

The Civil Society–State Relationship in Contemporary Discourse: A Complementary Account from Giddens' Perspective¹

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The article attempts to offer a framework for understanding the interdependence between modern civil society and the democratic state in its complexity. The author seeks inspiration mainly from two very significant sources—in Toqueville's social theory and in Giddens' theory of reflexive modernity. In the first stage the author summarises basic arguments in empirical discussions on the civil society concept. In the second stage he offers the overview of a robust normative perspective of the concept and, in the third stage, he tries to outline the complex interpretative framework for an empirical analysis of state–civil society relations. The author follows the ambition of overcoming to a certain extent the crucial sociological paradox between the macro- and micro-sociological approaches and considering both the functional-structural perspective and the empirical point of view of the civil society concept.

When attempting to provide a summary of how research on the issue of civil society has evolved, several difficulties immediately come to light. The first is the fact that a mere list of relevant literature on the subject would easily exceed the scope of any particular study. The second is that it is a subject that is considerably interdisciplinary in character, and because different disciplines have different approaches and perspectives, we are confronted with a maze of more or less interconnected arguments and discourses.² Civil society as a concept has increased in prominence, not only in the academic sphere, but also in the political and public spheres. It is not surprising that the complexity of the issue, and its overuse, have led to the concept's devaluation. The third and certainly by no means least of the difficulties is the extent to which any such discussion must be culturally and linguistically conditioned. Thus, there will be no avoiding a certain amount of reductionism in the ensuing analysis.³

The concept of civil society has both empirical and normative aspects (Alexander 1998; Barber 1999; Fullinwider 1999). It is a concept used to refer to those social and institutional structures that enable us, however imperfectly, to fulfil and meet particular expectations and values. Some claim (Tester 1992, 9), in my view correctly, that the concept of a modern civil society has, since its Enlightenment beginnings, been characterised by a predominantly normative bent. In order to simplify the structure of this article I adhere to this normative–empirical distinction. Moreover, however artificial this differentiation may be in practice, it is a tangibly present part of any contemporary discussion of the subject. In this analysis, however, both perspectives pervade to some degree.



In the first part of this study I attempt to summarise the current discussion of civil society from an empirical perspective. In the second part, I proceed to address the issue from a normative perspective. The third part is an attempt at discovering a complementary approach to the concept of civil society and overcoming the dichotomy between the empirical micro-sociological approach and the normative macro-sociological view of the subject. This is an attempt to formulate a theory capable of grasping the issue in all its complexity and explaining certain structural aspects, while also taking into account the behaviour of specific social actors in this broader contextual framework. Here I draw on Anthony Giddens' (1990) approach to the theory of reflexive modernity.

1. The Empirical Account

Charles Taylor (1995, 207) summarises the broad range of possible definitions of civil society in a manner that takes in both the prescriptive and descriptive dimensions. His description may be a useful starting point for encompassing both the normative and empirical perspectives.

In a minimal sense, civil society exists where there are free associations, not under tutelage of state power. In a stronger sense, civil society only exists where society as a whole can structure itself and co-ordinate its action through such associations which are free of state tutelage. As an alternative or supplement to the second sense, we can speak about civil society wherever the ensemble of associations can significantly determine or inflect the course of state policy.

At the most general level, the concept of civil society may be interpreted as an issue of the relationship between the public and the private spheres (Cohen 1999, 66; Calhoun 1999; Janoski 1998, 16; Habermas 1989 [1962]; Seligman 2000, 13), referring especially to the nature of the relationships between the sphere of political decision-making (state or government), the market and the non-governmental public sphere. From an empirical perspective it is possible to distinguish two basic approaches to the concept of civil society: socio-cultural and reductionist (economic). The group of socio-cultural approaches may be further sub-divided into three predominant conceptions of the issue: generalist, maximalist and minimalist. The reductionist approach may also be further differentiated into the left-wing and the right-wing interpretations. These individual perspectives will be dealt with below.⁴

For generalists who identify most with the way of thinking of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, among the basic characteristics of a civil society is the existence of a restricted and responsible public authority. The representatives of this interpretation include, among others, Ernest Gellner and Victor Pérez-Díaz. They, moreover, consider civil society as a concept competing with democracy, adding that it encompasses better and more realistically the conditions of its own existence.

Others, who conceive of civil society broadly similarly, but see it more as a non-governmental sphere, may be called the maximalists. Representatives of this view

include John Keane, William Sullivan, Edward Shils and Charles Taylor. Among the main forms of civil society they rank the political public and also the market. They are the proponents of what Jeffrey Alexander (1998, 3) refers to as the ‘umbrella-like’ concept. This refers to a platform of institutions outside the state sphere, encompassing the market economy and its institutions, public opinion, political parties, public and private associations and the wide variety of forms of social co-operation that establish ties of commitment and relationships of trust.

Finally, a third group of socio-culturalists can be referred to as the minimalists. Among the main contemporary advocates of this view are Jeffrey Alexander, Andrew Arato, Jean Cohen and Jürgen Habermas. In this minimalist interpretation, civil society is defined as a sphere, or sub-system, of society that is analytically—and to some degree also empirically—separate from the spheres of politics and the economy but also from other social spheres perceived as not engaged in supporting the solidarity of individual members. Even though civil society is itself dependent on the resources and results of activity in the sphere of political life, economic institutions and the broader cultural context, it represents an independent sphere of social solidarity that transcends particular ties and interests and facilitates the discovery of a collective identity among otherwise separate and detached individuals. It is a sphere of solidarity within which a kind of universalising society is gradually being defined. Civil society in this perspective can be viewed as a synonym for impartiality, the bearer of universal and transcendent values, above and outside critical disputes between different interest groups. This kind of civil society can never exist as such, but rather can only exist ‘to some degree’ (Alexander 1998, 97). The minimalists more or less call civil society that which the maximalists interpret as the public sphere (Pérez-Díaz 1998, 213).

*Civil Society: Contested Structural Arguments*⁵

The fundamental dispute is essentially between generalists and maximalists on the one hand and minimalists on the other. Most minimalists refuse to acknowledge the existence of systematic links between varied components of what maximalists call civil society. The market, like the state, provides, in their view, only scant support for social solidarity, and it does not contribute to establishing conditions for fostering a civic ethos. Minimalists are inclined to perceive fundamental conflicts between the market economy, the state and the public sphere (or what they call civil society). According to them, civil society is not just separate from the state and the market, it is the mirror opposite of the state and the market. The relative asymmetry of resources that is characteristic of the economy, the sphere of material and individual interests, tends also to have a negative effect on the civic (public) sphere. It is often difficult for citizens who are not economically successful or wealthy to communicate effectively in the civic sphere and to gain the respect of their institutions and of other citizens (Alexander 1998, 9).

According to Pérez-Díaz (1998, 213), minimalists, on the one hand, exaggerate the repressive nature of the market economy and the bureaucratic state and, on the other, equally overestimate the ‘liberating potential’ of the public sphere. Civil society is thus conceived of as a defensive bulwark against the combined oppres-

sion of the state, the market and other social spheres. In other words, the public sphere (civil society) should in their view provide the foundations for a transformation of the state and the economy.

This argumentation conceals the assumption that the quality of civil society cannot exceed the quality of its organised forms. Minimalists therefore focus mainly on analysing these forms. Consequently, some minimalists do not count churches as forms of civil society as, in character, they belong to the area of sacred activity and do not contribute much to the formation of a civic ethos in the profane sphere (Alexander 1998, 97). Among the most important forms of civil society minimalists primarily rank voluntary associations and social movements, which are the forms that most exhibit non-market oriented behaviour and the least degree of hierarchy. Voluntarism here is manifested as the basic precondition for conducting open dialogue. When a person is somewhere voluntarily, the space for coercion seems to be minimised. New social movements, in particular, are characterised by greater spontaneity, openness and flexibility. Their activities can often be described as symbolic appeals against existing power structures and established cultural patterns; they are not political in the traditional sense of the word. Their arena is the public space independent of government institutions, the party system or the state structure. The forms of their activities and the space in which they engage make them non-hierarchical and prevent them from establishing strong institutionalised structures (Ahrne 1998, 91).

To what degree are these expectations justified? As Goran Ahrne has pointed out (1998, 90), like other associations, voluntary ones in accordance with Michels' famous 'law' may also have a strong tendency towards oligarchisation. Moreover, their voluntary nature may at times be specific, in that matters of compliance and subordination also play an important role here. All volunteer associations are exclusive clubs, membership of which is granted on the condition of acceptance of certain values and ideas. Volunteer associations can often in this regard be very intolerant and members who do not have the 'right' opinions can be expelled by others. In addition, the particular nature of the new social movements is limited in both space and time. Research on the new social movements has shown that after any longer-term existence each social movement is eventually confronted with an insoluble dilemma. As soon as a movement is faced with the strategic need to decide on the use of collective resources, it has to renounce its openness and establish criteria for admitting members. In a long-term perspective social movements in no way differ from volunteer associations. The fact that a social movement, after a time, either dissolves or is transformed and institutionalised in no way decreases its significance. But, the question remains as to what extent it is possible to regard them, given their limited longevity, as a key manifestation and guarantee of the existence of civil society (Ahrne 1998, 91).

Conversely, with regard to the market, generalists and maximalists believe that a market economy founded on private property and a public sphere characterised by voluntary activity are theoretically complementary and have a pragmatic affinity, and they point to the many connective links between the market and the public sphere, which they consider as two key components in their understanding of civil society (Pérez-Díaz 1998, 215; Taylor 1990, 19). This dispute is not just a termi-

nological one, but rather also a material one, referring to the issue of how much and if at all the market economy contributes to strengthening the civic ethos. Opponents of minimalism cite firstly the fact that the very advancement of the public sphere has been fundamentally linked to the discussion of economic issues and the question of the role of public authority. Pérez-Díaz (1998, 215) points out that the origin of civil society is historically connected with the initiation of the debate on tax policy and the limits and conditions of the exercise of power while, as Habermas demonstrates (1989 [1962]), economic issues and questions about the rules of contact in the sphere of the exchange of goods and labour all preceded political issues. In short, maximalists and generalists argue that in the European historical tradition the market is an inherent component of civil society, just as civil society is inconceivable without the market. The market is its inseparable, civilising medium, and amid the current efforts to conceptualise civil society this cannot be overlooked (Calhoun 1993, 392).

The development of the public sphere is dependent on the cultivation of certain preconditions and customs that can also be reinforced by active participation in the market. Trade and exchange, which are based on certain value assumptions, when they are possible, provide those participating in these activities with positive experience and become a kind of civic training, which leads to the reinforcement of the participants' self-confidence and responsibility. A precondition, but also a confirmed starting point, is the recognition of the interests of the other actors in the exchange as justified. Exchange not only teaches participants tolerance but also leads them to strengthen their attachment to a plurality of interests and opinions and their capacity for (voluntary) self-restraint.

In the view of Pérez-Díaz (1998, 216) the majority of minimalists tend to overestimate the rationalising character of the public sphere as a space in which rational argument takes place in accordance with certain defined and moral rules of communication games. He adds that tolerance towards others, balanced by a readiness to confront individual violence and a determination to limit public authority, are customs and assumptions that cannot be the result of communication experience alone or stem from rational convictions; instead they are derived from practical experience based on repeated participation in the market and in liberal politics.

Furthermore, the relationship between civil society generally and the market economy, as one of the irreplaceable components of civil society, is, as Gellner indicates (1994, 203), even closer than it may first appear. 'Civil societies' are societies dedicated to basic egalitarianism, and thus to impermanence and changeability, which prevent the establishment of inert hierarchy. They are therefore also dependent on economic growth. It is only with the aid of technological innovation and economic gains that they are able to approach such a state and keep it within reach. These societies require not only social and political pluralism, which is able to counterbalance any strong tendencies towards centralism and authoritarianism, but also economic pluralism for reasons of production efficiency. Civil societies are, from the perspective of their legitimacy, dependent on economic growth, without which changeability becomes a risky zero-sum game, in which one person's gain is someone else's loss. In this light the economy appears as one of the irreplaceable

institutions able to check the power of the state and ideological monopolies. Reliance on economic growth requires cognitive growth, which makes the existence of any kind of ideological monopoly impossible.

According to Pérez-Díaz (1998, 218) one serious danger lies in the fact that the minimalist concept of civil society leads paradoxically to the formation of a society of irresponsible citizens. If we limit human expectations and aspirations with a view to the rules that restrict the market economy and the state in the civic interest, we risk becoming advocates of a new version of Epicurean morality. If cultivating the garden is all that is set aside for the fulfilment of civic aspirations, combined with a rejection of responsibility for the economic and the political system, this allows and reinforces both a low level of rational discourse in the political sphere and the loss of practical morality in the sphere of the economy.⁶

This is not to say that maximalists and generalists hold the market as the most important, perhaps even the only, guarantee of the existence of civil society. They simply point out that to view the state and the economy as the only spheres that have a tendency to fuse together and a tendency to manipulate the public to become uncritical and submissive is a dangerously simplified way of looking at things. It is necessary to assess all large organisations with a critical eye, not just the state, political parties and economic entities, but also unions, the media, the church and cultural, consumer, environmental, feminist and other associations of any sort. None should be perceived without criticism, as all such associations are striving for power and influence. To place some of them *a priori* beyond criticism solely on the basis of their motives would be wrong (Pérez-Díaz 1998, 218). Equally, according to this view, it would be wrong to disadvantage and rule out certain organisations in advance with regard to how much liberating and participative potential in the public sphere they have to offer.

The degree to which mentioned expectations are warranted in the age of a globalising economy is of course a question. We often hear the objection that global markets and corporations threaten local civil society. From the minimalist viewpoint there is of course a justifiable fear that the institutions of local civil societies (public spheres) are incapable of forming a protective bulwark against the threats and injustices of a globalising economy. Therefore, it is necessary to globalise also the public (civic) sphere, and there are visible signs that just such a process is already at work. Organisations such as, for example, Greenpeace, Global Watch and Transparency International genuinely appear to represent a globalising civil society (Salamon et al. 1999; Keane 2003).

From the maximalist perspective the globalisation of the network of civil societies (public spheres) also appears to be a necessity. The global market can be part of civil society as long as the latter is also global in other respects. In other words, only a global public sphere can ensure that the global economy becomes part of global civil society. Yet, the possibility of being able to escape the consequences of one's actions is, according to Zygmunt Bauman (1998), one of the most valued privileges of the mobile global elites. Freedom from responsibility and exemption from the obligation to contribute to the development of local communities is typical for today's global capital. A new asymmetry appears between the extra-territorial nature of economic power and the continuing territoriality of common human

experiences. Local economic elites are on the retreat and the global ones are never where they are needed (Putnam 2000, 282).

Insofar as the dispute between the generalists and the maximalists is concerned, the generalists interpret the concept of civil society as also encompassing the existence of limited, accountable and transparent government. Their arguments are similar to those used in the case of the market, and they cite the historical, theoretical and pragmatic connection between the development of civil society and of this kind of public authority. As stated above, in reality they consider the concept of civil society as one that rivals democracy (Gellner 1994, 187–189).

2. The Normative Account

There is more agreement among social scientists with regard to the normative account. Generally the majority of social scientists today do not regard civil society as some sort of cure-all, but instead view it as something that is simply a necessity and without which democracy has difficulty functioning. It is clear that within civil society from time to time serious and irreconcilable conflicts emerge that require the intervention of the state. Although the emphasis on the concept of civil society tends at times to be linked to a weakening of the principles of representative democracy, there is no question that the relationship between civil society and the democratic state is one of mutual dependence. Although from a certain perspective the relationship can be characterised as being indirectly proportional (the more civil society there is the smaller the scope of the state, and vice versa), there is no justification for deeming it a relationship of mutual rivalry or competitiveness (Dahrendorf 1990, 96; Hall 1995, 16; Shils 1991, 9; Neocleous 1996, VIII). While it may be that the greater the trust civil society is able to develop in its own abilities, the less the need for intervention from state institutions, we still need the democratic state for the protection it provides against abuses of freedom, and we also need an autonomous and open civil society, at the very least for the protection it offers against abuses of state power.

To understand the normative account it will be useful to recall the context and causes that lie behind the current revival of interest in civil society. There are four such causes, which actually form a series of interconnected phenomena. The first cause was the battle against the communist totalitarian regime in the CEE countries. Civil society was viewed by Central European dissidents like V. Havel (1985), A. Michnik (1987) and G. Konrád (1984) primarily as the defence of human and civic rights and as a platform for the struggle against the abuse of state power.

The second cause was the ensuing collapse of these regimes. The discussion was no longer motivated by a fear of the expansiveness of totalitarian power but centred, instead, on reflections about the shortcomings of post-communist societies in their efforts to build, in a short period of time, democracies comparable to those already in place in the West (Dahrendorf 1990; Sztompka 1998). The concept of civil society began to be understood as an attempt at the most complex reflection of the cultural, social and economic requirements of a functional democracy and as a condition of the survival and development of democracy, even in reference to the west (Keane 1998).

The third cause is the crisis of the welfare state, which had been cited as a factor by many even in the 1980s (Offe 1984; Keane 1988b), but after the fall of the communist regimes the crisis became even more acute (Cohen 1999; Offe 1996; Powell 2000; Putnam 2000). Any increase in the powers of the state occurs to the detriment of civil society's ability to look after various matters and solve numerous conflicts and problems and, as many have noted, with the increase in power of the welfare state that occurred after the Second World War the sphere of civil society came to be colonised. The current crisis of the national welfare state, which in the age of globalisation is incapable of solving serious economic and other problems, is now manifested in the decline in the legitimacy of political institutions, including political parties (Pérez-Díaz 1998, 235).

The final and fourth cause is a reaction to new forms of social mobility and diversity and to the speed and scope of technological, economic and cultural changes that globalisation has ushered in (Cohen 1999, 55). Social and political integration and participation that, up to this point, had been regarded as something natural and to be taken for granted, are now becoming a central subject of interest among social scientists. Not only is it becoming increasingly difficult to address serious social problems through effective collective action, but in the conditions of radicalised modernity, where the physical density of the human population significantly exceeds its moral density and is beginning to overwhelm the capacity of human intimacy to absorb others (Bauman 1998), it is no longer possible to take the existence of society for granted (Tester 1992).

On the basis of the preceding arguments, and with reference to Taylor's previously mentioned definition of civil society, it is possible to formulate four basic functional dimensions (values) that are present in the relationship between civil society and the democratic state. These four functional dimensions are cited with varying degrees of emphasis by all authors dealing with the issue of civil society. These are the defensive, legitimising, participative and integrative dimensions. Below we will look at these individual dimensions in greater detail.

The main value of civil society lies in its extra-political nature and its independence from state power, and in its ability to maintain this independence. Civil society should above all be capable of acting as a defence against the potential expansionism of state power (Cohen 1999, 63; Hall 1995, 15; Janoski 1998, 16; Shils 1991, 10). It is a part of the European historical experience that every power, often in the name of efficiency and the ability to mobilise itself, has a tendency to gravitate towards centralisation; this increases the risk of the abuse of power. This is where the defensive function of civil society comes into play.

The legitimising function of civil society is based on the fact that it is civil society that, through its independence and autonomy, creates the social resources of political power and gives the state and its government legitimacy (Dahrendorf 1990; Taylor 1995, 207; Tester 1992, 5). The power of the state or of the government is only legitimate when it is able to enjoy the trust of its citizens. The extra-political status of civil society guarantees, among other things, that political power is executed 'rationally', as civil society establishes public opinion independently of political power. Nonetheless, for the political power this public opinion has a binding and normative character. It is not possible in any democracy to rule for any real

period of time if the government is in conflict with public opinion. But, in order for it to be possible to form public opinion, civil society must constitute a relatively large structure within which social interests and priorities that condition and substantiate the democratic state and the policy of the government are consistently articulate, agreed upon and verified.

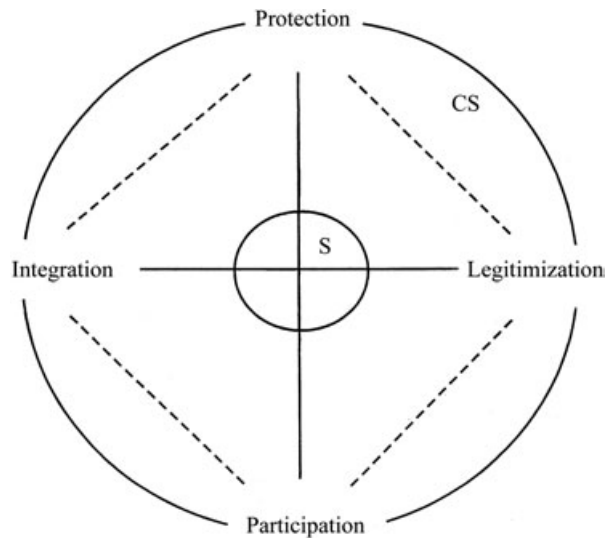
A third dimension is the participative function (Cohen 1999, 55; Fullinwider 1999, 2; Shils 1991, 13; Taylor 1995, 207). Civil society ought to facilitate the more effective involvement of citizens in the public sphere than established political parties. If someone wants to block the construction of a gas station or promote the construction of a children's playground, it is not necessary that they enter into politics to do so—say, at the communal level, attending party meetings and paying membership fees—nor is it necessary, at the opposite extreme, that they wait for the next elections. Broadly based civic participation may consist of the massive mobilisation of resources that is facilitated by the widespread dissemination of information and knowledge, which helps ensure that the process of democratic political decision-making is of higher quality. Instead of political centralisation, civil participation involves multi-levelled decentralisation, which provides citizens with an unobstructed link to public administration and, potentially, access to the process of political decision-making. It leads to the more economical and more effective use of material resources. The nature of interest groups, and specifically their focus on a particular problem or issue, means that they are generally able to recognise or identify serious risks or dangers much sooner than political parties can, and they are also able to propose useful solutions. It is then up to the public and the politicians to assess this group action and how they react to it.

The last, but by no means the least important, expectation associated with civil society is the fact that within it relationships of affinity and loyalty are formed, and this is civil society's integrative function (Cohen 1999, 55; Dahrendorf 1997, 58; Shils 1991, 10; Sullivan 1999, 37). From our repeated involvement in the goings on of civil society we eventually come to realise that in order for our voice to be heard and our interests to be taken into account we need to join forces with someone else. In an egalitarian and democratic society, if we want to be of influence and effect change we must work together with others. This in turn engenders a sense of belonging to or affinity with an interest group. More broadly there then emerges a sense of belonging to the society as a whole and identifying with the given political system. Civil society creates room for the reproduction of shared symbols, values and norms. But, it is not about everyone being able to achieve their own interests. It is necessary to consider the character of the political process, not just its outcome. The feeling that our wants or requirements are being heard is important, and even if they are not being acted on at the moment, it is possible to try and assert them again at any time in the future (Taylor 1990).

3. An Attempt at a Complementary Account: Giddens' Perspective

The contemporary liberal interpretation of the concept of civil society is rooted in the European Enlightenment, and this philosophical tradition can be traced at the

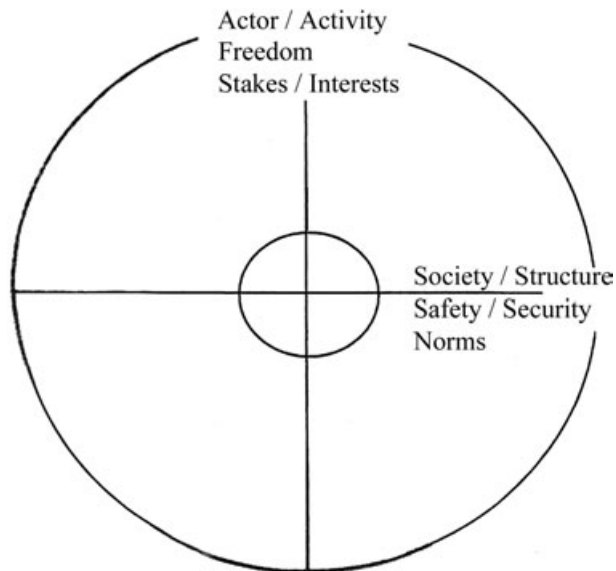
Figure 1: The Functional Dimension in Relations between Civil Society and the State



very least back to Locke (1963), but A. de Tocqueville may be regarded as the first modern theorist of civil society (Cohen and Arato 1992, 116). Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* reveals his extraordinary sociological imagination to pinpoint, while observing emerging young American democracy, all the crucial aspects and risks to be found in this new social order that we have discussed above.

Inspired by Giddens' approach (1990) to an analysis of the nature of contemporary modern societies, I define the functional dimension in relations between civil society and the democratic state as depicted above in Figure 1.

In this figure the outer circle represents the whole of civil society, and the small circle around the centre represents the state and the sphere of political power, i.e. the sphere of control of information and social supervision. The above-mentioned functions or expectations associated with the concept of civil society can be plotted in the figure as follows: at the top end of the vertical axis is the protective or defensive function, which is an analogy of the concept of 'negative freedom' (Giddens (1990) speaks of emancipatory politics). This function relates primarily to the provision of legal guarantees, securing the space of civic autonomy, and the liberation from inequality. At the opposite end of the vertical axis is the participative function which, conversely, corresponds to the concept of 'positive freedom' (corresponding to Giddens' 'life politics'). This dimension concentrates on the overall quality of the social environment, which features the opportunities for political self-realisation and a fulfilled and satisfied civic life. Both values form the content of the shifting dynamics in the relationship between civil society and the state.

Figure 2: Values of Modern Democracy

The legitimising function of civil society is at the right end of the horizontal axis, the entire right half of which indicates the mutual dependency and interconnectiveness of civil society and the democratic state. Civil society creates the social resources of political power and establishes the credibility, or legitimacy, of the democratic state, which in turn is responsible for protecting civil society and establishing the relationships of trust in democratic political institutions. At the left end of the horizontal axis is social integration, the value that expresses the fact that civil society is capable of reproducing and integrating itself as a society, but also illustrates the fact that civil society is integrated within the framework of a single political system. The process of democratic decision-making, as Taylor argues (1990), cannot take place in a society in which the members do not see themselves as members of one society. Silhouetted against this figure it is possible to detect two of the key value dimensions of liberal democracy: human freedom and security—see Figure 2.

The vertical axis represents the values of human individuality, freedom and particular interests. In the social sciences these issues usually tend to be the subject of research focusing on agency (the agency approach). The horizontal axis represents the value dimensions of social cohesion and shared norms, i.e. values of safety, security and shared orientations in action. In the social sciences this level of research tends to be the subject of macro-theoretical analyses focusing on society as a whole and on its structural nature and aspects. The social sciences usually refer to this analysis as the structural or the structural-functional approach. It may perhaps be said that in the figure the vertical axis represents the more liberal values, while the horizontal axis represents rather republican values and convictions.

Figure 3: The Risks in Modern Democracy

The level of utopianism that is present in Figure 1 is reduced and a dose of scepticism or realism is added to the configuration to produce the image in Figure 3. This figure represents a configuration of the serious risks and causes that are connected to the failure of the process of democratic political decision-making and which can occur in the relationships between civil society and the democratic state and seriously threaten their cohesion and reciprocal dynamics. This refers to the loss of legitimacy of political institutions, a decline in political participation, uncontrolled growth of state surveillance and finally the threat of social atomisation or even anomy. There are certainly numerous connections that exist between these risks, and in this respect Figure 3 may offer a new cognitive tool for use in both theoretical and empirical analyses. Let us take a brief look at each of the dimensions.

One of the most serious hidden dangers in the democratic political process is the excessive centralisation and concentration of political power, which is accompanied by an increased risk of its abuse (Cohen 1999, 77; Putnam 2000, 78). As Tocqueville (1968) convincingly demonstrated, democracy, owing to its love of equality, is particularly susceptible to succumbing to this danger. The formation of democratic mechanisms aimed at providing protections against inequality and at the elimination of privileges—in the name of equal treatment and equal material security—leads to the gradual accumulation of power in the hands of the centralised state. In order to achieve democratic equality the state becomes regulator, adviser, teacher and judge, a kind of shelter for a forming power that presents itself less and less as the source of violence and more and more as the guarantor of public

interest. The power of civil society that is democratically entrusted in the state then turns against the freedom of civil society. While the growth of state power for the purpose of the efficiency and alertness of the state is a tendency that may at first glance appear commendable or even necessary, its consequences can be social atomisation, the loss of legitimacy and even a decline in social cohesion.

The legitimising function of civil society also serves to counter yet another risk—the danger of the loss of legitimacy on the part of the state and its political institutions (Cohen 1999, 78; Fullinwider 1999, 2; Sullivan 1999, 33). The democratic state loses the trust of its citizens when it is incapable of apprehending their interests. Without the trust of the citizenry, the state and political institutions cannot effectively and democratically operate and govern, the laws of the state cease to be effective and the entire political system is put in jeopardy. But, to establish and maintain the necessary ties of trust between citizens and the state, political parties are inadequate. The low level of trust in political institutions among citizens is cited by many as the main obstacle in the democratic transformation of the post-communist CEE states (Müller 2002; Mishler and Rose 1997; Sztompka 1998). If political institutions lose their legitimacy the probable consequences are a decline in political participation, the unregulated growth of state power, the deterioration of social cohesion and the emergence of social cleavages.

The third risk of modern democracy is a decline in political and civic participation and a reduction of the public's ability to influence the processes of public decision-making (Cohen 1999; Putnam 2000; Sullivan 1999). This may of course be a result, for example, of alienation from political institutions owing to their loss of legitimacy. Declining participation establishes generally inauspicious conditions, which tend only to be favourable to the reinforcement of oligarchic tendencies. The fewer acute problems that civil society is capable of solving by itself through the active participation of its members, the more the state must intervene. Furthermore, if what Giddens says is true (1990, 156), that a sign of modernity is the fact that self-realisation becomes a fundamental factor in the formation of individual identity, then there is a direct link between civic participation and group or individual identity, and a decline in civic participation can thus ultimately lead also to the serious erosion of social cohesion.

Finally, there is also the danger of social fragmentation, which may result from both centralisation and a decline in political and civic participation, as well as from the concomitant increase in political alienation.⁷ It was Robert Putnam (1993 and 2000) and Francis Fukuyama (1995) who focused the discussion about the quality of civil society in the direction of issues regarding the relationships between interpersonal trust and so-called social capital,⁸ which today dominate the discussion of civil society in the United States.⁹ The danger of social atomisation, as Tocqueville (1968) again demonstrated brilliantly, is particularly characteristic of egalitarian societies, and it has the ability to produce a tendency towards anomie, the loss of social values and norms, the disintegration of the moral code and the overall loss of a sense of moral direction. If we speak of a loss of social cohesion, according to Putnam (2000) we are referring not only to a decline in the quality of the social environment but also to a decline in the quality of public administration—it is therefore a matter of a political loss.

Social disintegration has a tendency to escalate, and it may result in society finding itself in a vicious circle. A weakened sense of mutual belonging can be both a result and a source of the loss of shared norms, values and symbols, and of the decline in the capacity for self-restraint. Self-restraint is exercised in exchange for the recognition of the common interests of the whole, of which I am a part and whose interests are therefore also my interests (Taylor 1990). The development of a moral vacuum and the disintegration of social norms and shared values can be considered among the greatest risks to the democratic political process. To this kind of threat may also be added the danger of society breaking up into political cleavages and the risk of a significant segment of society becoming alienated from the political system.

Clouding the normative perspective further beneath the proposed configuration, which puts the state and civil society in a somewhat unequal position (civil society-centred analysis), it is possible to silhouette against the basic figure yet another group of four serious risks that pose a threat to the dynamics of civil society and the state. With regard to the protective functional dimension in relation to civil society and the state, it was Mill and Tocqueville who first pointed out that just as it is necessary to protect civil society against state power it is also necessary to protect the individual against the will of the majority. As stated above, within the framework of civil society itself serious conflicts can emerge, and not all interests formulated by an independent public are necessarily desirable and beneficial. In sum, it is not within the power of civil society to safeguard the rights of the individual without effective state power. A serious danger for civil society and democracy therefore also lies in the weakening of the strength and independence of state authority and in the deterioration of the effectiveness of public administration and its capacity for action. A weak state cannot lead to anything other than the colonisation of state institutions, at best by political parties (partitocracy), and at worst by influential interest groups; and most likely by both at once. Pervasive clientelism and the rampant spread of corruption are the only alternatives to the incapacity of the state.

Proceeding along the vertical axis the next risk that can be formulated is that of overloading the process of political decision-making with an excess weight of civic participation. Particularly in the case where the decision-making mechanisms have been weakened this risk can evoke serious problems (Almond and Verba 1963).

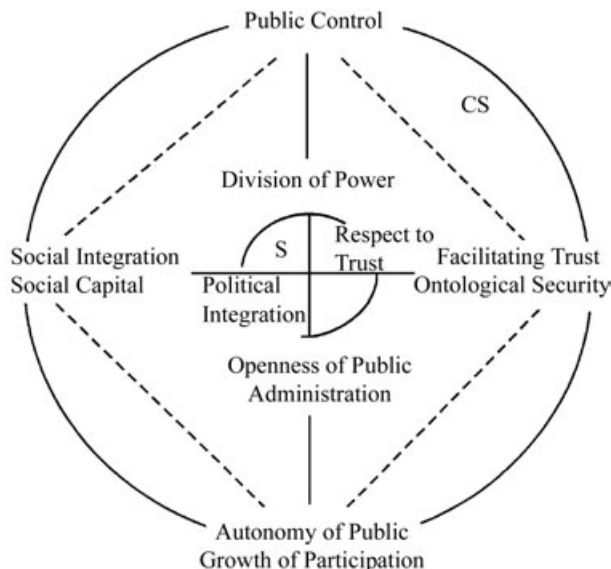
At the right end of the horizontal axis there is the danger of 'too much trust', to the point where civil society is uncritical of state institutions and where the rational discourse within civil society itself is weakened (Habermas 1989 [1962]). This can be both a result and a cause of the weakening of rational discourse in the sphere of political power. At the left end of the horizontal axis there is the danger posed by a highly integrated social system, which suppresses the internal pluralism of civil society. Although from a historical perspective it is erroneous to contrast the civic ethos and the national ethos as two contradictory principles, there is no question that for civil society and democracy exalted nationalism represents one of the most serious dangers (Calhoun 1993; Gellner 1994; Hall 1995).

The Guarantees of the Functional Dimensions in the Relationship between Civil Society and the State

In conclusion let us attempt to address the question that forms the basis of the current discussion in the social sciences: how does one build civil society? Is it at all possible or even desirable to strive for the advancement of this kind of ‘creative chaos’—as Ralf Dahrendorf (1997, 56) euphemistically refers to civil society—which emerged in the West and is the product of poorly transplantable historical experience? In my opinion the former question is fully justified, and however much some authors may argue that civil society as a concept is unnecessary (Kumar 1993), it is no accident that today it represents one of the most influential concepts in the social sciences. It attempts to approach the contemporary problems of radicalised modernity with greater sensitivity than other well-known concepts, and it tries to analyse these problems in relation to each other and in their entire complexity (Bryant 1993, 399; Smith 1998, 133).

If we are willing to accept the Marxist principle that the route to desired social change has little practical effect if it is not accompanied by the possibilities of institutionalisation (Giddens 1990, 155), then in Figure 4 we can redraw the configuration to incorporate the institutional guarantees of the above-mentioned functional dimensions and the institutionalised prevention of the above-mentioned risks. It is, however, clear that the institutional expression of the functional dimensions in relationship between civil society and the democratic state is itself influ-

Figure 4: Guarantees of the Functional Dimensions in the Relationship between Civil Society and the State



enced by the counterfactual character of modernity and, therefore, even in this case, a strict division between realistic and utopian thought is, as Giddens notes (*ibid.*), impossible.¹⁰

For each of the four relationships mentioned above it is possible to distinguish two, often unbalanced, counterpoints, which enter into the relationship and guarantee its vitality and advantageousness. Starting at the top end of the vertical axis, the institutional prevention of the risks of centralisation, bureaucratisation and the growth of state power can clearly be found in the active control of political power by an independent public. This requires, among other things, the active development and support of the public sphere by the public itself, including actively cultivating the quality and development of the public space (Barber 1999, 26). A key requirement is the guaranteed independence of the media and a pluralist media market, and the establishment of the appropriate mechanisms of public control over the media, especially television.

Moving further along the vertical access of 'freedom', the guarantee can, on the one hand, be the existence of a widely decentralised system of public administration or, on the other hand, the introduction of particular measures, such as provisions for ensuring transparency and openness of information in public administration. This signifies the direct involvement of the public in public administration and the establishment of new institutional mechanisms aimed at facilitating this. In this connection Giddens (1998) refers to the democratisation of democracy. A positive role could also be played in this by the active participation of the state in the protection of small and middle-sized business and in the promotion of programmes of corporate social responsibility. It is the task of governments actively to protect the market environment and to ensure that global corporations become responsible members of civil societies (Barber 1999, 26).

At the very bottom of the vertical axis is the existence of an autonomous civil society with a strong capacity for communication. Among concrete proposals for ensuring this, it is possible to cite the development of a good education system, which is capable of apprehending and cultivating the many varied interests and outlooks of children and students. It is also essential to build up educational democracy and promote literacy in democratic intercourse at schools at all levels. As Putnam claims (2000, 186), the more education there is in general, the more civic participation.

Let us now look at the horizontal axis in Figure 4. Many psychologists claim that the conditions for establishing relationships of trust, which are more of an emotional than cognitive phenomenon, are formed as part of the primary socialisation. Erik Erikson, who is cited by Giddens (1990, 92–99), points to the connection between relationships of trust and the sense of so-called ontological security. A feeling of 'ontological security', which apparently develops during early childhood, is by definition the precondition for personal integrity and healthy mental and personality development. Ontological security represents a sort of trustfulness in the permanence of one's own identity and in the stability of the social and material environment in which we act; a sort of elemental sense of the reliability of persons and things. Erikson considers a sense of ontological security to be a fundamental

precondition for establishing relationships of trust in the more complex sense of the word.

Moving along the horizontal axis towards the centre we can turn the discussion towards the number of guarantees that can be indicated as the state's means of protecting and maintaining relationships of trust. Among the forms of state protection and cultivation of public trust it is possible to include the maintenance of professional and moral integrity at 'access points' (Giddens 1990, 83–88; Sztompka 1998, 208), i.e. where the citizen is directly confronted with the state. Further could be mentioned the protection of children and the provision of a quality system of children's social aid. While the state cannot secure children's sense of 'ontological security', it can attempt to protect the 'less fortunate' from needless deprivation by, for example, actively working to prevent domestic violence.

We proceed further along the horizontal axis to the left and towards the integrative dimension. Among the many tools of systemic integration are affirmative action and, where appropriate, the introduction of elements of 'consociational' democracy. Again it is important that there is institutional progress in issues of education, and that the state takes an active role in fostering tolerance and an understanding of plurality of opinion (Cohen 1999, 72).

Finally, moving further left along the horizontal axis to the outer edge we come to social integration, the formation of social cohesion and the quality of social interactions. Of course, no reliable guidelines exist on how to produce social capital and thus also social solidarity and cohesion. The quality of social interactions depends on numerous factors, among the most important of which is without question the role of the family. Putnam (2000, 277) has concluded that the family (and its transformation) probably holds the key to how social capital is formed (and has declined in its power). While a well-functioning, democratic family is something hard to achieve, even so it is for all that the most reliable remedy for strengthening social capital. Therefore, the state should strive to promote an active policy with regard to this issue.

There exist numerous ties and repercussions among the four functional dimensions discussed above. It is not always possible to determine without question which risks represent the causes and which the effects of a breakdown in the functional dimensions in the relationship between civil society and the state. It is, however, certain that all of the risks can pose a serious threat to the security and stability of democracy and represent a threat to the level of freedom that has been achieved in the West. The concept of civil society is not motivated by anything less than the effort to seek the guarantees of democratic development. The proposed configuration of this entire issue represents an attempt to grasp the relationship between civil society and the democratic state in all its complexity. It has been inspired by a long list of authors, all of whom more or less draw on Tocqueville's legacy and Giddens' complementary approach to the theory of reflexive modernity. The latter is also the source of the effort in this article to formulate a complementary theory of civil society, i.e. with a view to both the manifestly utopian normative perspective and the empirical account with its sense for factuality and readiness to operationalise subjects within adequate limits.

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Notes

1. This essay is derived from a paper presented to the *Enlargement and Civil Society* workshop at the School of Politics, University of Nottingham, in January 2005. I am grateful to colleagues who have commented on the draft.
2. First and foremost are the historical-philosophical discussions relating to civil society's genealogy as a concept, followed by the ethical-philosophical discourse relating to the moral foundations of the social order (the dispute between communitarianism and liberalism), and the historical-sociological discourse on the origin and nature of the public sphere, and these are often incorporated into the larger more general theories of modernity. In this general framework mention can also be made of the political discourse that addresses theories of interest intermediation, political culture and democratic transition, or the social-scientific discourse on the crisis of the welfare state, social movements, discussions on nationalism, the globalisation of civil society, the influence of new technology in the field of communications, globalisation and a supranational (global) system of governance, and multiculturalism, or methodological debates such as the criticism addressed at the one-sided normative perspective of the concept of civil society. And the list could go on.
3. It is necessary to add that the aim of this study is not to provide an account of the genealogy of civil society as a concept or to present its historical development in the West, although these perspectives on the subject would certainly be useful in helping to understand the current discussions surrounding civil society. A sophisticated theoretical account can be found in the book by Cohen and Arato (1992). However, there are plenty of shorter studies that may be more accessible for readers (e.g. Bell 2000; Hall 1995; Keane 1988a, 1988b and 1998; Kumar 1993; Pérez-Díaz 1993; Seligman 1992; Shils 1991; Taylor 1995; Walzer 1991).
4. A warranted objection in relation to the empirical perspective is that the west is in reality confronted by considerable diversity of historical experience, numerous intellectual traditions and varied forms and issues of civil societies (on the diversity of traditions, see e.g. Bell 2000; Habermas 1989 [1962]; Kocka 1997; Peréz-Díaz 1993; Müller 2002; Skocpol 1999). Nevertheless, in connection with the processes of European integration and globalisation, today increasing reference is being made to the form of some sort of European or even global civil society (Keane 2003; Pérez-Díaz 1998; Walzer 1995), and new thought and analysis are being devoted to the relationships between government, the market and the public at the supranational (global) level. An equally justified objection is that the relationship between civil society and the state displays shifting dynamics, and in reality, as Giddens correctly points out (1998), there are no firm boundaries between the two.
5. I will leave aside the reductionist approach here owing to its obvious handicaps. These concepts in my view offer little appeal for the discussion at hand. With regard to the current shape of the reductionist approach at least two varieties can be mentioned. One could be labelled as the left-wing variant and the other the capitalist. Many advocates of utopian and left-wing oriented ideas, especially state socialism and communism, can be ranked in the first category. Libertarians especially can be ranked in the second one (Walzer 1995, 12–14).
6. Owing to its strong moral emphasis the term civil society has sometimes been interpreted in the modern social sciences as a synonym for a morally based community (*Gemeinschaft*), which contrasts with the formally founded society (*Gesellschaft*) and the amoral state, and is the intermediary between the micro-sphere of the family and the macro-sphere of the state, and which has its own non-political identity (Sztompka 1998, 191). The term civil is in this interpretation reserved for the meaning of cultivating general welfare and the ability for self-restraint in the interest of general welfare. The idea of modern citizenship is here dangerously narrowed and purged of its emphasis on autonomy and individualism, which are an integral part of the western notion of citizenship (Hall 1995, 10). As Alexander notes (1998, 2), civil societies are not systems that are good but systems that are procedurally decent and polite (civil).
7. Development in the CEE countries under communism is a good example of this.
8. Among the many ways of distinguishing social capital Putnam (2000, 20–23) considers one to be the most important—*bonding* and *bridging* social capital, which refer to a certain kind of exclusion and inclusion, in which the former produces a specific type of reciprocity and strong group solidarity, but may also give rise to strong group antagonisms, and the latter creates a more general understanding of reciprocity and identity and may produce more positive externalities. However, according to Putnam (*ibid.*) it is not a question of 'either or', but rather more or less of one or the other.

9. Convincing criticism of this kind of discourse can be found in Cohen (1999). She criticises it both for its overly conservative tones and for its reductionism and cultural-historical determinism, which on the one hand overestimates the role of cultural factors (society-centred analysis), and on the other hand underestimates institutional aspects, especially the role of the state, while also neglecting to analyse the forms and meanings of the public sphere.
10. In this connection Giddens (1990, 154–157) mentions the requirement of so-called utopian realism, with reference to the fact that too much utopianism without a foot in social reality can potentially be quite dangerous while, conversely, too much emphasis on realism can hinder productiveness and innovation if it is not balanced with a certain amount of utopianism and moral conviction.

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