

3 EMBEDDEDNESS OF CIVIC ADVOCACY CSOs IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: AN EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT

This chapter is an empirical exploration of the current situation of selected aspects of Czech civil society. It contributes to recent discussions on the situation of civil societies in Central and Eastern European countries, drawing on previous normative considerations and historical outlines of the evolution of basic civil society institutions, contexts, and actors.

As mentioned in the introduction, we focus on a particular function of civil society, advocacy, as we understand it to be the key indicator of the “maturity” of the Czech civil sphere, as primarily the political layer of non-state nonprofit activities was suspended during the Communist regime. Through an analysis of the state of civic advocacy, we want to engage in the discussions on the presumed weakness of civil society in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries reported by some observers (Rose 1999; Rose et al. 1996; Howard 2003; Howard 2011; for overview see Dvořáková 2008) two decades after the regime change of 1989. The assessment of civil societies in CEE countries as weak is usually evidenced by sparse organizational civic infrastructure, low membership in civil society organizations, insufficient community activism, and privatism of citizens in these countries. In the previous chapters, we presented an overall picture of Czech civil society and its evolution, showing that there are a relatively high number of active civil society organizations (CSOs) and also that a considerable share of citizens contribute individually to civic advocacy activities and/or support civic campaigns. On the other hand, there are also indicators of low citizen interest in membership in advocacy-oriented CSOs as well as an overall decline in the number of volunteers between 2005 and 2010. In what sense, then, may we speak of weak civil society? Or, what does it mean to speak about a weak (Czech) civil society?

Discussions on the (presumed) weakness of post-communist civil societies often seem to mention low citizen activity within CSOs, focusing on the low membership in CSOs in post-communist countries. The connection between individual and organized levels of civic advocacy is implicitly criticized as weak, or, in other words, it is

the connection between citizens and CSOs that is understood to be insufficient and poor. In the following pages, we take three steps. First, we show that the claims of weakness of civil societies in post-communist countries are often implicitly based on a specific tradition of civil society theory that privileges organized, mass-mobilizing bodies in a civic sphere and disregards the importance of individual and only loosely and indirectly coordinated civic engagement. Second, we conceptualize this disconnection between the individual and organized layers of civil society as a problem of the embeddedness of civil society actors. Third, we empirically explore this disconnection between organizations and citizens within the sphere of civic advocacy.

3.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Background: Four Ideal Types of Civil Society Development

As most critiques of the quality of civil societies in Eastern Europe seem to point at the inadequacy of the collective or organized level of civic advocacy, we focus here on contextualizing this perspective within the broad tradition of thinking on civil society. We suggest that it is useful to make a distinction between the organized and individual levels of civic engagement, or, in other words, between different types of coordinating individuals within the civil sphere, and between the possible types of this coordination. This distinction may be traced from the philosophical to the theoretical and even to the research layer of civil society inquiry.

Generally speaking, different perspectives of civil society, stemming from different traditions of civil society theory and research, emphasize different levels of engagement for civil society actors. In political-philosophical terms, one key tradition seems to build upon the tradition of civil society conceptualization, referring to the work of Tocqueville, and underlines the civic collective bodies themselves as the core civil infrastructure rather than the involvement of individual members. Another classical tradition of civil society theory comes from the “Rousseau-to-Habermas” tradition. In this perspective, it is primarily the involvement of free and equal individuals that makes

civil society something distinct and valuable in relation to the hierarchy of the family, the anonymity of the market, and the instrumentality of the political system. These two conceptions describing which type of actors primarily constitute civil society may be identified as the main ways of looking at how civil society is theorized, conceptualized, and studied empirically.

Both of the aforementioned political-theoretical perspectives find their more empirically oriented advocates among social science theorists and researchers. The first strand of empirical research is focused at the meso-level and maps the organizational behavior and the collective processes outside the areas of the state and of the market. Following Tocquevillian tradition, these theorists conceive civil society primarily as a civil sector and describe it through the concepts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), some more broadly as civil society organizations (CSOs), some as social movements and their organizations (SMOs), some as local and grassroots associations, and some as social enterprises. A more complex definition describes civil society as being populated by “community or grassroots associations, social movements, labor unions, professional groups, advocacy and development NGOs, formally registered nonprofits, social enterprises, and many others” (Edwards 2011: 7; see also Edwards et al. 2001; Zald, McCarthy 2003; Davis et al. 2005). Typically, these organizations are considered primarily as the spaces in which the individual involvement of citizens is collectively coordinated and through which the citizens are given autonomy, voice, and power (e.g. Moore 1978; Piven, Cloward 1979; della Porta 2009).

Another research perspective emphasizes citizen active involvement in extra-institutional activities and focuses on the individual attitudes and contributions to civil society events, structures, and processes (Barnes, Kaase 1989; Brady et al. 1995). This perspective stresses the role of temporal and loose interpersonal networks, platforms, campaigns, and temporary events and – probably most importantly – the individual engagement in the form of volunteering, event participation, financial support for groups, campaigns, or advocacy projects and active citizenship (ethical consumerism, charity giving, writing letters to public officials, etc.). According to this perspective, the increasing new means of communication, the widening

repertoire of political participation, and the arrival of the digital age seem to have changed profoundly the usual methods of citizen coordination within the realm of civil activities and to offer new opportunities for the individual engagement of citizens. (Norris 2001; Zukin et al. 2005; Shirky 2008; van Deth 2012)

Apart from the various types of civic engagement that are considered in these traditions of civil society research and theorizing, we may also consider another dimension, which is the level of collective coordination of this engagement and which may enable us to assess the important character of civil society. In other words, while focusing on the individual or collective engagement in a particular (period of evolution of) civil society, it is also important to assess the extent to which this engagement is coordinated with other actors and thus constitutes a socially rich and politically effective infrastructure of civil society. By combining the aforementioned criteria, we may differentiate between various basic means of civic engagement (see Table 8).

Table 8: Basic means of civic engagement

		Level of coordination	
		<i>low</i>	<i>high</i>
Type of engagement	<i>individual</i>	Dispersed and indirect civic participation	Civic participation through CSOs and civic networks
	<i>collective</i>	CSOs as isolated (public) interest groups	CSOs as cooperating networks and coalitions

Source: Authors

It is obvious that these means of civic engagement usually overlap and are not mutually exclusive in particular national civil societies. Previous research has shown that each civil society may differ in the level of collective coordination within its individual and organized activities, and thus different patterns in civil society structures and dynamics arise. We therefore propose to distinguish among different combinations of the aforementioned means of civic engagement in order to differentiate among four main “modes” of civic engagement in contemporary civil societies.

We may refer to the first mode of civic engagement (combining a low level of coordination of both individual and collective engagement) as “*fragmented*”. This type entails the indirect and privatized involvement of citizens who usually avoid having any enduring contacts with each other or with CSOs, and are instead using on-line instruments, ethical consumerism, and other indirect tools allowing individual civic engagement. The activity of organized actors is mostly isolated as well and for various reasons: competition for resources, high-profile CSOs, low levels of trust among the civic organizations, etc. This combination of these modes of individual and organized engagement usually results in a very low number of mass physical mobilizations, low CSO membership, low public attendance of protest events, and the practical non-existence of strong social movements and CSO alliances. In other words, transactions/social bonds between organizations and citizens and between organized civil actors themselves are largely missing (Diani 2003; Baldassarri, Diani 2007).

The second mode (combining a high level of coordination of the individual activities and a low level of coordination at the CSO level) may be labeled as “*pillarized*” civic engagement. It is typified by a considerable mass coordination of citizen engagement through direct and coordinated participation with CSOs or their activities. On the other hand, this engagement is either largely self-organized or coordinated by particular CSOs or by loose ad-hoc platforms and constantly changing initiatives sharing more or less the same political or cultural opinion leaders and organizations (former dissidents, journalists, actors, businessmen). CSOs are largely focused on their own constituency and its particular needs, and have no interest in mobilizing a larger part of society or engaging in cooperation with other organizations. They focus rather on particular issues or projects and act more like interest groups – in isolation from other CSOs and with a rather narrow vision of their mission rather than with broad long-term political goals. Typical examples are local trade unions mobilizing workers in particular factories or enterprises, local NIMBY groups, and series of frequent yet one-off local or nationwide initiatives that use specific opportunities and mobilize citizens for instant purposes, often in a social environment characterized by profound distrust

towards political elite and organized political activities (Císař 2008; Dvořáková 2003).

The third type (consisting of a low level of coordination of individual participation and highly coordinated CSO activities) is a “*transactional*” civic engagement: it is based on the notion of transactional activism. (Petrova, Tarrow 2007; Císař 2008; Císař 2010) Growing theoretical discontent with analyzing the CEE societies only through the lens of the concepts of grassroots and membership-based civil society actors led to a focus on the relations among the collective actors themselves instead of on their capacity to mobilize a population and directly engage citizens in their activities. In the post-communist context, the apparent lack of mass membership in social movements and lack of popular mobilizations is compensated for by the plurality of CSOs and various civic organizations. These tend to focus not on mobilizing people but rather on linking themselves to each other and cooperating with authorities/institutions in order to promote their goals while making use of professional staff. They tend to be financially dependent on external sources (EU grants, foundations, public funding, etc.). This type of civil society realm is dominated by a good proportion of activity of organized civic actors that interact with each other, share a common identity, and join coalitions to promote their interests, with a very scarce presence of citizen involvement. Individual civic engagement is rather rare, indirect, or remote, and takes place mostly outside the organized civil sphere.

The last type of civic engagement (combining high level of coordination of both individual and collective engagement) may be called a “*social movement*” one (Meyer, Tarrow 1998; Rucht, Neidhardt 2002, Corrigan-Brown 2012). This notion was developed in pre-war Western Europe and the US and describes a civil society inhabited by dense networks of CSOs that cooperate with each other, build upon various collective identities, promote shared goals and standards, and use common symbols and language. Collective actors are able to create large ad-hoc coalitions or instrumental platforms across various sectors and issues, and social movement organization activities combine with massive engagement of citizens in terms of event attendance and membership in CSOs or volunteering. In other words, the relationship between CSOs and their constituency is strong

and based on mutual trust; civil societies of this type build upon the mass mobilization capacities of networked civil organizations and other collective actors that rely on the permanent involvement of citizens. In this perspective, civic advocacy is defined as the facilitation of democracy through grassroots social action (Hager 2010: 1096).

By outlining this basic analytical framework we suggest that to evaluate the quality of particular society, two key dimensions should be taken into account: the quality of relations between organized civil society actors, and the quality of relations between organized civil society actors and citizens. As the former aspect has already become a subject of systematic empirical research and scholarly debates, this study is focusing on the latter one.

3.2 Czech Civic Advocacy

Civic advocacy and its collective representatives – be they CSOs, social movements, or other actors – have usually been considered as the offspring of the society as a whole, both as a reflection of its vital needs and a tool for their fulfillment on the level of societal and political system. Does this vision apply in the Czech Republic? After the basic analytical framework for assessing the quality or strength of civil societies has been specified, it now may be applied to post-communist civil societies in general (and the Czech civil society in particular). When the perspective emphasizing the individual type of engagement in civil society is applied and the mass personal involvement and individual participation in the collective organizations of civil society is highlighted, it is hard to speak unambiguously about robust civil societies in CEE countries. Existing empirical research generally suggests that there is a low level of individual intra-organizational participation, solidarity, and trust towards civic collective actors, resulting in organizational passivity and civil privatism of the citizens. (McMahon 2001; Howard 2003; Newton, Monterro 2007) On the other hand, the research focusing specifically on the new forms of individual participation reveals that Czech citizens seem to be very active in the civic sphere, engaging with outside organizations through internet activism, political consumerism, e-donations, and

financial contributions to various campaigns (Pospíšil et al. 2012; Pospíšil 2013). Czech citizens fare relatively well in this area, even in comparison with Western democracies (Charities Aid Foundation 2012).

Taking into account the collective type of civic engagement, it seems that the aforementioned extra-organizational engagement of the citizens is supplemented by less embedded civic actors that focus on horizontal cooperation with other SMOs or on vertical relations (either conflicting or cooperative) with elites and the system rather than on the engagement of citizens. Some CEE countries seem to be comparatively developed in terms of the number of civil society organizations, details of their legal frameworks, richness of sectoral divisions, and the structure of financing (state versus private donors) (Flam 2001; Petrova, Tarrow 2007; Císař 2008; see Müller and Skovajsa 2009 for overview). It has been widely argued that one of the main reasons for the relatively well-developed and organized civil society infrastructure in our countries (apart from the rapid opening of political opportunities for various political actors) is the role played by external supporters of the democratic change – i.e. foreign donors, mostly from the United States. These supporters considered advocacy as a key function for stabilizing new democracies, and a lot of issues could not have been addressed in our societies if this external support had not reached particular actors here – especially human rights, transparency, environmental issues, equal opportunities, etc. Although US and EU private foundations and state institutions supported service providers and community organizations, they focused mainly on human rights, advocacy, green, and watchdog NGOs (Quigley, 1997; Carothers, 1999). Research focused specifically on the capacity of Czech collective civic actors to connect with each other – either domestically or internationally – indicated that a substantial number of CSOs are very actively networking, transmitting resources, information, and skills, and entering into the processes of negotiation with authorities. These CSOs are usually in the field of post-materialist contention and are mostly environmental, human rights, anticorruption, or GLBT CSOs. (Císař 2008; Císař et al. 2011)

After the years of building an organized civic advocacy infrastructure, it was generally believed that advocacy organizations

would become widely accepted and socially embedded in Czech society and – according to the aforementioned scheme – would resemble Western “social movement societies”. It seems that instead we have a constellation of types and scopes of civic actor coordination that may be identified rather as a “transactional civil society”. As previous research suggests, there is an active stratum of organized “advocates without members” as well as a considerable number of citizens engaging in civic activities through extra-organizational means, with only sporadic mass-attended events (see also Dvořáková 2003). We are thus witnessing some kind of a gap between the level of coordination of collective and individual civic engagements. We propose that this gap should be explored. In other words, while organized actors are able to form advocacy coalitions and networks, individual engagement remained dispersed and unorganized, but not passive. This is a general evaluation of Czech civil society, and despite its clear overlap with the area of civic advocacy, a more focused inquiry should be conducted.

To formulate our puzzle in conceptual terms, we focus on the mutual relations between the individual and organized spheres of civic advocacy; in other words, on the problem of the social embeddedness of civic advocacy. The concept of embeddedness has been used in different theoretical contexts, and its definition ranges from a rather restricted one – the relationship between civil society actors and political institutions (Haddad 2006) – to a general one – the position of these actors within a particular social order that is defined by a shared understanding of its purposes (Fligstein, McAdam 2012). We take the middle course, understanding the embeddedness of advocacy CSOs in a more traditional fashion as the capacity of these organizations to function in a reciprocal manner with their (local) social environment (cf. Polanyi 1992; Granovetter 1985) – in other words, as their capacity to become rooted in broader social networks of individuals, to incorporate them within the inner structure of organizations or groups, to provide them with access into their internal processes, to gain their trust, and to mobilize them on different occasions.

To explore mutual relations or reciprocity between advocacy CSOs and citizens, we have formulated several research questions. First, in light of the issue of discrepancy between organizational and individual

levels of civil advocacy, we focus on CSOs as the main organized bearers of advocacy function in our societies. Generally, we ask:

- *What are the differences between engagement in advocacy and non-advocacy CSOs?*
- *What are the obstacles for advocacy CSOs that want to involve citizens in their structures and activities?*
- *What are the obstacles for citizens who want to enter into closer relations with advocacy CSOs?*

In order to find valid answers and address our research concerns in a detailed and complex way, we further specified and transformed our questions into more focused and mutually connected research sub-questions:

- *What are the differences between membership in advocacy and non-advocacy CSOs in the Czech Republic when taking into account also the European context?*
- *What are the levels, forms, areas, and motives for direct and indirect involvement of Czech citizens in civil advocacy?*
- *What are the attitudes of Czech citizens towards advocacy issues and CSOs?*
- *What are the levels and forms of direct and indirect involvement of Czech citizens within activities and structures of advocacy CSOs?*
- *What are the attitudes of representatives of Czech CSOs towards the involvement of citizens within their structures and activities?*

3.3 Data and Methods

We draw on two major data sources: the European Value Study and the “Has Our Dream Come True?” project.

The survey for the data from the European Value Study (EVS) was conducted between 2008–2010 in 47 countries in Western and Central-Eastern Europe. The dataset was used to analyze citizen membership in voluntary organizations. The question was: “Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organizations and activities and say which, if any, do you belong to?” The following

options were available: social welfare services for elderly, handicapped, or deprived people; religious or church organizations; education, arts, music, or cultural activities; trade unions; political parties or groups; community action on issues like poverty, employment, housing, racial equality; third world development or human rights; conservation, the environment, ecology, animal rights; professional associations; youth work (e.g., scouts, guides, youth clubs, etc.); sports or recreation; women's groups; peace movement; voluntary organizations concerned with health; other groups; or none of them. We selected social welfare, cultural, sport, and youth activities for analysis of membership as non-advocacy types; women's, political, peace movement, and trade union groups were selected for analysis as advocacy types. Other groups were not included as they cannot be easily identified with advocacy, with service provision, or with community building (typically these groups concerned community action, environmental protection, religion, or health issues). We do not claim that the types of organizations that were not selected are not (or cannot be) involved in advocacy activities; on the contrary, our own research shows that advocacy activities may be identified across many different issue sectors (see below). However, we do claim that the selected sectors in the EVS data may be more directly associated with either a high or low proportion of advocacy activities than the others, and thus we use them as a proxy for evaluating the embeddedness of advocacy and non-advocacy activities in civil society.

The data used were collected within the framework of an international comparative research project on the embeddedness of civil societies in seven CEE countries ("Has Our Dream Come True? Comparative Research of Central and Eastern European Civil Societies").

In order to answer these questions, we used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. In the quantitative part, we rely on an individual survey (N=800) that was based on a quota sampling strategy and was conducted via telephone interviews; in the qualitative part we used focus groups and personal semi-structured interviews with representatives of advocacy CSOs. With the survey, we intended to map the levels and means of citizen involvement in civic advocacy and their attitudes towards advocacy CSOs. If we found that citizens were somehow involved, we asked them how they were involved and

how precisely they got involved; we further asked about their motives, obstacles, information channels, and the mechanisms of their involvement (or non-involvement); we asked their opinions on CSOs and on various aspects of their activities; and we assessed their trust in various social institutions. These data were compared with the findings from the interviews with CSOs.

Realizing the potential impact of different issue areas and policy fields on citizen engagement, we used the individual survey to map the attitudes and relations of citizens with regard to fifteen different advocacy sectors and CSOs (children's rights; disability rights; anticorruption; personal security; human and citizen rights and freedoms; environment; education, health, social policy; consumer protection; animal rights; women's rights; economic policy; work of democratic institutions; international and global issues; national minority rights; and LGBT rights). Even if we acknowledge that many advocacy activities take place outside these sectors, we aim to map only those issue areas that are most explicitly connected with the advocacy or political function of civil society (contrary to e.g. sectors connected with sports or culture). We focused on three main dimensions here: first, we mapped the opinions of citizens towards the importance of CSO activities in these sectors (7-point scale). Second, we focused on their perception of the actual engagement of CSOs in these sectors (7-point scale). Finally, we focused on the (reported) engagement of citizens in these sectors (4-point scale). Following the average ranking of the respective dimensions of the listed advocacy areas, we elaborated an "embeddedness index" that shows the multidimensional embeddedness of the listed advocacy areas. To make these dimensions fully comparable, we present the ranking of particular advocacy areas in these dimensions instead of showing exact numeric results.

The qualitative part of the project included thirty-one semi-structured interviews with key CSO members and four focus groups with CSO representatives. The aim of the qualitative methodology was to get a picture of the embeddedness of advocacy organizations and their campaigns from the side of the collective actors (CSOs and informally organized groups). The sampling strategy followed previous theoretical considerations and applied some further criteria. The sample was created as a combination of three basic criteria: the

advocacy area of the group (groups from four of the most and four of the least-embedded advocacy areas were invited), the focus of the group (fifteen nationwide and sixteen local), and the level of its embeddedness as evaluated by the individual survey results (fifteen involving citizens and sixteen not involving citizens). The interviews were all conducted in January 2011. Despite the complex sampling strategy, our sample is obviously too small to be deemed as entirely representative for the field of organized advocacy in the Czech Republic. Nonetheless, we use the data more in an explorative and illustrative fashion as an intermediary methodological tool between individual survey and in-depth focus group interviews in order to capture some important formal features of CSO strategies and policies towards their social environment. In the semi-structured interviews, we focused on how these actors actually relate to their constituency and the public in general: their formal approaches with regard to the institution of membership, their involvement of the public into their activities, and their consultations with citizens.

Using focus group in-depth interviews with key members of 17 CSOs, we attempted to sketch more normative attitudes and the latent motives of CSO representatives towards the inclusion of citizens into their inner structures and activities, and to draw more subtle map of meanings underlying their relations with the public. The interviews were recorded and analyzed in order to depict the motives, normative positions, and justifications of CSO members towards relations with their social environment. We analyzed the recordings and inductively searched for more general patterns of motivation toward (non-)cooperation with extra-organizational environments. These two features of qualitative methodology are also connected via the sampling strategy: the focus group data provided, among other things, an expert assessment of the most and least-embedded advocacy CSOs and their campaigns within the least and the most embedded advocacy areas.

We organized four focus group interviews (approximately 100 minutes each):

FG 1, Brno, 20th January 2011: three participants representing the CSOs from the least-embedded advocacy areas (economic policy, national minority rights, LGBT rights) with a simultaneous focus on advocacy at the local level.

FG 2, Brno, 20th January 2011: five participants representing the CSOs from the most-embedded advocacy areas (children's rights, disability rights, environment), with a simultaneous focus on advocacy at the local level.

FG 3, Prague, 21st January 2011: five participants representing the CSOs from the least-embedded advocacy areas with a simultaneous focus on advocacy at the national level.

FG 4, Prague, 21st January 2011: four participants representing the CSOs from the most-embedded advocacy areas with a simultaneous focus on advocacy at the national level.

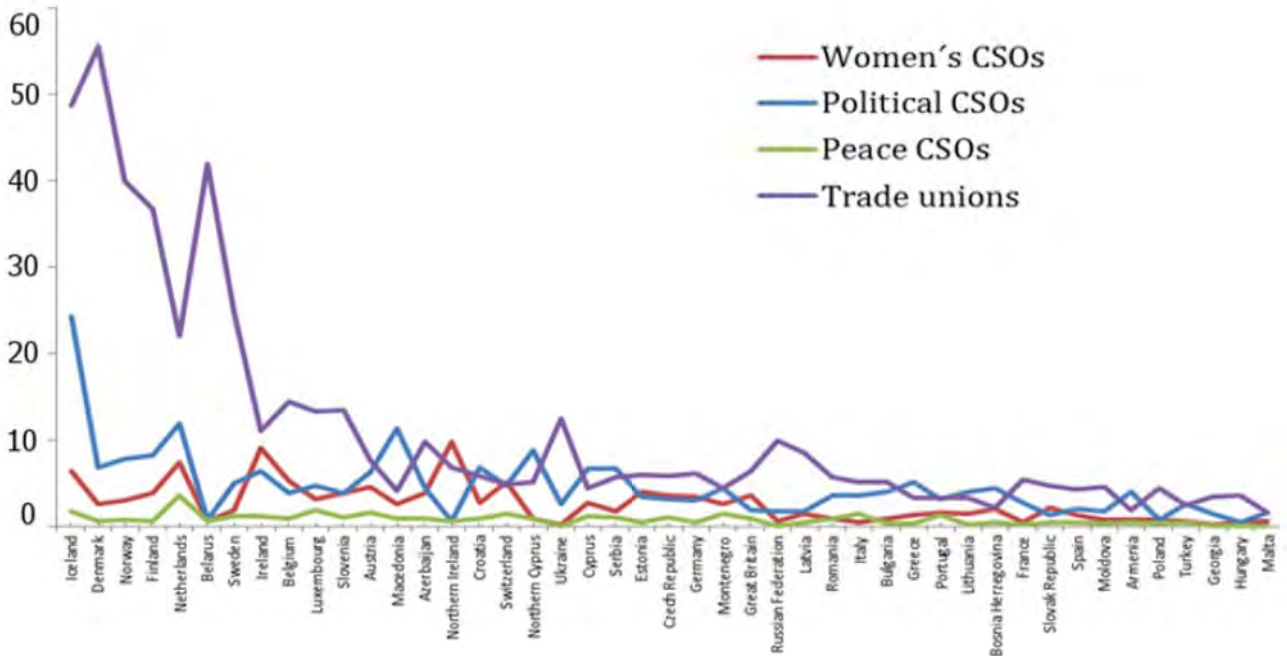
3.4 Membership in Advocacy and Non-advocacy Groups Compared

After clarifying the theoretical and conceptual issues, we compare organized advocacy and non-advocacy civic engagement in the Czech Republic to that of other European countries. The exploration of politically-oriented activities within the realm of civil society revealed several things (Figure 4). First, one of the most unevenly distributed types of membership is in the trade unions, with the highest rates among Northern countries, with some post-communist countries (Belarus, Ukraine). The distribution of membership in other types of advocacy organizations (women's, political, peace) is less varied. The overall picture suggests that Western countries have generally higher memberships, but with quite a lot of exceptions from Eastern Europe – particularly because of the high number of members in their trade unions. The Czech Republic is situated exactly in the middle of the selected European countries.

Data on the non-political engagement of citizens in groups or organizations suggest more uneven distribution of membership than in the previous case (see Figure 5). Most of the leading countries are from Western Europe; Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Estonia are the only Central-Eastern European countries in the top third of the countries on the list. The Czech Republic occupies the twelfth position, eleven place-ranks higher than in advocacy organization membership. This is the second largest shift to the top of the chart in the list

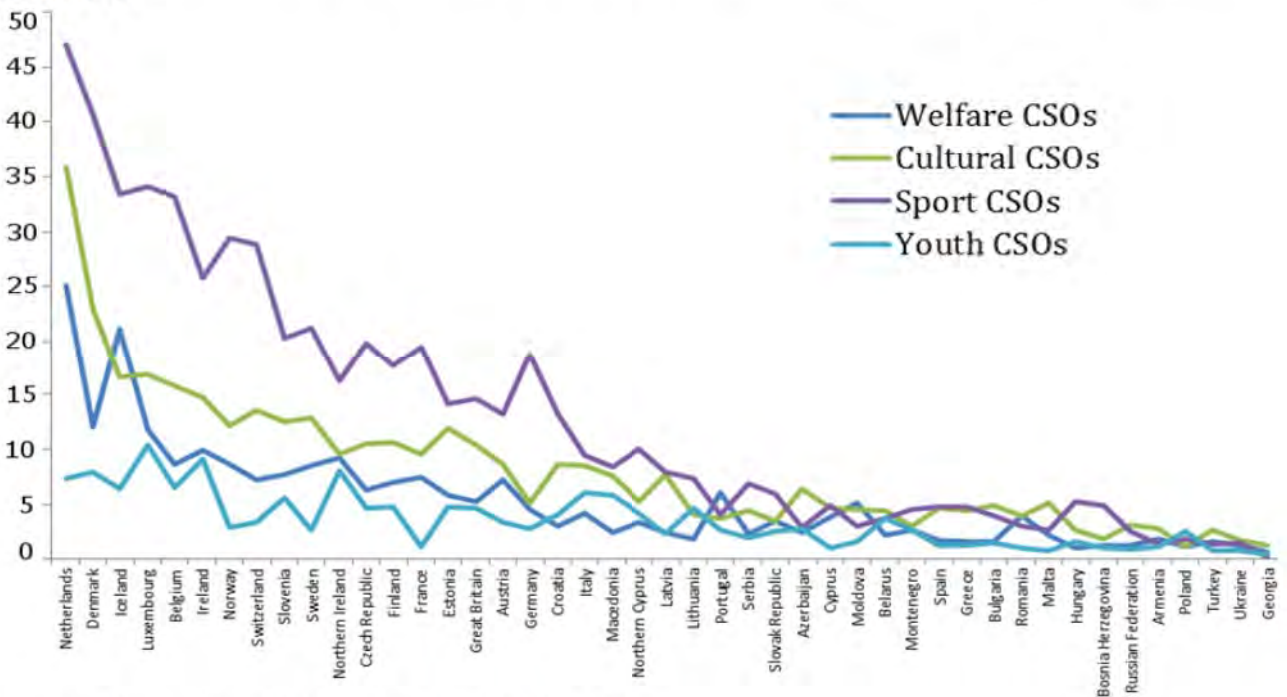
(compared to the position in Figure 4), after France (22 ranks). The largest shifts downward for membership in non-political organizations were experienced by Belarus and Ukraine (both by 25 ranks).

Figure 4: Membership in civic advocacy organizations in European countries



Source: European Value Study 2008–2010

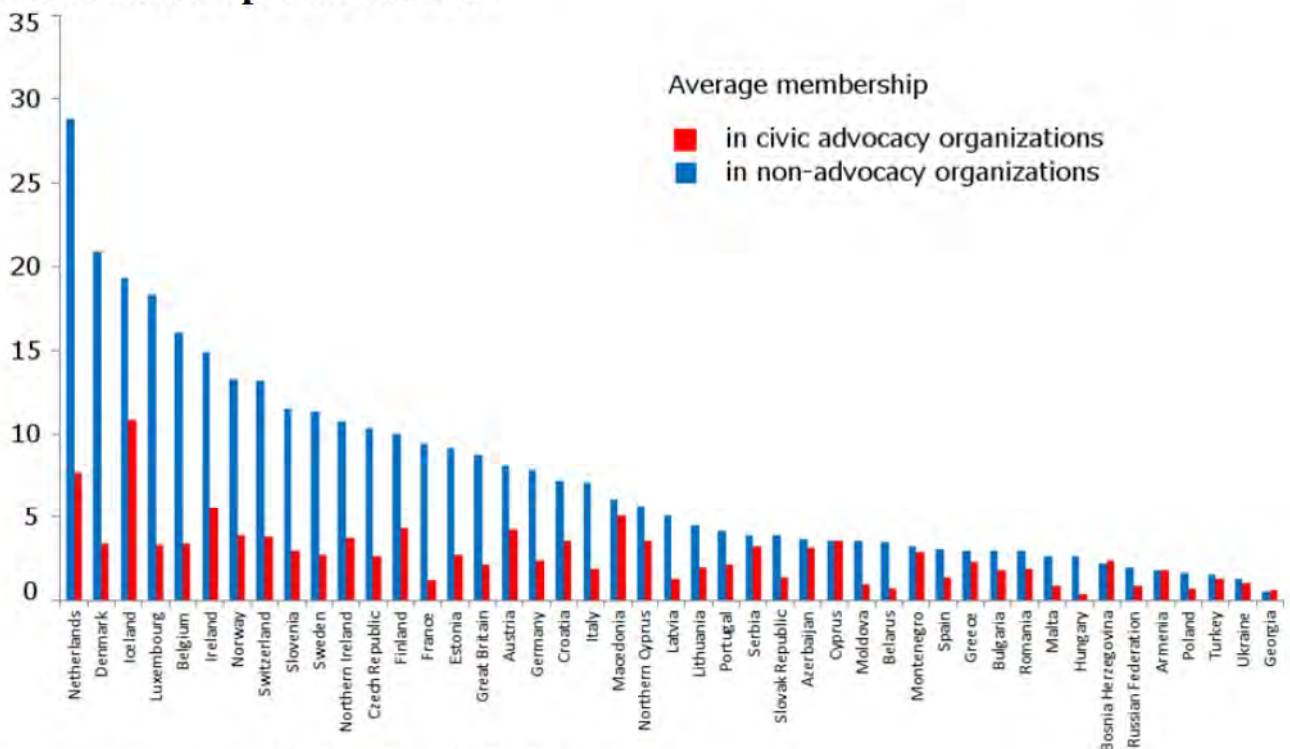
Figure 5: Membership in civic non-advocacy organizations in European countries



Source: European Value Study 2008–2010

If we compare both figures, focusing on the averages of the non-advocacy and advocacy organization memberships (see Figure 6), membership in non-advocacy organizations clearly prevails in most countries. This is even more visible in the first part of the chart, where most of the Western Europeans countries are situated. The Czech Republic has the twelfth-largest gap between average membership scores in advocacy and non-advocacy organizations.

Figure 6: Average membership in civic advocacy and non-advocacy organizations in European countries



Source: European Value Study 2008–2010

The difference in the ranking of the Czech Republic between these two types of organizational membership is the point of departure for our further empirical investigation. It seems that in non-advocacy areas and activities, Czech citizens are quite similar to the countries that are usually described as “mature” democracies with long traditions of vibrant civil society, and are clearly separated from the rest of the post-communist countries (with the exceptions of Slovenia and Estonia). However, the ranking of organized engagement in the advocacy areas is much lower: the Czech rank suddenly dropped to the middle of the chart, surrounded by other post-communist countries. What are the causes of this discrepancy? Why are Czech

citizens unwilling to join advocacy-oriented CSOs? What are the strategies of these CSOs for engaging citizens?

3.5 Individual Participation in Civic Advocacy Activities

First, we start by exploring the aspects and forms and patterns of civic engagement and non-engagement of Czech citizens. The general level of public participation in civic advocacy activities among Czech citizens is relatively high: almost one third of respondents declare their personal involvement in civic advocacy activities (see Table 9). In other words, two decades after the regime change, about one third of the citizens participate in civic activities with an exclusive political dimension.

Table 9: Personal involvement in civic advocacy activities (N=800)

	%
<i>Yes</i>	32.9
<i>No</i>	66.9
<i>NA</i>	0.2
<i>Total</i>	100

Source: Czech Survey 2010

First, it is important to explore the non-participation in civic advocacy activities. Even if people are not actively engaged at the moment, they may become involved later and they plan this involvement. Although the answers to inquiries about future action may not be very reliable, they may nonetheless indicate some trends. However, data on possible future engagements reveal that only 13% of the people that are not engaged at the moment are considering future civic involvement (Table 10).

Table 10: Intended future involvement in civic advocacy activities (N=535)

	%
<i>Yes</i>	13.0
<i>No</i>	83.4
<i>DK</i>	3.6
<i>Total</i>	100.0

Source: Czech Survey 2010

It seems that the most popular issues for planned individual engagement are children's rights and environmental issues, while minority rights and non-domestic issues are at the bottom of the list. As shown in Table 11, the preferences of people who are not engaged in civic advocacy are very similar to the preferences of those who are.

Table 11: Ranking of advocacy areas according to planned involvement (N=17)

<i>Priority</i>	<i>Planned personal involvement in the area</i>
1	children's rights
2	animal rights
3	environment
4	disability rights
5	human and citizens rights and freedoms
6	personal security
7	women's rights
8	consumer protection
9	anticorruption
10	education, health, social policy
11	work of democratic institutions
12	economic policy
13	LGBT rights
14	international and global issues
15	national minority rights

Source: Czech Survey 2010

After a closer look at the citizens that are not involved in civic advocacy, we now turn to the exploration of the participating ones. We may begin to explore the forms of their reported engagement. Based on these data, we may conclude that (1) there is an obviously disproportionate structure to the particular forms of individual participation that (2) explains the relatively high proportion of active participants in civic advocacy activities (see Table 12). The vast majority of people that are active in advocacy prefer donations or some form of loose support rather than more direct engagement, e.g., as a member of a CSO or as a voluntary worker. This helps explain why many Czech citizens easily declare themselves to be active in civic advocacy. On the other

hand, a decent share of respondents is engaged in voluntary activities, although not through membership in CSOs.

Table 12: Forms of personal involvement in civic advocacy activities (N=263)

	%
<i>donation</i>	89.8
<i>supporter (signing petitions, participating in campaign)</i>	52.4
<i>voluntary work</i>	37.0
<i>chatting, blogging, etc.</i>	26.5
<i>member of a CSO</i>	20.3
<i>other (promoting ideas and attitudes)</i>	5.3
<i>DK</i>	.2

Source: Czech Survey 2010

This general look at the basic structure of citizens' reported engagement may be further differentiated and detailed by focusing on various issue areas of civic advocacy and differentiating between citizens' attitudes towards collective activities in these areas, their perception of collective activities, and their own engagement in these areas (see Table 13).

First, we assess the "attitude dimension", or the importance of CSO engagement in these areas as perceived by citizens. The areas where the organized activities are perceived as the most important overlap with humanitarian issues and with the protection of the most vulnerable social groups – disabled people and children. The massive preference for the anti-corruption issue may be a reflection of the current political discourse. Animal and environmental issues – which tend to be over-emphasized in the mass media – are somewhere in the middle of the list, together with personal security, education, and consumer protection themes. The least support for organized advocacy activities was expressed for national/ethnic minority rights (presumably tied to the issues of the Roma minority) and LGBT rights (presumably a consequence of a feeling of "mission accomplished": registered (civil) same-sex partnership was established under Czech law in 2006).

Table 13: Ranking of advocacy areas according to the importance of CSO activity, perceived CSO activity, and personal involvement (N=263)

<i>Importance of CSO advocacy activities in the area</i>	<i>Perceived activity of civic organizations in the area</i>	<i>Personal involvement in the civic activities in the area</i>
children's rights	children's rights	children's rights
disability rights	environment	disability rights
anti-corruption	national minority rights	animal rights
environment	human rights and freedoms	environment
personal security	animal rights	human rights and freedoms
human rights and freedoms	disability rights	education, health, social policy
education, health, social policy	women's rights	personal security
animal rights	consumer protection	international and global issues
consumer protection	international and global issues	consumer protection
women's rights	LGBT rights	anti-corruption
work of democratic institutions	education, health, social policy	women's rights
economic policy	work of democratic institutions	work of democratic institutions
international and global issues	personal security	national minority rights
national minority rights	economic policy	economic policy
LGBT rights	anti-corruption	LGBT rights

Source: Czech Survey 2010

The “cognitive dimension” of the embeddedness of advocacy areas concerns the perceived level of activity of CSOs in particular areas. It seems that children's rights are perceived as being well covered by CSOs. But many other issue areas where the importance of collective activism is deemed very high are thought to be neglected by CSOs, or

CSOs are believed to devote too much effort to issue areas that are not important. In other words, CSO activities may be perceived as wasted on low-priority areas and, as a result, in short supply in high-priority areas.

The dimension of actual personal involvement in various advocacy areas is consistent with the preceding lists in a very particular way. There are basically two key patterns here: first, children's rights are still the most important issue area, which is consistent with the previous stance. But otherwise it seems that the level of personal involvement in various advocacy areas follows the priorities of the perceived need for CSO involvement rather than the perceived activities of CSOs. Citizens perceive the activities of organized civic actors as inconsistent with their own opinion of the needs for coordinated action in particular advocacy areas and with their own individual engagement. There are areas (disability rights, anti-corruption, and personal security) that are perceived as important, evaluated as rather insufficiently covered by CSOs, and, perhaps for that reason, people report that they engage in these areas. On the other hand, there are areas (environment, women's rights, national minority rights, and LGBT rights) that are perceived as less important, that are evaluated as being sufficiently covered by CSOs, and, possibly in consequence, people do not engage in these areas. These relations may signal some kind of "compensating mechanisms" that are at work in 10 out of 15 advocacy issue areas. This indicates that people have their own evaluations of the importance of various issues and they try to follow these evaluations in their individual engagements in civil society, thus compensating for the different focus by CSOs, or citizens may evaluate the extent of actual activity of organized collective actors and then avoid their own engagement in those areas where they believe the activity of CSOs is high enough. Either way, this is an important signal of a distance between individual citizens and organized civic actors.

The final important aspect of the attitude of both participating and non-participating citizens and CSOs are the means of communication by which citizens get their picture of CSOs, be it direct transfer of information and knowledge at various public events, or mass-produced presentations of CSOs that are offered by the mainstream media. The

data (Table 14) offer a picture that is quite consistent with previous findings. The most influential means of communication are the most “impersonal”: television and newspapers, followed by the Internet and radio. It is striking that there is no significant difference between engaged and unengaged citizens: the most direct means of getting information are almost the least used.

Table 14: Channels of information about CSOs and their activities

Engaged in civic advocacy (N=263) *Unengaged in civic advocacy (N=535)*

Television	Television
Newspapers, magazines	Newspapers, magazines
Internet	Internet
Radio	Radio
Other	Friends, family
Activists	Other
Friends, family	Street posters, leaflets
Street posters, leaflets	Activists
Attending event	Mail
Mail	Attending event
Telephone	Telephone

Source: Czech Survey 2010

3.6 Social Embeddedness of Advocacy CSOs

After presenting an overview of the patterns and forms of non-/engagement of Czech citizens in civic advocacy activities, we go a step further and explore the organizational level of civic activities: the CSOs. To combine the analysis of the individual and organizational levels of embeddedness of civic advocacy, we focus on the willingness of CSOs to involve citizens and on the strategies of such involvement, examining the sample of thirty-one CSOs from the four most-embedded (seventeen organizations) and the four least-embedded (fourteen organizations) advocacy areas (both nominally open and closed to citizens; both local and nationwide). We then compare the attributes and strategies of these two groups of CSOs and their campaigns.

One of the most important indicators of how willing CSOs are to integrate citizens into their structures and activities is the institution of membership: we know that there may be elite, closed, and profess-

sionalized CSOs, but there are also grassroots and open groups. What is the situation within our sample? And how does this apply to the most/least-embedded advocacy issue areas?

Our data suggest that organizations in the most-embedded advocacy areas are slightly more likely to be based on (individual) membership than others (see Table 15): even an informal form of membership, which is usually more exclusive than the formal one, may be often found there.

Table 15: Types of organizational memberships and their distribution

	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Informal</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>CSOs from the most-embedded advocacy areas</i>	13	4	1	18*
<i>CSOs from the least-embedded advocacy areas</i>	7	2	5	14

* One CSO reported both types of membership – both formal and informal
Source: Czech SMO Interviews 2010

Why is this? Some organizations argue that their legal form does not enable them to have formal membership (public benefit company – see previous chapter). In other words, these organizations were founded without the intention of having members (one CSO from the most-embedded advocacy areas and three from the least embedded). Another type of reasoning ignored the problem of the legal form of the organization and openly stated that the aim of the organization from the very beginning was not to have members, but to provide people with education or information. Membership CSOs had various criteria for accepting new members: there were formal, informal, or no criteria. Most often, some formal criteria for membership were applied (see Table 16).

Table 16: Types of membership criteria and their distribution

	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Informal</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>CSOs from most-embedded advocacy areas</i>	8	2	5	2	17
<i>CSOs from least-embedded advocacy areas</i>	8	0	1	5	14

Source: Czech SMO Interviews 2010

Formal membership criteria are basically very similar throughout the whole sample: these are typically membership fees, identification with the purpose and the status of the organization, or age. Only one national minority organization conditioned the membership by formal membership in a (Jewish) religious community.

After a brief overview of the formal aspects of membership, we may look at how the CSOs directly expressed an attitude to involving new members: seven CSOs from the most-embedded expressed willingness to seek new members, while nine CSOs were unwilling; six CSOs from the least-embedded issue areas claimed they were looking for new members, while three opposed it. One of the important aspects of CSOs openness to new people is their strategy for attracting new members. CSOs from the most-embedded areas usually try to find new people through public action and media (campaigns, recruitment at their events, and dialogue with supporters); the CSOs from the least-embedded areas tend to rely on recommendations from existing members or from the leaders of the organization, or through informal contacts among friends and cooperating organizations.

Apart from the strategies for involving new people as members, there are other aspects of CSO embeddedness or openness towards citizens. One aspect is the extent to which people other than members, employees, or volunteers are allowed to participate in the annual meetings of the groups and organizations. In the most-embedded CSOs, twelve out of seventeen organizations require that only members, employees, or invited guests may participate, while the annual meetings of the other five CSOs are open to anybody. In the fourteen least-embedded CSOs, just one organization admits people from outside the organization, but only on the condition of their advanced approval by the members of the organization.

The strategies of the civic organizations were somewhat more balanced in formulating their goals, which is one of the most important strategic activities: four of the seventeen most-embedded CSOs declared that it was possible for the public to influence the shaping of their goals; the same was stated by three of the fourteen least-embedded groups. But what is the precise inner structure of these strategies? What type of stakeholder is more restricted from participation in the formulation of the goals of collective civic actors? What type of

stakeholder do CSOs listen to more? Basically, the priorities of CSOs in both of the advocacy areas are the same: not surprisingly, the most welcomed opinions were those of employees. The second most important class of opinion-maker were cooperating CSOs, closely followed by members and experts. It was only here where the general public came into play, followed by the donors (most-embedded areas) and the community (least-embedded areas). Finally, and not surprisingly, the least favorite stakeholder to be included in the process of strategy formulation were politicians. We may also assess the openness of CSOs towards their environment by comparing the extent to which various categories of stakeholders and the public and various subjects are involved in the process of preparing campaigns and projects. We build our comparison upon the same categories of subject as for the public involvement in the formulation of CSO goals. Within the first group (the most-embedded advocacy areas), the most important are – again – the employees of the organization, which seems quite obvious. And again, the next most important factor for these groups were their collective partners and counterparts – cooperating CSOs, closely followed by members; experts had the same ranking as the general public. These were followed by donors, the community and, finally, politicians. The ranking within the second group of CSOs was somewhat different: the most important companions for making projects and campaigns were cooperating groups, followed by employees and members. The next important partner was the public, which preceded experts and the community. The least favored ones were donors and politicians, rated equally low.

We can make several generalizations based on this overview: generally, CSOs take a very practical stance in the development of their goals, activities, and strategies as they give priority to the subjects that may be coordinated most easily – employees, cooperating groups, and members. Members and experts are probably seen as outsiders that may help them to legitimize and review their procedures and visions, but these are consulted rather less frequently, as they are probably not manageable in an easy and efficient way. The distance of most CSOs from the community is quite interesting. It might be due to the fact that civic advocacy organizations usually raise more universal issues than immediate community interests. Our

findings again support one of the constant features of Czech political culture: a broad and intensive suspicion and distrust towards the political elite – be it parties, politicians, or political institutions.

Apart from including citizens in the process of formulating goals and strategies and in the preparation of their projects and campaigns, we also explored what emphasis CSOs put on their contact with a narrower social group that may provide them with some correctives of their activities – their sympathizers. Generally, this type of contact, between advocacy organizations and their immediate environment, took the unilateral form of information for their followers through “classic” media, such as newsletters, magazines, and mailing lists (ten of the seventeen CSOs from the most-embedded areas, and seven of the fourteen CSOs from the least-embedded areas). The rest of the organizations declared a more “direct” and interactive exchange of information and opinion with their sympathizers via social networks, face-to-face meetings, phone calls, public discussions, and events. These activities were usually held several times a year (nine of the seventeen groups from the most-embedded areas) to several times a month (nine of the fourteen groups from the least-embedded advocacy fields). It seems that even the sympathetic public is rather restricted from direct access and communication with advocacy CSOs.

We compared several types of subjects in terms of the extent to which their opinions were reflected in the formulation of goals and strategies of advocacy organizations, and to how the organizations relate to their sympathizers and supporters. But what is the actual perception of citizens on the part of CSOs? Are they seen as active contributors to collective advocacy activities or rather as recipients of these activities? Are they considered to be a source or a target for the organization’s activities? Groups from the most and from the least-embedded issue areas of civic advocacy have remarkably close attitudes: thirteen of the seventeen most-embedded CSOs and ten of the fourteen least-embedded CSOs see citizens as targets of their advocacy activities; the others see the role of citizens as more balanced – either both as the source and the target or just as a primary source of inspiration and rationale for their activities. This trend of treating citizens as a target rather than a source group of advocacy activities is clearly noticeable in the agenda setting process: twelve of

the seventeen CSOs from the most-embedded advocacy areas choose their issues according to various circumstances but do not directly consult citizens: they are inspired by the experts in the field, they consult their fellow organizations, their members, employees or managers; sometimes they state that they have long-term goals that do not change, or that they just follow the principles and status of their organization. Ten of the fourteen CSOs from the least-embedded areas dominantly followed those issues and cases for which they had funding and/or for which funding was available from national or supranational institutions; they also followed the advice of experts, members or cooperating groups; sometimes they even asked politicians. The remaining organizations declared that citizens might be – among many other subjects – a source of their agenda setting. To conclude, a large majority of CSOs see citizens as a social group that may benefit from their advocacy activities, but they do not respect them as originators of these activities: sometimes, citizens are perceived as patients that have to be cured but are not consulted about the disease.

We have mentioned two important parts of organized advocacy activities and campaigns: including people into their structures and into the process of formulating their goals. However there is one more important moment that needs be stressed: the process of evaluating the advocacy activities. How do civil society actors get feedback about their advocacy efforts? How do they evaluate their campaigns? Here the role of the public is similar to that in the process of formulating the goals of CSOs: only nine organizations (four from the most and five from the least-embedded areas) stated that they try to get some reflections from the broader public via questionnaires or even systematic research, or from direct “clients” of their activities (participants in events, seminars, etc.). The rest of the organizations are more inwardly focused: their evaluation is based on inter-organizational discussions, on the feedback from cooperating CSOs, or on the reflections from relevant elites (donors, politicians).

So, in conclusion, how exactly do CSOs – according to their own statements – incorporate people into their activities? Keeping the limited representativeness of our CSO data for the Czech field of organized civil advocacy in mind, we found the following patterns in our sample: the groups from the most-embedded areas declare that their

goal is to have an impact on the public rather than to involve the public into their campaigns: citizens tend to only be involved locally and in the form of some logistical support (volunteering during events, helping with the promotion of actions and campaigns, distributing leaflets, spreading information, collecting signatures for petitions, organizing camps, translating materials, or performing some minor tasks within the organization). CSOs from the least-embedded areas enable people to get closer to their activities: they use the public as a source of information, use them as experts and tutors, include them in the cooperation on particular issues, and enable them to focus on problems of their own in the framework of the activities of the organization. At the same time, a small part of these groups also use people as logistical support during petitions, as helpers with the organization of events and happenings, etc. So there seems to be some difference between these two groups of organizations – the former treats citizens more instrumentally and enables them to participate on the periphery of their activities, while the latter lets them get closer to the decision-making and provides them with a certain degree of autonomy.

3.7 Patterns of Alienation between Citizens and CSOs: Mutual Perceptions

The preceding sections explored the existing level of individual engagement and non-engagement of citizens and the relations between organized and individual participation in the field of civic advocacy; we now focus on understanding the motives and attitudes on either side of the gap.

First, it is interesting to look in more detail at the reasons that people most often give to explain why they are not engaged in civic advocacy (Table 17). The two most cited reasons in the Czech case closely align with several theories of civic engagement that emphasize various resources conditioning participation: these resources are time and money. Other important reasons are attitudinal, when people display a considerable normative distance towards collective civic actors and activism as such.

Table 17: Reasons for uninvolved in civic advocacy activities (N=535)

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>DK</i>
<i>no time</i>	68.3%	31.7%	0.0%
<i>have no money to support them</i>	63.0%	36.3%	0.5%
<i>solving those problems should be done by other actors, not by civic ones</i>	47.5%	43.4%	9.1%
<i>I do not believe that civic activism could change anything</i>	34.0%	61.5%	4.5%
<i>health conditions do not allow me to be active</i>	26.2%	73.8%	0.0%
<i>not interested in principle</i>	21.3%	75.3%	3.4%
<i>I had been active but I got disappointed</i>	19.9%	79.3%	0.8%

Source: Czech Survey 2010

What are the views of the citizens that are not engaged in civic advocacy of the abilities of advocacy CSOs? One of the important reasons for non-involvement in civic advocacy may be the “realistic” mistrust of the very capacity of CSOs (in terms of skills, resources, impact, etc.) to bring change or to simply succeed when dealing with different problems in various advocacy areas. However, there is a surprisingly high confidence among unengaged citizens regarding the capability of CSOs to solve problems in various advocacy areas: more than three quarters of respondents think that they are able to solve them (see Table 18).

Table 18: Perception of capability of CSOs to solve problems (N=535)

	<i>%</i>
<i>yes, they can</i>	77.9
<i>no, they cannot</i>	20.6
<i>DK</i>	1.6
<i>Total</i>	100.0

Source: Czech Survey 2010

Finally, we inspect the attitude of the group of citizens that are most skeptical about the civic advocacy engagement in general and advocacy CSOs in particular – not only are they not active in civic advocacy, but they also think that CSOs are not capable of solving problems in their particular issue areas. A more detailed inquiry into the reasons why some citizens view CSOs as incapable of solving

problems reveals that almost two thirds of the respondents are persuaded that CSOs do not represent civic interests, and more than half of them think that CSOs are ineffective, are too tied to political parties, or do not address important issues (see Table 19).

Table 19: Attitudes towards CSOs (N=118)

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>DK</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>I think that they represent business interests, not civic ones</i>	57.6%	31.3%	11.1%	100%
<i>I don't think these organizations are effective</i>	56.4%	25.9%	17.7%	100%
<i>I think these organizations are vehicles of political parties</i>	53.0%	36.1%	11.0%	100%
<i>I don't think they deal with problems that are really important</i>	52.3%	39.4%	8.3%	100%
<i>I think these organizations concentrate on their own financial benefits</i>	45.2%	44.5%	10.3%	100%
<i>I do not know anything about the activities of the CSOs</i>	39.1%	58.6%	2.3%	100%
<i>They represent foreign interests</i>	26.9%	58.4%	14.6%	100%

Source: Czech Survey 2010

One general conclusion may be drawn from the preceding tables and figures: both engaged and unengaged citizens maintain a considerable distance from advocacy CSOs. People who are not engaged in civic advocacy are rather optimistic about the technical capacity of CSOs to promote change and to address problems in their respective issue areas, but at the same time, they believe that collective actors should not be engaged in solving those issues, and that these should be solved by someone else. As was illustrated in the previous section, active citizens demonstrate this belief in CSOs in practice: they are engaged in civic advocacy, but only through distant means. Most often, they support some causes and campaigns through donations and loose support; only some are engaged in voluntary work and only a very small minority of active citizens are closely affiliated with organized collective actors – CSOs.

We focus on a direct comparison of the attitudes of engaged and non-engaged citizens in order to depict similarities and differences that could help us understand their different relations to organized

civic advocacy. First, the apparent distance between citizens and collective actors should be clarified more. What is the public perception of CSOs as related to the needs of citizens? Are CSOs responsive enough? Do they reflect relevant problems? The belief that CSOs are responsive to citizen issues (Table 20) differs between citizens who are engaged in civic advocacy and those who are not. While both groups share a large proportion of undecided respondents, engaged citizens are generally more optimistic about the role of CSOs in solving the problems of ordinary people. Still, only one quarter of citizens at best consider CSOs to be responsive towards their needs.

Table 20: Extent to which the advocacy activities of CSOs reflect the problems that people personally face

%	<i>Engaged in civic advocacy</i> (<i>N</i> =263)	<i>Unengaged in civic advocacy</i> (<i>N</i> =535)
<i>low</i>	15.9	30.9
<i>neither; nor</i>	50.9	47.9
<i>high</i>	24.4	13.7
<i>DK</i>	8.8	7.5

Source: Czech Survey 2010

It seems that the issue of trust plays an important role here. This is not the trust of citizens in the technical competencies of CSOs to deal with the problems in their specific area of expertise, but specifically the trust in them as general social institutions that may help citizens deal with their hardships. Both engaged and unengaged citizens rank CSOs very low compared to other social and political institutions. Our findings match previous empirical research on citizen opinions towards various social and political institutions (Červenka 2010: 2) and confirm ambiguous and mostly negative attitudes towards CSOs, resembling the attitude towards the least trusted area of Czech public life – political institutions (see Table 21). It seems that there is a considerable lack of confidence in Czech civic and political actors; people only trust their closest social environment, i.e. their family and friends. The most trusted public institutions are the police and the local authority: Czech citizens seem to refuse the intermediary level of CSOs when solving their problems, tending to rely either on personal ties or on direct

communication and negotiations with the appropriate bodies closest to their locality.

Table 21: Ranking of subjects to contact in case of any problems

<i>Unengaged in civic advocacy (N=535)</i>	<i>Engaged in civic advocacy (N=263)</i>
family	family
friends	friends
none	police
police	none
local authority	local authority
colleagues at work	colleagues at work
local government representative	local government representative
media	civil society organization
civil society organization	media
MEP/ EU institutions	government agency (ministry)
government agency (ministry)	MEP / EU institutions
MP	MP
church community	church community

Source: Czech Survey 2010

Based on our previous considerations and the presentation of the survey data, we can draw some conclusions about the attitudes of Czech citizens towards collective actors in the realm of civic advocacy and about the main reasons for the apparent distance that citizens express towards organized civic action. The data suggest that unengaged citizens generally trust the technical capacity of CSOs to deal with the problems in their particular advocacy areas, but some of their normative views of CSOs are rather gloomy: they question the motives of CSOs, and they do not think that CSOs focus on issues that are important for citizens. This is quite similar to the views of engaged citizens as they evaluate the activities of CSOs in different advocacy areas. All in all, there are only minor differences between engaged and unengaged citizens with regard to their trust in CSOs and the roots of that trust: CSOs are generally seen as unreliable partners that focus on their own issues and ignore the real problems and needs of citizens.

With regard to the attitudes of CSO representatives towards citizens and their engagement, the analysis shows how CSOs and their representatives perceive citizens: whether they are seen as active

contributors to organized advocacy activities or as recipients and end-users of these activities, and whether they are considered to be a resource or a target for organizations' activities. CSOs from the most-embedded and from the least-embedded issue areas of civic advocacy have remarkably similar attitudes: 76 % and 71 % respectively see citizens as a target of their advocacy activities; the rest see the role of citizens as more balanced – either both as a resource and a target or just as a primary source of inspiration and rationale for their activities (Czech SMO Interviews 2010). This attitude is based on the perceptions of the role of citizens in the process of civic advocacy in general, and the situation in the Czech Republic in particular. Four key types of justification for these strategies were found in the data.

The first set of CSOs argue that citizens are generally not interested in the work of CSOs, and particularly not in actively working for them. These organizations feel that there is considerable distrust of the non-profit sector and that (Czech) society has been developing towards selfish individualism; that people are too busy, and that it is too demanding and expensive to win them over and make them actively interested in public issues generally and/or in the particular issue that their organization addresses. Representatives of CSOs complain about the unwillingness of citizens to participate in public affairs. They attribute this unwillingness to various circumstances stemming from Czech political culture: ignorance, lack of interest and motivation, laziness, passivity, pessimism about the abilities of CSOs to influence things, and the bad image that they believe the whole non-profit sector has due to negative campaigning by political elites:

I think (...) that the mentality of the Czechs ... even though I hate it when someone speaks about Czech national characteristics ... that the mentality is somehow shaped ... and if you can expect that some wave or some social movement for something would emerge and be successful in the United States, it does not necessarily mean that it takes root here because the Czechs are not used to getting involved that much and I think it is necessary to keep that in mind (...).

Source: FGI (representative of a CSO from the least-embedded advocacy area)

Another set of reasons refers to the “expert knowledge” of CSOs and the highly detailed focus of the organizations: citizens do not have the education and the expert knowledge that is necessary to understand the nature of the problems the CSOs deal with, and consequently are unable to participate in their solution. The CSOs complain that people have insufficient information, are prejudiced against CSOs in the particular area that they are active in, and that they are too oriented towards “populist” solutions to problems. A similar complaint arises when defining the target groups of CSOs: sometimes the primary target of the CSOs, particularly in the environmental sector, is not a part of society and consequently there is no need to enter into a dialogue with any social groups and citizens:

“I was thinking ... as you asked who formulated (the goals) ... if the advocacy issue is environmental protection ... it is – among others – about articulating the interests of nature ... let’s say ... which means that people that formulate the goals often speak in the interests of the environment and not of a particular target group... of course that metaphorically speaking the target group is the population as a whole, whose being is conditioned by the existence of a functional ecosystem ... which means that there is no such thing as a specified target group that could be addressed ... which means that ... I really know that those people [environmentalists] are systematically observing public attitudes towards particular problematic issues in the area of environment but of course there is no direct demand ... simply because ... there is always someone speaking on behalf of nature and basically this is one of the roles of the environmental CSOs: that they articulate the interest of nature in the public discourse.”

Source: FGI (representative of a CSO from the most-embedded advocacy area)

The third type of reasoning used by CSO representatives is similar, but it builds upon the claim of universality and autonomy of advocacy activities. CSO leaders are suspicious of politicians and, to a degree, of donors, as the spheres of politics and economy are usually seen as threats to the independence and objectivity of CSOs. Therefore, the distance of some CSOs towards citizens might be also due to the fact

that civic advocacy organizations usually claim to raise more universal issues than immediate community/business/policy-making interests. There is, therefore, quite a clear sense of unease on the part of some CSOs towards the influence of donors on CSO activities:

"What I lack ... and I've actually been the leader of the CSO for a year and a half ... is the ability within the advocacy area and within the organization to choose the goals, the campaigns and the directions without restraints ... which I think ... the way that we are funded and project-oriented ... we lack the freedom to do so."

Source: FGI (representative of a CSO from the least-embedded advocacy area)

Finally, there is the question of resources, which is frequently explored in studies of transactional activism (Císař 2010): despite the fact that the organization-donor relationship (or even dependence) is usually downplayed by the civic actors, the role of resources still seems highly relevant for their relationship with the citizens:

"I would say that we focus more on the authorities, not on people ... because if you want to work somehow, you have to get the money ... you can only get the money from Europe, or from the government, or from the regional government, or from the city or local government ... so for us it is important to get the money and with the money I can realize my agenda ... I can do almost nothing without the money ... and it is the authorities that decide on the distribution of the money, not people ..."

Source: FGI (representative of the CSO from the least-embedded advocacy area)

3.8 Summary

This chapter addressed the evaluation of Czech civil advocacy based on empirical data. It started with the conceptual framing of the problem and showed different assessments of the quality of civil society that are embedded in particular theoretical traditions. Next, the non-

/involvement of citizens in advocacy and non-advocacy activities were compared in order to show that the organized civic involvement in the former is generally weaker and less embedded. Then, based on original data, we explored the gap between citizens and CSOs in the area of civic advocacy and attempted to identify their mutual perceptions in order to better understand their distance and the low social embeddedness of advocacy CSOs.

The analysis of empirical data revealed several things. First, a clear gap between the involvement of Czech citizens in advocacy and non-advocacy CSOs was illustrated. The general level of Czech citizens' involvement in civic advocacy is relatively high, but their involvement bypasses any organized actors in this area and takes mostly distant and indirect forms. Even if we lack comparative data from other countries in this regard, we may speak about a clear distance of citizens towards practical engagement in CSO activities: while unengaged citizens trust the capacities of advocacy CSOs, they are often suspicious of their motives. Citizens that are engaged in civic advocacy often behave as if compensating for too intensive or too weak activity of CSOs in most advocacy areas. Both engaged and unengaged individuals think that advocacy CSOs very rarely reflect the real problems of citizens, and advocacy CSOs are one of the least-preferred types of social institutions. The chapter revealed the tendency of advocacy CSOs to largely ignore the citizens and to rely more on technical expertise and their employees in fulfilling their missions. Generally, a large majority of CSOs see citizens as a social group that may benefit from their advocacy activities, but they do not respect them as a source of these activities: sometimes, citizens are perceived as patients that have to be cured but are not consulted about the disease. CSO representatives share four main types of excuse for this attitude: they doubt that Czech citizens are interested in civic activism at all; they argue that CSOs represent expert knowledge that simply cannot be generated from people's opinions; they claim to represent much wider or long-term goals than the immediate interests of the community; and, in order to achieve their goals, CSOs must rely more on their contacts with authorities and institutions for adequate economic resources for their action.

Generally, advocacy CSOs thus fail to perform the role of the intermediary between the individual and politics, and the citizens as a rule do not make use of CSOs when they encounter a societal problem. Two main conclusions can be drawn. First, it seems that the specific weakness of Czech organized advocacy lies in the low social embeddedness of advocacy CSOs; in the disconnection between the individual and organized sphere of civic advocacy. In other words, it is not the absence of activity or even actors in one of these spheres, but rather their alienation. Therefore, an assessment of the quality of Czech civil society that focused exclusively on the evaluation of either individual participation in civic advocacy or advocacy CSOs would probably show a more optimistic picture. Second, the tendencies and motives for this disconnectedness do not stem exclusively from one sphere of civic advocacy, but are interactive and arise from the opinions of both citizens and the representatives of CSOs. Therefore any attempt to change the status quo would require changing the opinions and attitudes of either side, which, however, seem to be firmly embedded in the Czech political culture.