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CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY FORMATION IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND UKRAINE

Abstract

The article is devoted to a comprehensive reflection on the cultural foundations of the formation of civil society as a complex social and sociocultural phenomenon shaped through the interaction of historical, value-based, moral, and institutional factors. The focus is placed on the analysis of the processes underlying the formation and evolution of the Central European model of civil society, its socio-philosophical foundations, as well as the historical conditions that have determined the specificity of its development. Key stages in the formation of civic practices in Central European countries are examined, particularly in the context of transformations of modern and postmodern sociality, the experience of a totalitarian past, and subsequent democratic transformations.

The author analyzes the leading theoretical approaches to the interpretation of civil society, ranging from classical philosophical concepts to contemporary interdisciplinary interpretations, emphasizing its conceptual multidimensionality, normative potential, and moral-practical significance. Special attention is paid to the role of culture as an integrative factor that ensures the reproduction of civic values and contributes to the formation of social trust, solidarity, and responsibility.

A special place in the study is devoted to the Ukrainian context, in particular to the analysis of the specificity of the Ukrainian lifeworld, its historical traumatic experience, symbolic structures, and value orientations that influence the

processes of civil society formation. It is emphasized that Ukraine's integration into the broader Central European and European sociocultural space requires not only institutional changes but also a profound rethinking of the cultural and moral foundations of civic interaction. The article substantiates the thesis that the study of the cultural dimensions of civil society constitutes an important direction of contemporary socio-philosophical and humanitarian research, capable of contributing to a deeper understanding of the paths of democratic development of Ukraine and the countries of Central Europe.

Keywords: civil society, modernization of the state system, crises of legitimacy, social anomie (alienation).

Statement of the problem. Over the past two to three decades, the issue of civil society has occupied a prominent place in the scholarly discourse of European studies. A substantial body of research on this topic has been produced by representatives of philosophy, sociology, legal studies, and political science. At the same time, despite the extensive range of existing studies, conceptual debates continue regarding the content, significance, and theoretical foundations of the Central European model of civil society, interpretations of which remain ambiguous and contested.

For contemporary Ukraine, the relevance of this problem is determined by the absence of social consensus between two fundamentally different discursive models – the civic and the clientelist. The former is based on the recognition of individual autonomy and dignity, cultural heritage, and moral orientations, as well as on the priority of legal and ethical norms. The latter model is oriented toward clientelist practices of bureaucratic governance, which involve the expansion of administrative control and the gradual displacement of the private and public dimensions of human life.

In this context, the task of theoretically comprehending different variants of these discourses, taking into account Central European and Ukrainian experience – particularly their value foundations, intentions, and normative principles – acquires special significance.

The purpose of this article is to provide a philosophical reflection and conceptual generalization of the key factors that have determined the formation and development of the Central European model of civil society. The study outlines the sociocultural and value-based parameters of this phenomenon, as well as the specific features of the formation of the individual lifeworld in postcolonial societies. The object of the research is the Central European value paradigm in the interrelation of theoretical ideas and the processes of their legitimation in social practice. The subject of the analysis comprises the determinants of the formation and functioning of the worldview concept of civil society in its multidimensionality and internal contradictions.

Review of Recent Research and Publications. Contemporary scholarly discourse demonstrates the existence of established approaches to understanding the necessity of conceptualizing a Central European version of civil society. A significant contribution to the development of this line of inquiry has been made by Central European thinkers and public intellectuals, in particular K. Wojtyła (John Paul II), M. Dzielski, J. Kuroń, M. Kundera, V. Havel, L. Kołakowski, J. Habermas, R. Paradowski, D. Petrik-Rives, and A. Madera. Their works emphasize the distinctive features of the Central European experience of civil society, its sociocultural foundations and value orientations, which oppose the clientelist practices of despotism and unfreedom rooted in the region’s totalitarian past.

Alongside this, contemporary theory preserves another interpretative line represented by the works of E. Gellner, N. Bobbio, A. Lisa, J. Keane, and M. Castells, who view civil society as a universal normative phenomenon of

European civilization. Within this approach, civil society is primarily identified with a space of law, freedom, and individual autonomy that is presumed to be independent of specific historical forms and cultural contexts of its formation. Such an interpretation consistently reinforces the idea of civil society as the conceptual core of the democratic order.

At the same time, the question remains open as to whether the complexity and multidimensionality of the phenomenon of civil society can be exhausted solely by these normative characteristics, especially in light of the large-scale sociocultural transformations of the late twentieth century and the experience of the "velvet revolutions" in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Presentation of the Main Material. The conclusion of bipolar confrontation, the collapse of the socialist system, and the emergence of new states in Central Europe necessitated a rethinking of a number of fundamental factors in the formation of civil society. Above all, the questions of the role of the sociocultural context and the structures of the individual's "lifeworld," as well as the significance of the ethical and moral dimension, which ensures the reproduction of authentic forms of sociality, recognition of human value, and societal legitimation of human dignity, became particularly relevant.

The experience of the transformation of former communist societies toward European development models allows us to identify several key characteristics of the formation of the Central European version of civil society.

First, social processes in Central European countries during the 1970s and 1980s demonstrated a close connection between civil society and the lifeworld of the individual, which existed in a state of internal resistance to the mentally alien and distorted totalitarian-communist system. Opposition practices arose not only as a reaction to the dominance of bureaucratic state institutions, which restricted the sociocultural space of the individual, but also in response to the systematic imposition of meanings alien to traditional ethnos-based values. These imposed

meanings conflicted with the historical experience of societies that, throughout the twentieth century, had been subjected to the pressure of totalitarian regimes with their anthropologically unnatural demands.

Second, against the backdrop of institutional crisis and moral degradation under communist regimes, the dependence of state legitimacy on value-normative foundations rooted in traditional and modern culture became evident. At the same time, Central European intellectual and political elites demonstrated the capacity for creative rethinking of cultural heritage, the formation of new worldview, ethical, and political orientations, and the integration of instrumentally rational and value-rational strategies for social development.

Third, the establishment of horizontal, self-governing forms of civil society organization and the appeal to shared historical and cultural experiences with Western European countries became an effective mechanism for delegitimizing the old power structures in Central Europe. This facilitated the formation of a space of social solidarity around demands directed at a new government, which, in the eyes of the public, had to be more responsive to the needs of individuals, society, and culture.

Fourth, in Ukraine, the process of implementing ideal models of civil society took on a fragmentary and unsystematic character and did not rely on a deep understanding of either the traditional sociocultural heritage or the prolonged experience of the communist past. In the value-normative dimension, Ukrainian society proved unprepared for the full internalization of Central European civil society models, while the national intelligentsia failed to offer the postcolonial society effective and comprehensible models of social self-organization. As a result, the lifeworld of the ordinary citizen remained structurally weak and incapable of effectively resisting the pressures of the bureaucratic system.

The Normative Context of Civil Society in Central Europe

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, the concept of civil society acquired the status of a leading integrative factor, uniting various opposition movements in post-socialist Central European countries. For most secular and religious communities in the region, the communist regime appeared as a form of atheistic, despotic, and corrupt totalitarian power, deprived not only of legal but also moral and rational foundations. This was evidenced both by the degradation of the classical public sphere (in the terms of J. Habermas) and by the systematic intrusion of the state into the private, and at times intimate, dimensions of human life, as highlighted by H. Arendt.

Under such conditions, civil society performed a special normative function, aimed at fostering moral and civic resistance to state practices that contradicted the fundamental dimensions of human existence, reason, and dignity. The canonical tradition relied upon by opposition movements was based on the conviction that humans possess a natural ability to act according to reason, and therefore in accordance with virtue and morality [1, p. 43].

During the development of resistance, there arose a need for symbolic figures and value-oriented role models capable of exemplifying high ethical standards through their own lives. Among these moral authorities were John Paul II and Milan Kundera. The Pope, during his European visits, consistently and persuasively criticized both communist governance practices and extreme forms of liberal consumerism. By rejecting both socialist and liberal models of social order, he advocated forms of social organization that opened space for freedom, self-organization, and the religious and moral development of the individual.

In his reflections, John Paul II emphasized that the collectivist regimes of Eastern Europe were governed by a totalitarian bureaucratic apparatus that limited economic initiative, suppressed entrepreneurship, and stifled citizens' creative potential. At the same time, he argued that capitalist systems were capable of generating forms of dependency that hinder integral development of both

individuals and communities. Therefore, he considered the social mission of the Church to include critique of both Marxist statism and unbridled capitalism, as neither ensured the full development of human dignity [2, p. 48].

In theoretical debate, the Pope consistently pointed to the internal flaws of Marxism, whose dominance contributed to the spread of alienation, deformation of working-class consciousness, the erosion of justice, and the devaluation of labor dignity. Simultaneously, he warned against the illusion that the mere strengthening of liberal mechanisms of private interest could bring post-socialist societies to genuine democracy. In his view, only civil society rooted in a system of stable moral and cultural values could serve as a reliable vector for future development. He repeatedly stressed that democracy without a value-based foundation easily transforms into a disguised form of totalitarianism [3, p. 49].

For John Paul II, it was indisputable that adherence to the principles of morality and respect for human dignity could not be achieved either through repressive subjugation or by reducing social development to economic efficiency, service, or material well-being. He consistently emphasized the importance of cultural, religious, and moral development as a necessary condition for the formation of a free civil society. In this context, both the liberal models of Western civilization and the totalitarian practices of communism were regarded by him as inadequate for the formation of social trust and moral foundations, later conceptualized in F. Fukuyama's theories as "social capital" [4, p. 166].

In the conditions of communist totalitarianism in Central and Eastern Europe, the Church, according to one of the founders of the "philosophy of dialogue," emerged as a key institution of resistance to state power, an embodiment of the normative essence of civil society, and an important mechanism for preserving humanity. John Paul II's views not only contributed to the formation of a critical attitude toward Marxist political practice but also stimulated discussions regarding the limits of radical secularity, which a number

of theorists (L. Kołakowski, M. Dzielski, J. Kuroń, C. Offe) regarded as a manifestation of spiritual degradation and a serious obstacle to the development of humanistic forms of civic life [5, p. 52].

At the same time, Milan Kundera proposed a new intellectual framework for understanding Central Europe as a space of moral and ideological resistance to totalitarian homogenization. His concept became a manifesto of ethical civic opposition to a system that, for decades, had undermined the foundations of human communication and universal humanistic values. His essay *The Tragedy of Central Europe* resonated widely among various social groups of the "subjugated peoples" and sparked a broad discussion on the necessity of forming civic and national identities as alternatives to despotic value models. Kundera paid particular attention to the "mission of small nations," which, through the pursuit of their own identity and cultural recognition, resist totalitarian standardization [6, p. 33].

Ultimately, both the theoretical reflections of European intellectuals and concrete historical experience demonstrated that the cultural identity of Central Europe fundamentally differed from the one imposed by political authorities. The intellectual heritage and moral stance of leading resistance figures became important methodological guidelines for shaping public opinion, contributed to the delegitimization of immoral, corrupt, and clientelist practices of the totalitarian system, and facilitated the reproduction of key parameters of the Central European discourse on human dignity. Despite the unfavorable political context, this discourse performed a consolidating function and served as an effective counterweight to communist statism.

The Ukrainian "Cultural Trauma": The Destruction of the Lifeworld

One of the leading figures of the Ukrainian intellectual sphere, I. Dzyuba, convincingly points out that contemporary Ukrainian culture and public life are not only in a state of crisis but also characterized by structural incompleteness,

caused by a lack of institutional mechanisms typical of developed societies [7, pp. 4–5]. Above all, this refers to the absence of a full-fledged national-cultural foundation capable of ensuring the autonomous functioning of both the private and public spheres of social life. This circumstance significantly limits the potential for the formation of a fully developed civil society in Ukraine.

In response to this position, the well-known publicist M. Riabchuk emphasizes that the Soviet legacy led to a deep impoverishment of the individual's lifeworld, leaving the Ukrainian person in a state of moral and psychological oppression. According to him, the inertia of totalitarian practices continues to shape the logic of social life: beneath a renewed symbolic façade, traits of the old order remain visible. The formation of civil society occurs fragmentarily, primarily through the isolated efforts of intellectuals representing the civic discourse. At the same time, the state, in the researcher's view, has not undertaken a fundamental reassessment of its position, retaining characteristics of imperial and totalitarian orientation [8, p. 127].

The Ukrainian intellectual discourse also raises a fundamental ethical issue relevant to the Central European space – the problem of delayed rehabilitation of national culture and insufficient ideological distancing from the values of the totalitarian past. In this context, the position of Y. Sverstiuk is particularly important; he emphasized the necessity of recognizing the shared religious and cultural roots of Ukraine and Central Europe as an alternative to the Marxist-Leninist ideological monopoly [9, p. 74].

A crucial element of this process is the idea of cultural decentralization, which implies restoring significance to historical centers of Ukrainian culture and establishing new centers of spiritual gravity [9, p. 74]. Special attention in this context is given to the Lviv and Stanislaviv phenomena as potential focal points of sociocultural support for civil society.

At the same time, historical experience has shown that Ukrainian civil society has lacked adequate institutional foundations. A temporary alliance between national-democratic forces and the territorial nomenclature bureaucracy helped reduce social tension and channel societal energy toward the creation of an independent state. In a sense, this represented a Central European-style renaissance of Ukrainian society, accompanied by high expectations and hopes. However, over time, the initial euphoria gave way to disappointment, exacerbated by widespread social injustice, chaotic accumulation of primitive capital, uneven resource distribution, and the state's effective refusal to fulfill its social functions.

The profound transformations in the social structure – the emergence of specialized interest groups and the formation of private and corporate owners in production and services – were not accompanied by adequate legal and sociocultural regulation of the civil society space. As a result, during the period of independence, civil society operated mostly in a shadow or extralegal mode, without exerting a significant influence on the moral consolidation of society.

Initial Expectations and the Persistence of Bureaucratic Logic in Ukraine

The initial expectations associated with the awakening of civic activity, entrepreneurship, and the overcoming of Soviet models of paternalism were not realized. This was due to the persistence of the operational logic of the "system" in the Habermasian sense: the bureaucratic apparatus was not dismantled but, on the contrary, gained new opportunities to control the lifeworld of individuals. As R. Dergachov and V. Polokhalo rightly note, the nomenclature system never voluntarily relinquished power and never disappeared completely [11, pp. 21–23].

Instead of a scenario resembling a velvet revolution, Ukraine experienced a nomenclature-driven transformation, during which bureaucratic decentralization and privatization led to the fragmentation of a unified state system into competing clan-corporate groupings. In the economic sphere, a logic of interpenetration

between property and power became dominant, marking a defining feature of the new social reality.

Under these conditions, there was a shift from the classical bureaucratic state to a clan-bureaucratic model, characterized by a concentration of political power and private ownership. The state increasingly became alienated from society, while leaders of corporate structures began to play a central role in the public sphere, seeking to control state institutions, mass media, and the symbolic space at large. Meanwhile, horizontal ties between social groups remained weak, preventing the formation of solidarity and mutual trust.

In such a context, clientelist relations became the dominant mechanism of social integration, with consolidation stemming not from civic solidarity but from hierarchical corporate loyalty reinforced by corrupt practices. Official declarations regarding the development of a market economy and civil society proved to be more rhetorical than substantive, as they were not accompanied by transformations in the individual's lifeworld or the overcoming of clientelist discourse.

Conclusions. It must be acknowledged that neither the political transformations of the early twenty-first century nor constitutional changes have created conditions in Ukraine for the full functioning of specialized social groups and communities. The process of building civil society is complicated by a deep crisis of the state system, manifested in a deficit of legitimacy, limited citizen participation in decision-making, ineffective conflict regulation, and widespread distrust of state institutions. This crisis stems from the nomenclature-shadow nature of the state structure, the imbalance among branches of power, and citizens' disappointment in the state's ability to act in their interests.

Overcoming this state of social anomie is possible only through the restoration of the sociocultural fabric of society, which must serve as the value-based foundation for an authentic civil society in Ukraine. Clearly, this is a long and complex process that extends beyond a single political cycle. Yet without its

implementation, the state risks remaining in a mode of superficial imitation of external value and symbolic models, which in the long term may lead to the destruction of organic social ties and the loss of state agency.

The reversal of destructive trends is possible only by returning to the value-normative foundations of the Central European model of civil society, which reflects Ukraine's shared historical destiny with the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe and can serve as a basis for restoring human dignity, solidarity, and social trust.

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