other	1	0,28
17	Respondents from other stakeholders	78	22,10
	Total	353	100,00

Indicators

Structure	Diamond	Space	Diamond
Membership	51,14	polit pressure	50,32
Distribution	24,54	policy involvement	33,31
umbrella body 1	58,50	legislative access	29,73
umbrella body 2	42,61	state recognition	24,77
umbrella body 3	41,92	general state attitude	25,22
Alliances	52,79	social recognition	31,09
Links	44,14	public spiritedness	36,04
coop business	40,96	business recognition	17,81
internal cult diversity	55,69	business philanthropy	21,99
Pol part 1	50,15	regulation(rescaled)	73,08
Pol part 2	49,25	tax 1 (rescaled)	35,65
Pol part 3 (rescaled)	92,74	tax 2 (rescaled)	34,19
financial sustainability (rescaled)	42,77		
Public funding (rescaled)	76,85		
private funding (rescaled)	83,23		
foreign funding (rescaled)	74,62		
Co-operation (re-scaled)	47,85		
Membership (World Value Survey)	38,10	Legal Environment (USAID)	17,00
		Corruption Perception Index	37,00
		Civil Rights Index	50,00
		Press Freedom	37,00
Diamond score	53,77	Diamond score	34,64

Values	Diamond	Impact	Diamond
tolerance 1	62,83	policy agenda	45,39
tolerance 2	54,07	policy drafting	26,08
human rights 1	77,01	policy making	24,03
human rights 2	74,78	policy implementation	22,28
Cultural diversity 1	61,46	comparative advantage	73,60
Cultural diversity 2	54,76	policy monitoring	47,09
gender equity 1	67,39	media image	49,42
gender equity 2	66,67	media attention	46,17
sustainable development	63,76	public profile	51,89
Public accountability	57,30	conflict resolution	38,87
financial transparency	36,03	responsiveness	59,71
Internal democracy 1	63,85	mobilizing marginalized	44,42
Internal democracy 2	60,57	popular support	53,66
social conflict (rescaled)	86,62	service impact	71,06
corruption (rescaled)	45,67	public good	64,12
Trust (World Value Survey)	29,80	Impact (USAID)	44,00
Tolerance (World Value Survey)	68,00		
Diamond score	60,62	Diamond score	47,61

Notes

1. Croatia 4,5 million population, per capita GDP \$4,500. During the War 54% of territory has been affected by war operations. Croatia lost 13.583 people, 37.180 were wounded. The number of displaced persons and refugees was from 550.000 in 1991 to 386.264 in 1995. Official estimation of direct war damage is \$29,2 billions (Perković and Puljiz, 2001).
2. The most active organisations were: UNHCR, International Rescue Committee, Catholic Relief Service and several American organisations involved in USAID programs. Capacity of these organisations in the term of human resource, foreign and indigenous staff, used to be a critical point in programs performance.
3. Civil society is considered as opposition in other transitional countries (Jenkins, 1995; Osborne and Kaposvari, 1997).
4. Such attitudes are partially connected to the use of the term non-governmental organisation. The organisation in negative connotation to the Government of young nation is not acceptable to the ordinary citizen.
5. The request for review of constitutionality regarding parts of the provisions of the Law on Associations was submitted in 1999 by representatives of CSOs. Group of people involved in this initiative comes from University of Zagreb and their opinion has influence at a high level.
6. In 1993 the Croatian Parliament discussed tax benefits for public welfare donations. The then Minister of Finance refused the proposal considering it a form of money laundering, explaining that both tax collection and allocation of funds to those who need them is the role of the state. The Minister was reluctant to count on citizens' responsibility and confide in their civil engagement. After that the tax regulations were amended, allowing for non taxable donations to sport purposes (the suspected money laundering is likely to be justified here) and not, for instance, to humanitarian organisations.
7. Suspicious about the missions of foreign funders of civil society in the region was an issue and obstacle for effective co-operation. (Deakin, 2001; Deakin, 2002).
8. Very often, without arguments, the national TV was accusing organisations dealing with human rights issues for anti-governmental activities.
9. Such position of civil society has been documented in Poland (Regulska, 1999) and in other transitional countries (Kuti, 2001).
10. Four larger coalition groups of CSOs, more than 400 organisations, took a part in the campaign.
11. CERANEO- Centre for Development of Non-Profit Organisations, since 1995 to 2000 resource centre for Croatian CSOs, now think tank in a public policies issues.
12. In the mailed survey we sent 525 questionnaires.
13. The CIVICUS Diamond Tool and analytic framework was developed for CIVICUS by Helmut Anheier, Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics. For more information on the Diamond Tool, please see R. Holloway, (2001) Using the Civil Society Index: A Handbook for using the CIVICUS Index on Civil Society as a Self-Assessment Tool, CIVICUS, and Helmut K. Anheier, Civil Society: Measurement and Policy Dialogue, Earthscan, London, forthcoming.
14. List of indicators with scores are in the Appendix.
15. E. Kuti (2001) pointed it as a problem in other Eastern European countries.
16. Data available on the web site of the Ministry of Labour and Social Care, <http://www.mrss.hr>

17. Resource centres are in Split, Rijeka and Osijek. It was a program of American organisation Academy for Educational Development.
18. The scores of individual indicators are provided in brackets projected into a common metric-typically from 0 (most negative) to 100 (most positive). Thus, the higher the score, the better the situation of civil society with regards to the respective indicator. List of indicators is in Appendix.
19. There is a key role here for a university in providing courses and research opportunities. Different departments from universities should be important stakeholders for civil society development.
20. On that topic see Hungarian similar experience in Szeman and Harsanyi (2000).
21. More details are available on www.vlada.hr
22. This principle originated from social teaching by the Catholic Church with regards to public welfare in the industrializing Germany in the late 19th century. Its principles states that the smallest social unit capable of delivering the respective social service, should be in charge and thus places a premium of importance on civil society organizations at the local level.
23. At the end of 2002 CSOs have serious problems to get Bill on Consumer Protection and also Amendments on Law on Croatian RadioTV.
24. In early 2001 Vjesnik (daily newspaper) showed growing interest in systematic monitoring of civil society development.
25. Transparency of CSOs is lasting issues in other transitional countries (Regulska, 2001; Salamon, et. al., 1999; Siegel and Yancey, 1992)

Bibliography

- Anheier, H. K. *Civil Society: Measurement and Policy Dialogue*, Earthscan, London, forthcoming.
- Barić, S. (2000). *Pravni sustav suradnje neprofitnih organizacija s vladom i tijelima lokalne samouprave i uprave u Republici Hrvatskoj*, B.a.B.e., Zagreb.
- Bežovan, G. (1995). Croatia, The Profile of the Voluntary Sector in Eastern Central European Countries, *Družboslovne rasprave*, 11, 29-44.
- Bežovan, G. (1997). *Problemi i potrebe neprofitnih organizacija u Hrvatskoj*, CERANEO, Zagreb.
- Bežovan, G. (2002). Zaklade i dosezi njihova razvitka u Hrvatskoj, *Zbornik Pravnog fakulteta u Zagrebu*, 52, 619-649.
- Bežovan, G. (2002 a). Socijalna odgovornost gospodarstva i iskustva u Hrvatskoj, *Revija za socijologiju*, 33, 17-32.
- Bežovan, G., and Zrinščak, S. (2001). Mogućnosti decentralizacije u socijalnoj politici i nove uloge lokalnih vlasti, *Revija za socijalnu politiku*, 8, 239-258.
- Cohen, J. L., and Arato, A. (1992). *Civil Society and Political Theory*, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Coury, J. M., Despot- Lučanin, J., and Bežovan, G., (1998). A Real Alternative? How the Debate over Third Sector Development is Shaping Up in Croatia, ARNOVA Conference, Seattle.
- Deakin, N. (2001). *In Search of Civil Society*, Palgrave, New York.
- Deakin, N. (2002) Interview of Author with N. Deakin.
- Johnson, A. K., and Young, D. K. (1997). A Profile of the Non-Profit Sector in Romania, *Voluntas*, 8, 303-322.

- Holloway, R. (2001). *Using the Civil Society Index: A Handbook for using the CIVICUS Index on Civil Society as a Self-Assessment Tool*, CIVICUS, Washington DC.
- Jenkins, R. M. (1995). Politics and the Development of the Hungarian Non-Profit Sector, *Voluntas*, 6, 183-201.
- Kolarič, Z., Meglič-Črnjak, A. and Svetlik, I. (1995). Slovenia, The Profile of the Voluntary Sector in Eastern Central European Countries, *Družboslovne rasprave*, 11, 77-94.
- Kuti, E. (2001). Different Eastern European Countries at Different Crossroads. In H. K. Anheier, and J. Kendall (eds.), *Third sector Policy at the Crossroads: An International Nonprofit Analysis*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Lagerspetz, M., Rikmann, E., and Ruutsoo, R. (2002). The Structure and Resource of NGOs in Estonia, *Voluntas*, 13, 73-87.
- Laiferova, E., (1995). Slovakia, The Profile of the Voluntary Sector in Eastern Central European Countries, *Družboslovne rasprave*, 11, 65-76.
- Ledić, J., (1997). Croatia. In L. W. Poinier (ed.), *The New Civic Atlas- Profiles of Civil Society in 60 Countries*, CIVICUS, Washington DC.
- Ledić, J., and Mrnjauš K. (2000). "Gangs, Mafia and Groups of Renegades": (Mis)conceptions about Civil Society and Third Sector in Croatia, *ISTR 4th International Conference, Dublin*.
- Osborne, S. P., and Kaposvari, A. (1997). Towards a Civil Society? Exploring its Meaning in the Context of Post-Communist Hungary, *Journal of European Social Policy*, 7, 209-222.
- Pinter, F. (2001). The Role of Foundations in the Transformation Process in Central and Eastern Europe. In A. Schlüter, V. Then, and P. Walkenhorst (eds.), *Foundations in Europe: Society Management and Law*, Directory of Social Change, London.
- Putnam, R. D. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Tradition in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Perković, M., and Puljiz, V. (2001). Ratne stete, izdaci za branitelje, žrtve i stradalnike rata u Republici Hrvatskoj. *Revija za socijalnu politiku*, 8, 235-238.
- Potuček, M., (2000). The Uneasy Birth of Czech Civil Society, *Voluntas*, 11, 105-121.
- Regulska, J. (1999). Building Local Democracy: The Role of Western Assistance in Poland, *Voluntas*, 10, 39-57.
- Regulska, J. (2001). NGOs and their Vulnerabilities During the Time of Transition. In H. K. Anheier, and J. Kendall (eds.), *Third sector Policy at the Crossroads: An International Nonprofit Analysis*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Salamon, L. M., Anheier, H. K., List, R., Toepler, S., Sokolovski, S.W. and associates (1999). *Global Civil Society: Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
- Salamon, L. M., Anheier, H. (1998). Social Origins of Civil Society: Explaining the Nonprofit Sector Cross-Nationally, *Voluntas*, 9, 213-248.
- Shimkus, D., (1996). Development of the Non-governmental Sector in Croatia, *16th Organisational Development World Congress*, Cairo.
- Siegel, D., and Yancey, J. (1992). The Rebirth of Civil Society : The Development of the Non-profit Sector in East Central Europe and the Role of Western Assistance, *Rockefeller Brothers Fund, New York*.
- Stubbs, P. (1996). Nationalisms, Globalisation, and Civil Society in Croatia and Slovenia, *Research in Social Movements. Conflict and Change*, 19, 1-26.

- Stubbs, P. (2001). Politička ekonomija civilnog društva. In M. Meštrović (ed.), *Globalizacija i njene refleksije u Hrvatskoj*, Ekonomski institut, Zagreb.
- Szeman, Z., and Harsanyi, L., (2000). *Caught in the Net in Hungary and Eastern Europe: Partnership in Local Welfare Policy*, Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest.
- Office for Associations. (2000). *Program of Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Non-government, Non-for-Profit Sector in the Republic of Croatia*, Zagreb.
- World Bank. (2000). *Croatia. Economic Vulnerability and Welfare Study. (Draft)* Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Unit Europe and Central Asia Region. June.

Avtorjev naslov:

dr. Gojko Bežovan,
Faculty of Law , Department of Social Work
University of Zagreb
Nazorova 51, 10000 Zagreb, CROATIA
Phone 385 1 48 95 808, Fax 385 1 48 21 206
E-mail: ceraneo@zg.tel.hr

The author is also the President of Centre for
Development of Non-Profit Organisations- CERANEO.

Rokopis prejet januarja 2003.

*Članek je po mnenju uredništva uvrščen v kategorijo:
izvirni znanstveni članek (s kvalitativno/kvantitativno argumentacijo).*