

**Croatian Civil Society:
On the Path to Becoming
a Legitimate Public Actor**

**A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE CIVICUS
INDEX ON CIVIL SOCIETY PROJECT IN CROATIA**

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Part I

Introduction—The Development of Civil Society in Croatia

In Croatia, the term ‘civil society organisations’ (CSOs) refers to associations, foundations, public benefit companies with private status and labour unions.

There is limited tradition of civil society in Croatia — its development has been hindered by half a century of communism and totalitarian ideology coupled with a 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. Thus, passiveness and apathy exists in Croatia.

Civil society in Croatia was largely established during the Homeland War of 1991–1995, encouraged by foreign organisations and donors. CSOs, mostly associations, played a significant role in solving war-related problems, assisting in overcoming crises related to refugees and displaced persons, as well as providing for war victims. At that time there was a high level of solidarity among citizens. Several research projects 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 (Bezovan 1995). The citizens’ withdrawal and declining sense of solidarity was exacerbated by escalating economic crisis and a focus on family problems, leading to a standstill in civil society’s development.

Both during and after the war, co-operation with foreign organisations continued, but CSOs were at times rather incompetent in accepting and adequately distributing funds received. These foreign organisations thus initiated the establishment of a number of associations in Croatia, and provided these associations with much needed technical support. According to Stubbs (1996) these programmes emphasised relief-based activities, rather than encouraging sustainable social development.

The development of CSOs in Croatia is partially driven by programmes designed by foreigners for implementation in Croatia. The problem is that these people speak of civil society using foreign concepts and terms that are not necessarily applicable to Croatian citizens (Stubbs 2000). In this context only few individuals in CSOs are able to motivate for the significant role of civil society in the larger Croatian society.

It is important to point out that the state has not recognised the importance of civil society and has not supported or empowered CSOs to make them sustainable.

In the second half of the 1990s, a number of associations ceased to exist. During this time the authorities had an extremely negative attitude toward CSOs, declaring them enemies of the state. Under these circumstances many non-governmental organisations formed an active part of the political opposition. The negative attitude of many citizens toward non-governmental organisations today is a partial consequence of this past political environment. According to research performed

by the International Republican Institute (2001), 38% of citizens reported a negative attitude to non-governmental organisations, 44% positive, and 18% were ambiguous.¹ The negative attitudes toward non-governmental organisations among students and secondary school pupils, as well as the lack of knowledge of the concept of civil society, was recognised in research accomplished by Ledic and Mrnjaous (2000).

It was under such conditions that civil society in Croatia was forced to develop, conditions that forced at least a partial top-down” approach. The citizens regarded themselves as mere clients of CSO programmes or services, rather than as active citizens promoting a civic culture in Croatia.

For a long period Croatia had no satisfactory legal framework either for establishing CSOs or for their operations. The 16 provisions of the Law on Associations restricting the freedom of association, were abolished by the Constitutional Court in February 2000.² By the beginning of that year Croatia was the only Central European transitional country not allowing the public to make tax-deductible donations to CSOs, with the exception of sports and cultural CSOs. In this context it should be noted that Croatia has the lowest number of established foundations, compared to other Central European transitional countries, pointing towards a generally disabling tax environment for private philanthropy. This is largely due to the absence of a long-standing tradition of CSO activity in Croatia, unfavourable tax regulations and general distrust toward CSOs.² The inadequate legal framework and the patronising attitude of the state toward the non-profit organisations is, according to Baric (2000:47), a significant obstacle in the development of the sector.

At this stage of civil society development, the legislative status of CSOs was an unsolved issue. Additionally, activities of CSOs were conditioned by the Homeland War, the economic crisis and foreign funding programmes. Real co-operation and partnership with the government was impossible. State-controlled media negatively influenced the public opinion of CSOs. In such an environment the majority of citizens formed negative perception of CSOs.

¹Such attitudes are at least partially related to the use of the term 'non-governmental organisation'. Any organisation whose very definition is set negatively against the Government is not acceptable to the common citizen.

²In 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 rely 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.

Part II

The Present State of Croatian Civil Society & The CIVICUS Index on Civil Society Project

Little research on the activities of CSOs and the challenges they face has been conducted in Croatia. There is a significant lack of literature on civil society in the native language, which poses a significant obstacle to systematic efforts to develop a stronger civil society. The research conducted by the World Bank (2000:32) reveals that the main political and academic stream have little respect for the activities of CSOs in the wide area of social care and consider them to be politically engaged rather than professional.

The following aspects have been recognised as the most significant problems of civil society development: insufficient funds for sustainable development, a non-professional approach, lack of organisational transparency as well as limited membership levels, a lack of trained leadership, poor networking, a low level of co-operation between the organisations themselves and with the mass media (Shimkus 1996, Baric 2000, Stubbs 2000, (Ledic 1997, Pavic 1997 and Bezovan 1997).

The 2000 elections were preceded by an extensive campaign involving a number of CSOs and early in 2000 the new government began to address the problems facing civil society development with more responsibility. The government is now ready to adopt a new legal framework concerning the establishment and functioning of CSOs. This framework is of a similar nature to those of many developed countries. 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. Following the efforts of the Associations Office, the government has developed a transparent national grant programme to be allocated from the state budget.

As civil society in Croatia awaits the adoption of this new legal framework – particularly in public policy – there is a growing recognition that in order to develop a strong, vibrant civil society sector in Croatia, stakeholders need a foundation of knowledge concerning the current state of civil society. As noted above, there has been little information available on civil society in Croatia, and even less in the local language. Thus the Centre for Development of Non-Profit Organisations (CERANEQ), 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 aims 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. This project is the first systematic approach to analysing the state of civil society in Croatia. CERANEQ began its involvement in the Index in 2000 and the following report highlights the findings in Croatia.

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 survey was conducted among 353 key civil society stakeholders (those considered knowledgeable about the entire civil society sector in Croatia) from a variety of sub-sectors, in order to assess the current health of civil society Table 2 (see Appendix) outlines the sub-sectors and the number of respondents from each.

The assessment process made use of the CIVICUS Diamond Tool³ as a general analytical approach. This tool breaks the complexity of civil society into four 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 dimension.⁴ 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.

The outcomes of this research shall provide public insight into both the strengths and the weaknesses of the civil society. Additionally, by bringing together a variety of stakeholders together in a National Goal and Agenda Setting Workshop to reflect on the findings and identify areas for action, we hope to see improvements in the future health of civil society in Croatia. Lastly, the information generated here will provide the media with empirically-based information on the relevant problems facing civil society today.

³CIVICUS Diamond Tool and analytical framework was developed for CIVICUS by Dr. Helmut Anheier, Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics. For more information, see Anheier, H. K., and Carlson, L., *Civil Society: Measurement and Policy Dialogue*. London: Earthscan, forthcoming.

⁴List of indicators with scores are in Appendix

Part III

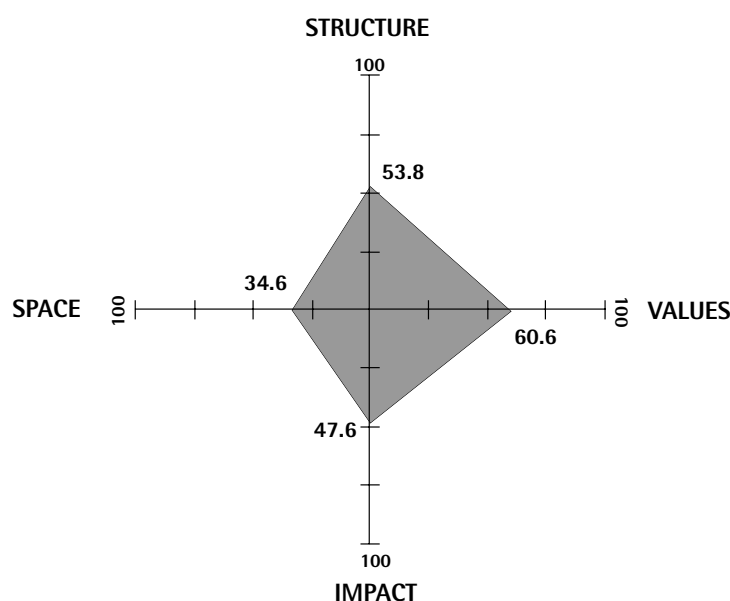
Civil Society in Croatia: The Findings of the CIVICUS Index on Civil Society

The Civil Society Diamond

Civil society in Croatia, as a post war and transitional country, according to one 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, reflecting that the current health of civil society in Croatia is 'moderate' (*Figure 1*) with respect to its structure and impact. Civil society's values are also rated fairly positively, however its legal, political and socio-cultural space is regarded as negatively. Thus we see that the most critical issues facing the development of Croatian civil society today include: the limited legal and political space for it to operate, caused by negative attitudes on the part of government, low respect for the contribution of CSOs in the policy making process and a lack of real corporate social responsibility.

Improving financial transparency and sustainability within CSOs and increasing efforts toward ensuring CSOs exist throughout all parts of the country, are points upon which civil society needs to take decisive actions. Tackling these internal issues will assist tremendously in strengthening the legitimacy of civil society as a crucial actor in Croatian governance.

Figure 1 Croatian Civil Society Diamond



Structure

Little is known about the specific features of civil society's structure in Croatia as collecting and disseminating respective data on civil society, its activities and its achievements has not been an area of research thus far. During the second part of 1990s, after several attempts made by different organisations all with poor results, CERANEO developed a database of about 1000 CSOs including a list of other stakeholders. A major problem was that CSOs often refused to provide information about their missions, current programmes, sources of funding and so on.

In short the absence of thorough information on civil society in general was a serious obstacle for the recognition of CSOs as an important stakeholder in Croatian society.

A respondent observed the following:

Civil society in Croatia undergoes the period of 'children's diseases'. However significant progress has been made in the last ten years, both in shaping and organising civil society, and initiating networks and co-ordination between organisations (a prerequisite for having an impact on societal development).

General Features

Croatia has about 20 000 registered CSOs, of which 18 000 operate on a local level.⁵ 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 active. However experience suggests that the number of active associations should probably be assessed as significantly lower.

Croatia has 46 registered foundations, three funds⁶ and slightly over 150 public benefit companies with the status of non-profit organisations. Further data indicates that the vast majority of associations in Croatia, that is some 10 000, are registered in the area of sports and recreation.⁷ In early 2001 431 humanitarian organisations were registered with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Of these, 284 (66%) are domestic associations, 37 (8%) are foreign associations, 77 (18%) are religious communities and 33 (8%) comprise other inland legal persons including foundations, public benefit companies and companies.⁸ According to an estimate by the Regional Centre for Environmental Protection, 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. A crucial component in the regional structure of civil society are training organisations and resource centres that are funded by foreign donors.

A national survey conducted by CERANEO in 1997 of 548 CSOs indicated the following analysis of fields of activity for CSOs in Croatia:

⁵ According to the Law on Associations (Article 15) an association active in one county is to be registered in the County Office for Public Administration Office, and an association that is active in two or more counties, i.e. on a national level is to be registered at the Ministry of Justice, Administration and Local Self-Government.

⁶ Funds are a specific sub-category of foundations with a narrowly-defined mission and are allowed to exist for five years.

⁷ Estimate of the Croatian Olympic Committee

⁸ Data available on the web site of the Ministry of Labour and Social Care, <http://www.mrss.hr>

Table 1. 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%

Membership in CSOs

Previous research indicates that CSOs in Croatia have no active membership base. In the past these organisations were represented by their leaders and had few active members. They were thus considered organisations without a constituency and consequently without a legitimate basis for their advocacy work. The Index Project supports these findings, but indicates that the lack of representation is not as prevalent today as it was in the past. The indicator measuring the extent to which there are active CSO members scores 51.1 out of a possible 100.⁹ According to results of the World Value Survey 1995, 38% of the Croatian population belong to at least one association, which is significantly higher than in most other post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Geographic Distribution

Within the dimension of structure the indicator assessing the distribution of CSOs throughout all regions of the country was extremely negative (24.5). This is also recognised as a problem in the research undertaken by the World Bank. The majority of CSOs are located in the four larger towns, with a lack of CSOs in areas with less than 20,000 inhabitants (World Bank 2000:33). As in other post-socialist states, Croatia has an insufficient number of community based organisations. This problem has also been recognised by donors when examining civil society development programmes. Thus, a new programme of the Institute Open Society Croatia for 2001 is giving priority to projects both outside the large towns and those, which are engaged in community development.

⁹The scores of individual indicators are provided in brackets and generally range 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.

Network and Alliances

Networking among CSOs has also been recognised as a problem for civil society development in Croatia. 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 fail to adequately encourage membership and participation (42.61) and are unlikely to promote the common interest of the sector they represent (41.92). The reluctance of CSOs to associate, co-operate and represent common interests was also recognised by Ledic (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. At the National

Workshop participants agreed that long-term networks and alliances are much more productive for the health of civil society than short-term, issue-based coalitions

The lack of CSO co-operation on issues of mutual interest (47.85) is not so much due to mutual conflict, but due to a lack of experience and awareness that information exchange and mutual co-operation can be beneficial to all organisations involved. CSOs are not familiar with protecting and promoting interests. Also, CSOs rarely join broader alliances of social forces. Larger organisations do not always work closely with local grassroots organisations. The smaller organisations are marginalized and only partially participate in activities of big organisations (44.14).

Croatia lacks a tradition of co-operation between CSOs and the private sector (40.96). Connections between the two have only recently been established. The private sector hardly recognises its interests in civil society and CSOs still lack the power to solicit attention 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.

Political Participation

The representation of CSO interests in the public sphere is rather underdeveloped in Croatia as many CSOs are not acquainted with the mechanisms of interest representation and lobbying (50.15). The problem is also dependent on political parties, as their representatives lack a willingness to listen to the citizens they represent and to take up their concerns.

Unlike trade unions, other CSOs have limited familiarity with 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 focusing public attention upon their concerns. The most active social groups in Croatia are environmental organisations, organisations representing vulnerable social groups and women, and human rights groups. In the case of the government's plan to reduce the payment for maternity leave these groups organised protests, which attracted the attention and support of the general public. On such occasions CSOs seldom use violent means, such as damage to property or personal violence to express their interests in the public sphere (92.74).

Financial Resources

The research findings emerging from the *Index Project*, confirm previous research (Bezovan 1997) indicating that financial sustainability is one of the key problems facing CSOs. This problem has persisted during the last ten years forcing a number of CSOs to close their operations each year (42.77). The problem lies very much with the high turnover of key staff, inadequate or inefficient management structures of organisations, as well as the inability of CSOs to adapt to the actual needs of the communities.

CSOs are not dependent on indigenous public funding only, and previous research (Bezovan 1997) indicates that only 7% of organisations have received state subsidies. It is important to note here that in the past the system of allocating state funds on various levels was completely non-transparent, although this has improved over the past years. Findings also indicate that few CSOs depended on indigenous private financial supports (83.23), largely because there was no favourable tax framework for donations. The sponsorship tradition existed even in the period of socialism and according to previous research, in the mid-90s 11% of organisations were granted funds from indigenous private resources (Bezovan 1997).

There is a growing consensus that CSOs depend primarily on foreign funding to maintain their operations, although the survey indicator shows a very positive picture (74.62). Foreign funding programmes play 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. Twelve percent of CSOs in Croatia receive donations from foreign resources (Bezovan 1997). The problem of financial sustainability is likely to remain one of the vital issues facing each organisation. To improve this situation, CSOs will have to find financial resources inside the country: donations, subventions and income generated from their own services.

There is a serious need to assess the structure of civil society in greater depth. It will also be useful to encourage the activities of CSO support and information. With regards to specific issues that need to be addressed, improving the geographical distribution of CSOs and identifying new sources of funding are crucial for a strengthened structure of civil society in Croatia.

Space

The state provides only formal/symbolic support, both financially and otherwise. It seems that such support exists only to meet the requests of the international community, and does not reflect a real inclination to make the social-cultural environment in Croatia perceptive for the operations and development of civil society.

Enlarging its space was an important task for Croatian civil society during last ten years in terms of legislation and policies, as well as in terms of socio-cultural norms. The negative impact of socio-cultural norms, i.e. the absence of a civic culture that seriously inhibits civil society's development in Croatia has never been seriously discussed among stakeholders.

Most variables of the space dimension received a low score. This is a complex area, deserving comprehensive analysis outside this paper. To begin with, there is only 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.

Registration Procedures

The only unquestionably positive indicator within this dimension is the unproblematic registering of associations as CSOs (73.08). Research performed in the mid 1990s on humanitarian organisations also recognises that registration of CSOs is relatively unproblematic and beneficial for the development of civil society (Bezovan 1995).¹⁰ According to respondent experiences, the association registration procedure requires about 4 – 5 weeks. On the other hand, the foundation registration process is unnecessarily complicated and long.

Tax laws

In the past tax regulations in Croatia have been a serious obstacle to the development of civil society. Despite some changes that have been beneficial to CSOs, there still is an obvious need to introduce considerable tax benefits for individuals and businesses, and some for membership fees. Here, we see some promising first steps with the government considering the introduction of such legislative changes. An important change in the taxation law has recently been introduced so that CSOs no longer have to pay VAT (22%) when purchasing goods and services from foreign donors.

Co-operation with the State and Parliament

The local authorities and the national government usually do not invite CSOs involvement in public policy formulation (33.31), and even at a local level, CSOs rarely influenced policy. As there are no formal communication channels for communication between the state and civil society, only a minor proportion of CSOs succeed in exerting a slight influence on policy. The poor impact on local levels could be attributed to citizen perceptions that the government is the most important decision maker. Although the government remains cut off from CSOs, significant alterations have recently been implemented. Government representatives have begun to emphasise the significance of civil society in their public appearances. In the government's *Strategy of Croatia's Development*¹¹, the importance of civil society, the principle of subsidiarity¹² and partnerships with CSOs 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 no positive experiences recorded in this area, and it is not likely that progress will be achieved soon. The proposals of various laws are made through informal contact with politicians and mostly at the last moment. There is an urgent need for the improvement of co-operation between civil society and the parliament and the establishment of reliable communication.

General State Attitude Towards Civil Society

In the last ten years, the state has neither respected the activities of CSOs nor recognised those who have shown great public service in civil society (24.77). The state only award prizes to deserving persons for their achievements in the area of environmental protection. 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). In this context it does not seem likely that the state will

¹⁰In discussions regarding the passing of the new Law on Associations due care was given to the problem of the registration of associations. Proposals were offered suggesting appropriate restrictions of the registration authority competence regarding the association's statute contents.

¹¹More details are available on www.vlada.hr

¹²This principle originated from essays by the Catholic Church with regards to public welfare issues in late 19th century Germany. Its principles state that the smallest social unit capable of delivering the respective social service should be in charge. It thus places a premium of importance on CSOs at the local level.

assist CSOs in the development of Croatian society. The previous government has neither recognised the vast potential of CSOs in benefiting the public good, nor the need to invest in civil society and so better utilise its resources. According to one respondent,

...work in civil society is not recognised by the authorities. Awards are rare, mostly related to protocol purposes. This results in a low regard for social values among authorities.

Additionally, individual membership in a CSO is not respected by society (31.09). There is an absence in the use of associations as a means to solving both social and community problems, because there is an absence of individual citizen attention to these problems. Consequently, volunteerism and work for 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.

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 CSOs (17.81). Following the experiences of socialism and privatisation of the economy, the business sector does not see any reason for supporting civil society. Such engagement is considered a private matter for employees. Businesses are also not actively engaged in philanthropic programmes supporting CSOs (21.99). Previous research (Bezovan 2000) indicates that some companies tend to support health institutions, schools, sports and recreation organisations, the church and in rare cases, some small CSOs. Some large companies have recently started inviting public tenders for granting donations. The social responsibility of companies concerning problems in their respective communities, as well as their responsibility for public welfare, is thus a serious issue for civil society development in Croatia

It should be stressed again that the current government shows goodwill to take positive steps in changing the legislation and policies regarding a more enabling environment for civil society's development. Also, more and more local authorities now do co-operate with CSOs. Yet, the capacity of many CSOs might be too limited to be able to fill out an enlarged space for civil society. According to the opinion of participants at the National Workshop media and educational programmes in schools could play an important role in helping to install a truly civic culture in Croatia that would foster the grounding of CSOs within larger society.

Values

Civil society's actions are grounded in important values. Recent debates on values in Croatia prove that profound changes have taken place, from public support to the previous political system to the current one based in a market economy and political pluralism. The value-base of civil society is an important component of its make-up that has, however, never been seriously discussed in Croatia. Findings from the Index Project show that, compared to other dimensions, the values dimension is the most positive element of civil society in Croatia.

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). It is necessary to bear in mind that Croatian society is not integrated but rather highly divided among different groups of people. Whereas CSOs do not promote conflicts between members of different cultural and religious groups (86.62), they should however, become more engaged in the process of social integration. The above mentioned research by the World Bank has recognised the political divisions within civil society. For example human rights groups are sometimes linked to left parties, whereas organisations representing war veterans and displaced persons are regarded as right party supporters. The written comments of respondents clearly indicate a divisiveness of organisations into extreme left and extreme right political ideology. Some respondents consider political engagement of these organisations harmful to the development of civil society:

... in general CSOs are not acting in an autonomous and independent way, in large part they are servants of political ideologies while they use term 'civil society' to hide their real activities... 'politicising' 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 actually a significant part of the mission for most of CSOs.

The cultural groups in Croatia are often split up along the lines of ethnic communities. The indicator measuring the peaceful promotion of their interests in civil society receives 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 (67.39). According to the result of this survey, gender equality is mostly accepted value in CSOs (66.67).

Accountability & Transparency

Many CSOs make information about their general 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 cooperate with CSOs. CSOs are facing serious problems in this regard.¹³

The most problematic indicator in the value dimension is that of financial transparency of CSOs (36.03). Few organisations make their financial reports publicly available, and in some cases 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. Making their financial reports available to the public is a recent practice of only a few CSOs. 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 are used to generate severe conflicts and consequently instability in some organisations.

¹³In early 2001 Vjesnik (daily newspaper) showed growing interest in systematic monitoring of CSOs.

Internal Democracy

Previous research has shown that there is insufficient involvement of members in activities of CSOs, 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 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. This is still, however, 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 public support. A developed social and civil commitment, i.e. a civil society of responsible individuals, is a prerequisite for effective participation in civil society and the bottom up development of its value systems.

The Croatian society can hardly be considered as a responsible society because it only involves a small group of ‘socially committed elite’ (and those who pretend to be) who are responsible for the creation of civil society values.

During the National workshop, several participants felt that that the score for the values dimension was unrealistically inflated and consequently decided that a 5% improvement would be realistic.

There is a real need for Croatian civil society to focus on value issues. Putting these issues on the agenda for civil society development could improve the low level of trust in society. Accordingly, the concept of social capital that helps to ground CSOs in society, should become a part of the defining values of civil society in the local language.

Impact

In Croatia, civil society activists are challenged to justify how society can benefit from the work of CSOs and how CSOs actually contribute to solving societal problems. A large part of the general public believe that CSO workers act purely for personal gain. Thus, CSOs need to highlight the concrete and important results of their work to government officials, business and media representatives. Unfortunately, civil society's impact upon larger society is not a topic that is regularly contemplated, let alone measured and evaluated.

Public Policy Impact

The following section presents findings on the perceived impact of civil society at various 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 has 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 one respondent, “Government and the

responsible ministries are shut off from CSOs, particularly regarding the passing of vital laws and resolutions.”

Within the impact dimension the indicators measuring successful cooperation of CSOs with government in implementing policies is at the lowest level (22.28). There are only a few areas where the government is actively cooperating with CSOs. These include: environmental protection, social and gender issues and issues pertaining to victims of the war.

CSOs are also not very successful in monitoring government commitments and policies (47.09). This requires a lot of additional effort and mutual understanding. Government representatives are not open to independent monitoring and do not see this as an important role for CSOs, yet they are regularly seeking the support of CSOs. The misunderstanding of the concept of civil society is evident in the standpoint of a high ranking government official: “I am not satisfied with the role of the social sciences. We have not succeeded in creating a civil society in Croatia, the social-sciences is to be blamed for this” (*Jutarnji list* 2001).

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 encouraging point may require additional analysis as participants of the National workshop were suspicious about this score. They concluded that CSOs are not sufficiently critical and objective of their capacity achievements.

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 relate to an unfavourable public image of CSOs (51.89). According to one respondent: “The only way for CSOs to get support and create a 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. Some war veteran organisations are involved in resolving current conflict about whether Croatian soldiers committed any war crimes or not. Human rights groups support the government in implementing legislation around this issue. However, it is difficult to analyse the concrete contributions of these groups in this conflict resolution.

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 perceived to improve the lives of the people they are working with, i.e. users of their services (71.06). They also are considered to succeed in benefiting the public good (64.12). In contrast to these positive contributions they are perceived to be less successful in mobilising the disadvantaged groups in society to take part in public life (44.42). . Most CSOs regard such groups as the passive objects of their activities ignoring efforts to mobilise them for participation in public life.

According to one respondent:

Growing democratisation of social and economic relations is inconceivable without the development of civil society. The necessity to develop initiatives is 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.”

In this case impact of CSOs is very much dependent on the level of development of civil society. It is important to address issues of cooperation with the government in policy implementation and in access to new legislation. Some prominent CSOs do have more success in these fields. In a country where government faces much pressure for legislative reform it is realistic to assume that CSOs will play a role in this reform.

Part IV

National Workshop

The National workshop took place July 6–7 in Stubicke Toplce, close to Zagreb. There were 52 participants representing different stakeholders from different regions. Most of them were from CSOs, but there also was a large number of government representatives. CERANEO organised the workshop in cooperation with and financial support from the government Office for Associations.

The purpose of the workshop was to present, validate and publicise the research findings and to discuss the implications of the research results for the future development of civil society in Croatia. Participants received an information package with an agenda of the workshop, a list of participants, the research report and an evaluation sheet. The workshop consisted of five parts:

1. Welcome, introduction to *Index Project* and presentation of research funding with discussion (in plenary)
2. Group discussion
3. Validation of findings with a new vision and concrete actions
4. Presentation of vision and discussion of action agenda
5. Evaluation and closure

During the small-group discussions, participants validated each indicator and then discussed those indicators needing actions in next two years to improve the health of civil society. The small group dealing with the values dimension proposed to raise the score by five percentage points. Small groups dealing with structure, space and impact proposed new scores for those indicators with necessary actions. The panel accepted the proposal to focus on a limited number of crucial indicators. Based on these outcomes a Vision Diamond was calculated.

The NLO team provided a list of proposed actions and debate focused on the most critical issues. Workshops participants felt that although civil society is progressing slowly, visible changes are likely to be seen in the longer term. It was argued that CSOs should take some responsibility for tackling concrete social, economic and political problems through which they could attract other stakeholders to join, support and respect them. It was noted that the programme of cooperation with the government will definitely enhance the scope of CSO activities. It was also recognized that the development of civil society in the coming years will highly depend on the country's general political and economic development.

Participants agreed that they had received new information and knowledge of civil society. They also felt that civil society would be able to reach the goals set by Vision Diamond. CERANEO in cooperation with the Office of Associations and regional resource centres plans to organise three regional workshops on this topic during October and November 2001. These workshops, aiming to set an agenda of activities with task-teams, will be followed by a large workshop debating the final results and action points in Zagreb in December 2001.

Part V

Conclusion

This research has evidenced that the most critical challenge for civil society development in Croatia relates to the limited space in which it has to operate, as defined by the legislative, political and social-cultural framework. Civil society in Croatia needs to engage more with public policy issues in an attempt to establish a place for itself in the policy-making process.

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. The development of civil society in Croatia should be linked to a commitment on the part of CSOs to take responsibility for facing these challenges. These commitments in turn need the support of national grants, targeted for the sustainable development of organisations.

Regarding its impact, civil society seems to contribute significantly to solving specific social, economic and political problems and furthering the public good. However, as stated previously, its influence on the public policy process is very limited. To truly have an impact, CSOs must take part in true collaborations with government and local authorities, mobilising the necessary human resources to have an impact on policies. These collaborations need to take place throughout all regions of Croatia, paying particular attention to establishing CSOs in small towns and rural areas where their activities are lacking. To stimulate this, the development of CSOs in smaller communities could, for instance, be a part of a new national grant programme.

Another area of concern for the development of civil society is related to the financial transparency and accountability of organisations. This must be improved in order to enhance the reputation and credibility of individual organisations and civil society as a whole.

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 CSOs as well as the public as a whole. This is the only way to enhance the development of civil society in Croatia, which should be the common concern.

A female respondent, 40 years old concludes:

I think Croatians have little concern with the creation and development of civil society and do not care about it. Meeting basic needs is their priority, considering that there is a 23% unemployment rate. Only once people have made provision for their basic needs and the needs of their families - and if they have the time and inclination - can they begin to engage in the development of civil associations. Their priority is the solution of economic issues. It seems that development of civil society in Croatia shall have to wait for better times.

The majority of the Croatian population considers the government responsible for solving their problems. That being said, Croatians are not without the experience and feeling that they, along with people from their communities, can associate and mobilise resources to help themselves. We hope that a small part of the population with this experience, such as members of CSOs, overcome the difficulties in legitimising their initiatives and actions. This will provide them with the legitimacy they need to mobilise and unite society for the public good. More and more citizens are taking this responsibility seriously.

Appendix 1

Table 2. Sub-sectors in survey

Sub-sector number	Sub-sector	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

Project Implementation

CERANEEO as the National Lead Organization (NLO) informed CSOs and general public about the project. A focus group of 12 people representing different stakeholders took place in March 2001. Its purpose was to select the respective indicators and to propose division of CSOs into sub-sectors. The focus group analysed the indicators and agreed to accept all except the one dealing with the racism issue which was not seen as relevant for Croatian society. The group was critical about the use of USAID indicators in this research. We made certain changes in sub-sectors including the addition of new sub-sectors for victims of war, war veterans and displaced persons. Participants provided comments and ideas about the translation of questionnaires. The research was performed in the form of a mail and electronic mail survey from April 1st to May 25th 2001. It comprised 275 respondents from CSOs; divided into 16 sub-sectors, as well as an additional 78 respondents representing various stakeholders in the development of civil society. The aim was to comprise at least 10 representatives of organisations within each respective sub-sector preferable from a range of geographical locations. The data received has been processed by the CIVICUS coordination team.

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