

***Hungarian Minority Civil Society in Romania and Slovakia***

**- Research outline -**

*Introduction*

The Hungarian Minority Civil Society in Romania and Slovakia is my PhD thesis main topic. I would like to emphasise that hereafter I will present only the *research outline* of my thesis.

I would like to present you the aim of the research, a short overview of the bibliography, my hypothesis and their explanation, the theoretical concepts, the variables and the expected outcome of the research.

*1. The aim and outline of the research*

In Central and Eastern Europe, research focusing on civil society was flourishing in the 1990s. One shortage of these was that they entirely ignored to create an appropriate theoretical model of national minority institutions and civil minority societies. One attempt of my research is to compensate this shortage by creating a valid *theoretical model* which can be applied to each analyzed civil society.

The *aim* of my study is to analyse and compare civil society of Hungarian minorities in Romania and Slovakia. I do not inquire into civil society only as a concept but also how it has been organized, through its institutionalization. Thus I focus my research on nationwide Hungarian social organizations in Romania and Slovakia, moreover, what issues these organizations supported/have supported over the years, what political relations they have, and what kind of relations they have with the majority society, and majority civil society/organizations.

*2. Overview of the bibliography*

The term of civil sector has been previously defined as a separate category, having on its ground the free association of individuals rather than an accurate hierarchy within the institutions of legislation. For Hegel and Marx, civil sector as a term meant „society minus the state”, and by all means included everything that we would call “economy” today. In this respect the civil sector has been determined by the appearance of political economy, in which people are linked to one another like independent factors entities, rather than people who have to adapt into already existing social roles. Antonio Gramsci speaks in a more specific way about civil society, without taking into consideration the „society minus the state” term.

According to him, the civil sector is situated between economic structures and state legislation and restrictions.<sup>1</sup>

A normative definition of the term has come to the front at the time of important social, political and economic changes. The term of *civil society* gathered all the expectations and struggles that were expressed towards a future goal, a desirable social structure.

In 1990 Timothy Garton Ash used a rather complex approach to describe the triumphant civil society: “a) the existence of associations, institutions that do not depend on the state; b) tolerance of the citizens, their reluctance towards violent means; c) being earnest about the responsibilities of a citizen. We cannot speak about a well-functioning civil sector unless the former requirements are all accomplished.”<sup>2</sup>

Civil society represents a part of the society or a part of culture that does not include institutions led by the government. For Marx and Hegel civil society represented the part of society in which materialism and self-interest played a dominant role. Adam Smith also believed that an enlightened and successfully accomplished self-interest would conduce and promote social welfare. Thinkers like Locke who elaborated early political theories, used the term to describe the whole civilised society. In Anglo-Saxon philosophy Locke speaks about the „civil government”<sup>3</sup> as one being relatively independent from the state, a sort of “state-free”, yet legitimate administration. For Hegel civil society was an “arena” in which determined individuals can start developing their free will and their personal autonomy. According to Hegel “civil society is a differential that comes between family and state, even though its appearance is the result of the development of the state. Each differential is based on the state that has to exist as a separate entity in order to contribute to the existence of the former. On the other hand the appearance of civil societies belongs to the modern world, and this privilege may achieve all the definitions of the term. (...) In a civil society everyone is bound to aim at oneself, and all the rest is nothing for him.”<sup>4</sup>

Some authors claim that we cannot speak about a minority civil society founded exclusively upon ethnic grounds, more adequately we should speak about a chain of institutions run by the minority, however, that is not equal with a minority civil society.

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<sup>1</sup> Antonio Gramsci: *A gyakorlat filozófiája*. (The philosophy of practice), Kriterion, Bukarest (Bucharest), 1974.

<sup>2</sup> See Béla Révész: A „civil kurázsi” intézményesülése. (*The institutionalization of civil organisations*) In: *Ön-Kor-Kép*. 1996/12. From: [http://www.net.hu/onkorkep/6\\_12/13.html](http://www.net.hu/onkorkep/6_12/13.html)

<sup>3</sup> John Locke: *Második értekezés a polgári kormányzatról*. (*Second Treaty of Civil Government*). Polis.Kolozsvár.1999.

<sup>4</sup> G.W.F. Hegel: *A jogfilozófia alapvonalai vagy a természetjog és államtudomány vázlata. Részletek. 182 §. In: Az egyetemes politikai gondolkodás története. (A History of Political Thought: From Antiquity to the Present)* Manuscript, ELTE-ÁJK, Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó.Budapest.1993. 310.

Regarding the bibliography that is preoccupied with the respective topic, a model of minority institutions lacks from it, therefore I shall make an attempt to develop an appropriate model.

Essential research questions have been the following: what role do civil organizations hold in a respective Hungarian minority community? What extent have civil organizations institutionalised to in the region? What infrastructure do they possess? What issues have they supported since their foundation? What sort of political relations have they developed? What is their relationship with the majority society and with majority civil organizations? What kind of funds can they reach on a local, regional, national, international, European level?

### *3. Hypotheses*

H<sub>1</sub>: All civil organizations (NGOs) of Hungarian minorities in the respective regions strengthen national and cultural identities, helping to preserve and successfully maintain these.

Explanation of the hypothesis: In Romania and Slovakia there are civil organizations that do their activity in the interest of the Hungarian community, their leaders are Hungarian and language of all their activities is Hungarian. As a bottom line, these organizations can be regarded as NGOs of the Hungarian minority.

H<sub>2</sub>: Although their starting point from 1989 is significantly different, Hungarian civil organizations of the two regions are relatively similar from the perspective of their institutionalization and their infrastructure.

Explanation of the hypothesis: Before 1989 in Slovakia there was the CSEMADOK (*Czechoslovak Hungarian Workers' Cultural Association*), which had local organizations at several Slovakian towns and villages and it is essential to note that generally these had their own properties. On the other hand, in Romania it was not allowed to manage any civil organizations, mainly without state control. Thus, around the 1989 landmark, in Romania there were no properties, no real estates, and no infrastructure that belonged to civil organizations (except for the KISZ - *The Hungarian Young Communist League* – properties). By contrast, in Slovakia the entire Hungarian civil society was based upon the already existing properties of the CSEMADOK. Several civil organizations were functioning/have functioned in these buildings, they are officially registered at these locations, and they share the infrastructure of the CSEMADOK.

In Romania after 1989 each and every civil organization had to overcome serious difficulties regarding their headquarters, they had to solve these problems for themselves, develop their own infrastructure, so we might say that concerning institutionalization, these

organization were in a drawback compared to organizations from Slovakia. Nevertheless, even if their starting point was relatively different, I would say that at the moment concerning institutionalization, civil organizations of the two regions are quite similar.

H<sub>3</sub>: Organizations performing their activities in different regions have supported cases which directly affected either them or Hungarian residents of the area.

Explanation of the hypothesis: In Romania and Slovakia target groups of Hungarian NGOs are local Hungarian people, whom they try to provide with interest representation within the community and with different (cultural, educational, social) services.

I intend to use press analysis to inquire into all these cases they have supported between 1990 and 2008, both in Romania and Slovakia. One of my questions is whether articles published in national daily newspapers or regional papers do present opinions, point of views civil organizations have expressed regarding all these different matters (through views expressed within press releases or comments towards law proposals).

H<sub>4</sub>: Regarding political relations of these organizations, I would assume that organizations in Romania are much more embedded in politics than the ones in Slovakia, which by contrast, have preserved their independence from politics.

Explanation of the hypothesis: At the beginning of 1990s, among Hungarian politicians in Romania it became customary to establish one or more civil organisations of their own. Due to this practice it proves to be difficult even nowadays to distinguish Hungarian political intellectuals from leaders of these organizations as we often have to face overlaps between these people. According to my hypothesis, this is not characteristic for the Slovakian region.

H<sub>5</sub>: Access to different financial resources depends rather on organizations than on a respective country.

Explanation of the hypothesis: As a matter of fact, organization leaders, organizational culture and human resources of an organization determine what sort of funds the organization applies for. Applying for a particular tender does not depend on whether the organization is registered in Romania or in Slovakia.

At the moment, regarding local and national tendering opportunities I am familiar only with the Romanian situation and one of my future tasks is to inquire into the Slovakian possibilities.

In the studied period, even if Slovakia was already an EU member and Romania was not, theoretically there has been only a slight difference between the two countries regarding their access to different international and European tenders.

#### 4. Reference of theoretical terms and concepts

Civil society is a complex “compressing” phenomenon; it includes many different issues and systematizes them, practically functions only as a system. It includes *events and incidents* which have civil features, *people* who organise these events, who make them happen, *institutions* where people achieve their targets, do their activities, and furthermore it includes those *ethical norms and values* that represent the grounds of civil society, the grounds of its functioning.

To say that civil societies are “system-like”, function only as networks, may not be the right term. Nevertheless I have chosen to use it because civil society has a specific system which to a certain extent differentiates it from the entire society.<sup>5</sup>

Charles Taylor gives the next definition of the civil society: „a web of autonomous definitions, independent of the state, which bound citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their mere existence or action, could have an effect on public policy”<sup>6</sup>

As Máté Szabó states it, social movements are “collective actions which have not fully institutionalised and are not organised in a bureaucratic way. Regarding the role of social movements in the political process, we can say that they have to pass interests that are not organised to decision-making centres in a direct and spontaneous way.

Along their institutionalisation process social movements can establish several different kinds of institutions (associations, political parties, public interest organizations) that are either attached to the movement (*social movement organization*), or alienate from it and become bureaucratic organisations.

Structural frames of political actions of a political system (*political opportunity structure*) determine to what extent and how institutionalisation of social movements takes place. The terms and accordingly strategies of social movements are constantly changing. Generally speaking we can point out that social-political crises are favourable for political activities of social movements, while in a “normal” political period, political opportunities of these organizations decrease as opposed to the rational, standardized and efficiency-driven functioning of bureaucratic organisations.

Processes of the Eastern-European change of regime quickly and dramatically altered political terms and conditions for social movements. The alternatives how social movements get involved in politics can be categorised into three periods: a) crisis, b) transition, and c)

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<sup>5</sup> Tünde Székely: *A civil társadalom és értékei egy demokratikus politikai rendszerben (Civil society and its values in a democratic political system)*, p. 6-7, 2004. Manuscript.

<sup>6</sup> Taylor, Charles: *Invoking Civil Society*, In: Robert E. Goddin - Philip Pettit: *Contemporary Political Philosophy*. Australian National University, Canberra, 1998, p. 68.

institutionalization, which is practically a quite theoretical distinction, in reality these periods are linked to one another and are transitional.”<sup>7</sup>

Civil society as such is quite difficult to analyse. Because of this, I have decided to focus only on civil organisations. Even if there is a direct relationship between civil society and civil organisations, only the latter can be measured and analysed. In the course of my research I studied civil organisations mainly through their institutionalisation.

Variables:

- *H1: Independent variable* is the political, legal and administrative context of the two countries, the environment which either grants authorization for the existence of these civil organizations that function on ethnic grounds or by contrast, denies it. *Dependent variable* is the number of minority NGOs. *Mediator variable* is citizens’ attitude towards voluntarism as a value.
- *H2: Independent variable* is the political, legal, administrative environment of these countries, which regulates the formation of civil organisations. *Dependent variables* are the quality and quantity of the infrastructure belonging to these organisations. *Mediator variables* are those sponsors who offer opportunities, who are calling for tenders to offer financial resources for infrastructural developments.
- *H3: Independent variables* are questions affecting national minorities and discussed by the political environment of the two countries. *Dependent variable* is the reaction of Hungarian civil organisations to the above mentioned questions. *Mediator variable* is the attitude of the majority and minority press towards these questions.
- *H4: Independent variables* are social and political traditions regarding relationship between politics and civil organisations in Slovakia and Transylvania. *Dependent variable* is the relation of Hungarian ethnic parties with civil organisations. *Mediator variable*: whether an ethnic party belongs to the Parliament, and whether it is member of the current government or it belongs to the opposition.
- *H5: Independent variables* are all the international/European/national tenders inviting civil organisations. *Dependent variable*: the proportion of applications handed in by Hungarian organisations as opposed to applications of civil organisations representing the majority. *Mediator variable*: access and availability of Hungarian civil organisations to these funds, possible future grants (this may depend on: type of activities, foreign language knowledge, qualified human resources).

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<sup>7</sup> Máté Szabó: A civil társadalom az állam ellen? (*Civil society against state?*), In: *REGIO*, 1998/3.

- Along these studied hypotheses we have the possibility to inquire into different civil organisations through quite various perspectives. Verifying these hypotheses may help us in our attempt to elaborate a theoretical model of minority civil society.

My hypotheses are based on a deductive approach, a deductive way of thinking.

I would like to interview leaders of Hungarian NGOs, prevailing and functioning in Romania and Slovakia. The population of the research includes all the existing nationwide Hungarian civil societies in these two countries. According to my preliminary estimation there are approximately 30-40 organisations in Romania and 10-15 in Slovakia.

The research is a comparative study based qualitative methods. Moreover, the analysis is descriptive and explanatory. Nationwide Hungarian organisations from Slovakia and Romania represent the centre of my study. I have a quite different position in the research regarding two countries. While in Romania I am a full participant of Hungarian civil society, in Slovakia I carry out my research as an observant.

In the course of the research I intend to make an interview with the leaders of all these organisations in Romania and Slovakia, so my data base will include all regions from both countries.

Inquiring into all the registered Hungarian civil organisations in Slovakia and Romania, I focus on all their activities, their organisation history between 1990 and 2008, moreover I analyse processes of this period. The time-frame of the research is cross-sectional.

During the research there will be primary data collection as I am going to carry out interviews with organisation leaders. The interviewing guide can be found in what follows.

Besides these, I will deal with written and electronic Hungarian press analysis (written between 1990 and 2008) both in Romania and Slovakia.

*My aim* is to create the model of a minority institution-system.

*As an outcome of my research* I plan to achieve a comparative analysis that enables to elaborate a valid model and further apply it.