

trei ruși. Morala în familie este la înălțime, se căsătoresc de tineri și sunt foarte religioși. Caracterul ascuns și neîncrezători. Cântecul originare nu sunt, la Sf. Lazăr umblă cu șervete pe cap și coșuri în mână, cântând „Lazăre-Lazăre”. La Sf. Toader, întrecerea cu cai, la Sf. Andrei, fac focuri, „curbanuri”, mese comune, sărbătoresc „hramul bisericii” și umblă cu colinde moldovenești.

(Sursa: ANRM. F. 112, inv. 1, d. 1616, ff. 608-619).

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(Va urma)

András MORAUSZKI

CONCEPTUALIZING ETHNIC CIVIL SOCIETY CASE STUDIES OF KOŠICE, PÉCS AND TIMIȘOARA

Rezumat

Conceptualizarea societății civile etnice. Studiul de caz din orașele Coșice, Pecs și Timișoara

Articolul de față contribuie la discuția despre societatea civilă și în special despre societatea civilă etnică, deoarece se face o analiză a felului cum reprezentanții organizațiilor etnice utilizează termenul „societatea civilă” sau „societatea nonprofit”, la fel și termenul „organizație a minorităților” (germană, croată, romă). În baza unor interviuri calitative cu reprezentanții organizațiilor etnice din Coșice (Slovenia), Pécs (Ungaria), Timișoara (România) s-a reușit identificarea a patru criterii determinative a termenului „societatea civilă”: independența, motivarea liderilor și membrilor, finanțarea de stat și relațiile cu societatea. Termenul „organizație minoritară” s-a bazat în primul rând pe activismul organizației cu caracter etnic nedeterminat, axată de exemplu pe patrimoniul cultural, istorie, ridicarea nivelului de trai etc. Celelalte aspecte nu sunt la fel de importante, dar pot fi la fel de relevante, precum limba de lucru, competența grupului țintă, calitatea de membru și lider.

Cuvinte-cheie: societatea civilă, organizație publică, minorități etnice.

Резюме

Концептуализация этнического гражданского общества. Тематическое исследование, проведенное в городах Кошице, Печ и Тимишоара

Статья касается дискуссии о гражданском обществе и, в частности, об этническом гражданском обществе. В ней дан анализ того, как представители этнических организаций используют термины «гражданская организация» или «некоммерческая организация», а также термин «организация меньшинства» (немецкого, хорватского, ромского). На основе интервью с представителями этнических организаций в Кошице (Словакия), Печ (Венгрия), Тимишоара (Румыния) удалось выявить четыре определяющих критерия, лежащих в основе термина «гражданская организация»: независимость, мотивация лидеров и членов, государственное финансирование и контакты

с общественностью. Термин «организация меньшинства» предполагает такую характеристику, как активность организации, имеющей расплывчатый этнический характер, например, занимающейся культурным наследием, историей. Другие аспекты в деятельности группы важны не в такой степени, но также могут быть актуализированы, например, рабочий язык, состав целевой группы, членство и лидерство.

Ключевые слова: гражданское общество, общественная организация, этнические меньшинства.

Summary

Conceptualizing ethnic civil society. Case studies of Košice, Pécs and Timișoara

The paper aims to contribute to the discussion on the topic of civil society in general and ethnic civil society in particular by analysing the ways in which the representatives of ethnic organisations use the terms ‘civic organisation’ or ‘non-profit organisation’ and the term ‘minority (German, Croat, Roma, etc.) organisation’. Based on qualitative interviews made with the representatives of ethnic organisations in Košice (Slovakia), Pécs (Hungary) and Timișoara (Romania) we were able to identify four defining criteria for the term ‘civic organisation’: independence, motivation of leaders and members, state-funding and contact with the community. The term ‘minority organisation’ was primarily based on one characteristic: the activity of the organisation having a vaguely defined ethnic character: e.g. focuses on the cultural heritage, history, engages in community building, or in the case of the Roma social welfare activities. Other aspects are not as important, but may also have relevance, such as the language of operation, the composition of the target group, membership and leadership.

Key words: civil society, non-profit organisations, ethnic minorities.

Civil society, voluntary organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), non-profit organisations (NPOs), social movements, non-profit, community, civic or third sector are all concepts used in the formal

and professional discourse to describe more or less the same phenomenon. These terms emphasize different aspects – e. g. voluntariness, autonomy – of more or less the same set of organisations, usually falling into the legal categories of associations or foundations. The dominant terms vary across countries and languages. Some are more widespread, while others are used less often. Some of these are more straightforward, and enjoy a general consensus regarding their meaning; others are more problematic or even contested.

Among these concepts, present paper mainly focuses on two concepts: 'civil society organisations' and 'non-profit organisation', the first being the dominant term in Hungary and in the ethnic Hungarian communities in Central Europe¹, the other is the typical term used in Slovakia². As a result, these were the terms our respondents, the representatives of ethnic organisations typically identified with. The paper tries to contribute to our better understanding of ethnic civil societies by looking at the ways in which the representatives of ethnic civic organisations conceptualise these terms. The way in which these terms are used by them tells us how they perceive their role in modern societies, their relationship with other kinds of institutions, and as we will see also tells us about the conditions of their operation.

We will proceed by taking a look at the literature on civil society and the non-profit sector. Then after a short review of the methods and locations of data collection we will present the main findings. Based on the interviews we identified four main components of the definition of 'civil society organisations' and 'non-profit organisations': independence, voluntariness, being grant and state-funded, and contact with community; we also identified two contrasting terms to those mentioned above: 'fake civils' and 'institutions', and found, that the concept of an 'ethnic/minority organisation' is based primarily on one deciding attribute: the activity of the organisation having a relatively vaguely specified ethnic character, while other attributes may also contribute, but are not perceived necessary.

Theories of civil society, non-profit sector and minority organisations

As Edwards pointed out, due to the several different definitions "civil society is [...] a confusing and contested concept" [3, p. 3]. Seligman and Keane identify three ways in which 'civil society' is understood. Of course, it may be used in an *analytical* way to describe societal processes; one may examine its origin, development and different forms. But it is also used as a *political tool* by parties and movements to achieve specific political goals. And 'civil society' is also used as a *normative philosophical concept* to denote the „good society”, in which state and civic organisations are separated, and the autonomy of the latter and the media is guaranteed, discussion, representation and the control of the state is made possible [12; 8]. As a result, the concept of civil society is not only confusing, but potentially loaded

with different expectations towards these organisations. But even if used as an analytical term, it can still mean either a *part of the society*, usually the voluntary organisations; a *type of society* in which specific norms are in effect; but also the *public sphere* of voluntary activity and engagement [2; 3].

In the literature civil society is most often conceptualised as part of society, which usually means the non-profit organisations, the so-called third sector [2; 11], that is organisations that are (1) institutionalised to some extent, (2) private, institutionally separate from the government, (3) non-profit-distributing, (4) self-governing, able to control their activities (5) voluntary, i.e. non-compulsory and including some meaningful degree of voluntary participation [13]. Others also emphasize the relatively high level of voluntariness and autonomy as an important attribute of civil society [5].

Concerning its relationship with other sectors and spheres, the literature stresses on one hand, the analytical distinction of the civil society or the non-profit sector from the political and economic society, but also the sociocultural lifeworld [1]. On the other hand the literature shows, that it is also a mediating sphere between the lifeworld and the system, which can gain influence over political and economic processes [1], an intermediate area of complex interaction [4], that connects the state, the economy and the informal sector (the households). When looking at the non-profit sector through this lens, the cooperation with the state, adaptation of practices from the economic society and the formalization of subcultural interests coming from the informal sector comes into focus [4].

However, when it comes to ethnic organisations, several scholars warn us, that the mainstream theories of civil society and the third sector should be treated with caution. Károly Tóth points out, that while the operational definition of civil society organisations rests on formal and legal criteria, the self-definition of minority organisations is based primarily on ethnic and ideological criteria, the above mentioned formal attributes are secondary from the organisations' point of view, most of these are not even officially registered [14].

Dénes Kiss also questions the validity of mainstream theories as they may lead to misleading conclusions, and makes some important remarks regarding minority institutional systems [9]. Kiss points out, that in the context of ethnic minorities, the non-profit sector gains an ethnic character: in contrast with the state, which is associated with the majority, the non-profits are associated with the minority. Also, as he points out, the mainstream theories fail to take into consideration the power relations within minority non-profit sectors. Similarly to Tóth, Kiss also argues that the non-profit character, that is the formal and legal characteristics, of an organisation are secondary – in his model – to their belonging to a specific institutional sub-system, which is based on their field of activity and pursued goals³. For-

mally, most of these organisations are civic-non-profit, but in practice they often function as analogous organisations to the public institutions of the majority, and are established by the minority elites to substitute for these public institutions. These public institutions cannot be used to promote specific minority interests, which results in the high proportion of non-profits within minority institutional systems. Kiss states, that the proportion of actual civic organisations is smaller, than the proportion of non-profits. One of the aims of present paper is to contrast this theory with empirical data.

Another important remark of Kiss is, that the organisations form fields, network-like entities, which are connected to the respective majority and – if there is such – the kin-state's respective field and operate in the intermediate space between these two majority fields with varying autonomy. This leads to the potential doubling of financial resources on one hand, but the adaptation to the logic of both linked fields may prevent the forming of consistent rules governing the field [9].

Fennema makes important remarks regarding the state-funded ethnic organisations. Fennema considers these professional organisations, created for lack of autonomous ethnic organisations, which are as a result dependent on the state, but may facilitate the formation of the ethnic civic communities [5]. As we will see from the interviews state funding has indeed an important role in the functioning of the ethnic non-profit organisations, however the high level of professionalization is usually not true for them.

The scholars also offer some criteria for the operationalization of ethnic organisations, and which are typically not all met, but in order to qualified as ethnic organisation, at least some have to be met [5; 9; 14].

Methods and locations of data collection

Present paper is based on semi-structured qualitative interviews made with the representatives (mostly leaders) of ethnic non-profit organisations in three localities: Košice (Slovakia), Pécs (Hungary) and Timișoara (Romania). These three cities have been selected because of their regional importance and multi-ethnic character. These cities also serve as regional centres for many national and ethnic minorities.

In Košice according to the 2011 census from the total population of 240,688, the largest ethnic groups were the Hungarians (2,65%) and the Roma (2%), followed by Rusyns (0,68%), Czechs (0,65%), Ukrainians (0,3%) and Germans (0,13%), but there were other smaller national minorities (Bulgarian, Polish, etc.) as well. The total population of Pécs in 2011 was 146,990. The largest communities were the Germans (4,47%), Roma (2,14%), and Croats (1,31%). Other nationalities included the Serbs, Romanians, Russians, Arabs, Poles, Bulgarians, Greeks and others. In Timișoara, from the 319,279 residents 5,12% were Hungarians, 1,37% Germans, 1,3% Serbs, 0,69% Roma, the other nationalities were the Ukrainians, Slovaks, Jews and others.

Besides their civic organisations, several ethnic minorities have other important cultural institutions (theatres, libraries, etc.), media (radio, newspapers) and schools (both primary and secondary) in these cities. All three cities are also important regional centres: of Eastern Slovakia, Baranya and Banat.

Currently interviews with 31 persons representing 34 organisations are available for the purpose of the analysis: 4 interviews have been conducted in small groups of 2 to 4 people, in the interview with Hungarians in Košice had 7 participants, in Timișoara 10 participants, and there were 3 individual interviews as well. In Košice we had the opportunity to interview representatives of Hungarian, Roma and German organisations, as well as one interethnic organisation. In Pécs the representatives of some Croat, German and Roma organisations responded to our questions. In Timișoara only the representatives of Hungarian organisations participated. The interviews were ethnically homogeneous, except one which was made with one representative of two German organisations in Košice and the representative of the mentioned interethnic organisation. In Pécs all interviews were in Hungarian, and this was the language of the interviews with the Hungarian organisations is Košice and Timișoara, too. The other interviews in Košice were in Slovak language⁴.

The goal was to explore the relevant standing-points, attitudes and opinions of the operators of minority organisations in relation to the role of ethnic and civil society organisations in the society, their activities and resources. Some of the main questions were the organisations' relationship with politics, the represented community, the role of voluntary work, their comparison with institutions and the effects of funding on the operation. The leaders have been asked to participate, as presumably they have the most information about and the strongest influence on the operation of the organisations. If the leader could not attend it was possible to send someone else as a substitute.

Main results

A central part of the interviews was how the respondents define the terms 'civil society organisations' or 'non-profit organisations' and 'minority (Croat, Hungarian, German, Roma, etc.) organisations', what are the most important criteria for an organisation to qualify as 'civic' and 'minority'. As we will see, the typical answers are strongly interconnected with each other and with the organisations' actual conditions of operation and they can be treated more like a set of autostereotypes on ethnic civil society than some definition.

The most important aspects of a civil society organisation fall under four main topics: independence, motivation, finances and contact with the community. As we can see, these are connected to the aspects that are identifiable from the literature: relationship with the political society, economy, lifeworld, autonomy and voluntariness.

Independence

According to the respondents, the main feature of civil society organisations is their independence, primarily, but not only from politics. This was expressed by most of our respondents as first characteristic.

“Well, by all means, that it is independent, that is why it is a civic organisation, so of course, politically, in every aspect it has to be independent” (Roma organisation, Pécs, welfare).

“I see and appreciate in civic organisations their independence, which they should have, in every aspect” (Interethnic organisation, Košice, cooperation).

Even if the representatives of the organisations accept, that to have opinion on minority issues and human rights may have political relevance and to express them and pursue the interests of the community is a political act, in the interviews they usually tried to distance themselves from politics, and their political role was presented as undesired but inevitable.

“...we mustn't engage in politics, yet we have to engage in politics” (Roma organisation, Pécs, women).

One aspect of being independent from politics is that civic organisations and political parties work according to different principles and logic.

“These are political standing-points, and we don't assume political standing-points, in our minority, not politics, but minority activity we don't work according to political principles, but identity and some cultural principles” (German organisations, Košice, culture and economic development).

The other aspect is that the organisations have to avoid being tied to any political party. The representatives of these organisations stress the neutral, nonpartisan nature of their activity, they stress, that a civil society organisations may not engage in party politics and cannot be tied to any political party, neither governing nor opposition:

“The leaders are clever enough, not to be open to any side, or rather to be open to both sides [of the political spectrum], because one may never know” (Roma organisation, Pécs, welfare).

Being nonpartisan is on one hand a necessity for these organisations, as they don't want to lose financial or moral support of the other side of the political spectrum. As we will see in the part discussing finances, these organisation are mostly financed by grants from the government, so they have to be careful.

“It would be ideal, if civic organisations didn't have to engage in actual national politics, as they can't afford to stand left or right... If they do so, they only get support, financial or moral, if that side is in power” (German organisation, Pécs, coordination).

“If they choose the wrong side, it may have consequences and cause problems for the functioning of the organisation” (Roma organisation, Pécs, welfare).

Most of the respondents were optimistic about the chances of maintaining neutrality. But there are some

others, who argue, that political engagement and the representation of their own interests in itself inevitably leads to choosing sides, and that this is – despite being unhealthy – unavoidable and necessary.

“Ethnic organisations have to engage in politics, they can represent their interests only this way, so it is hypocritical to say that they shouldn't, every civic organisation leans either left or right” (German organisation, Pécs, coordination).

But also, the contrast to political parties has another, somewhat less emphasised, but relevant aspect: moral superiority. In contrast to these, the members and leaders of civil society organisations are presented as acting without self-interest, for the sake of the community.

„Because political parties have emerged, which, in my opinion, are rather based on individual ambitions, than really trying to further the interests of the Hungarians in Slovakia. Petty fights between the parties, between persons, and the important things are completely forgotten” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, culture).

Another explanation might be the internalisation of the debate on the politicisation of civil society and try to affirm their independence to avoid being labelled “fake”⁵. All this of course raises the question of membership of politicians in civic organisations. Members of civic organisation may decide to further the interests of the community in local or national politics either as independent candidates, but often on some party list. We may know of such cases from the media, but several instances were mentioned in the interviews, too. Although the respondents find this natural, they stress, that in these cases one has to separate politics from his engagement in the work of the civic organisation, as otherwise it could politicise the activity of the organisation, which as we have seen, may lead to negative consequences and therefore has to be avoided by all means. In other cases respondents stated, that it is not at all typical for someone to be active in politics and civil society at the same time, one has to choose one way, in which one wants to work for the ethnic community.

“A civic organisation may not be only a mouthpiece of a political party. To have them [politicians] as members, as normal members, it's completely normal. As people, as civilians... but to take over the leadership, that's unhealthy” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, culture).

Of course, cooperation with politicians is possible:

“Now the politicians of Fidesz make all the decisions. Therefore we shouldn't have a relationship with them? The main thing is, if they take their work seriously” (Roma organisation, Pécs, women).

Another question is, whether organisations perceive a threat from political parties to try to influence civic organisations, to gain their support as means to strengthen legitimacy for instance or gain more votes in elections. We know from the literature, that there have

been such cases in the past, for example in Slovakia [10; 14], but our respondents denied, that such things happened with them, and stated that the parties are not interested in them, due to the communities being small.

As we have shown above, typically the representatives of the organisations tried to distance themselves from politics, there were only a few exceptions, who stated otherwise:

“... It would be great to have a role that was more visible after 1989. Their [the civic organisations’] role was explicitly a social movement role, which, if necessary showed itself in public life. And it was not necessarily party politics” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, coordination).

“First we have to protest, secondly we have to propose or try new alternatives. To have an effect on political parties. The most important role is to control the political parties” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, coordination).

Bud independence has another dimension as well: that a civic organisation can decide about its activities freely and try alternative solutions that other institutions do not, because they are potentially unprofitable, or target social groups that are less accessible by public institutions. Yet, as we will see in the part discussing finances, this free choice may sometimes mean only free choice among activities that get funding.

Motivation

The second main topic was that of the motivation of the members, and especially leaders of the organisations. Civil society organisations are characterized by voluntary activities, that the leadership and membership is doing its work „for free”. Interestingly even organisations with paid employees emphasised some degree of voluntarism and the importance of enthusiasm and selflessness, as working for an NGO is not as well paid as other jobs.

When asked, what motivates these voluntary activities, the answers most often emphasized character and socialisation, and – especially Roma respondents – solidarity with the less fortunate members of the ethnic community. As already mentioned above, this shows signs of moral superiority of civil society in comparison with politics and the economy.

“For civic organisations voluntary work is the most characteristic. There is no reward, actually, only that yes, we have achieved something, shown something, but usually we do all this as voluntary work” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, culture).

“Evidently such people go to work for a civic organisation, and these associations, foundations are established by people, who are committed, or at least we hope so. This should be like this, even if there are often civic organisations that are accused to work only for the money” (Roma organisation, Pécs, welfare).

“My life goes reasonably well, but I see the problems in the community” (Roma organisation, Pécs, women).

“But nothing is lost, because we both are such optimists, if we weren’t optimists, then we basically wouldn’t do this. You need an awful lot of energy, optimism and faith. If you have a clear goal that you want to achieve, it is so much easier to work. Because you pursue that goal... We don’t go from project to project after the money, but after specific goals. You put into it an awful lot of energy, work, personal energy, family life, I don’t even mention, because the whole family is subordinate, but you know, why you’re doing it, and it is super, if your family is supportive and understands, that you like to do it, because to work for the community is such, that you have to love it” (Roma organisation, Košice, media).

But, especially among representatives of youth organisations, another kind of motivation was mentioned as well: doing voluntary work may also be a hobby; one may be a member of an organisation to have a good time and to meet people with similar interests. But this was not universal among youth organisations, the respondents often emphasised commitment to the interests of the community, too, and as its source socialisation and character.

“I like to do this, and I spend the most of my spare time on this, because this way I spend it in a useful way. And it has its results, too” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, youth).

“I would like to return what I have got and besides I enjoy what I’m doing” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, youth).

“Besides, as in hockey and football teams... You have to belong somewhere. If one can use this to his advantage, one can gather other people under one’s banner, but the most important factor is, what Peter mentioned, to have a charismatic leader, someone committed” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, youth).

This reliance on voluntary work, of course, has its consequences: it is not always easy to recruit new volunteers, and even in case of members, the organisation has to do without financial motivation and coercion. These organisations are therefore usually not hierarchical and centred around a small group of active people surrounded by inactive members who are satisfied with the actual or symbolic benefits of paid membership in an ethnic civic organisation. As membership fees mean financial resources for the organisation, it is still a mutually advantageous situation. When it comes to recruitment, the data suggest a shift: the older generations emphasised the role of family, especially parents, and their example, while for the younger generations the youth organisations and minority schools were at least as important.

Finances

Even if the organisations rely on voluntary work, the financial support was an important topic in the discussions, and proved to be one of, if not the most important factor shaping the ethnic civil societies. Interestingly, one of the most important attributes of non-

profits, based on the interviews is, that – except a small group of organisations that can access EU funds – they are financed from grants from the government or – if there is one – the kin-state. The data confirm, what Kiss stated about the potential doubling of sources. If there is a kin-state grant system, the organisations try to access that as well. This is especially true for ethnic Hungarians as Hungary is especially active as a kin-state.

“We are not an enterprise; we don’t earn money, so to say. From grants, a non-profit organisation gets money from grants” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, culture).

This reliance on grants may, of course, question the organisations’ independence. Still, the situation is rarely perceived as a problem. There was only one case, when the respondent said, that civil society should look for other sources of funding. In fact, if a problem is identified, it is more often the small amount and uncertainty of funding, not the lack of autonomy, and the proposed solution is some kind of normative funding, which would probably mean even smaller autonomy.

“Those, who have proven themselves for years, those could be given normative funding” (German organisation, Pécs, advocacy).

“Well, as a matter of fact, the civic community is expecting state funding. That is, all kinds of state, not literally, but through foundations or I don’t know what, since the nineties the system has been functioning this way. The system is like this. So, but a real civic system doesn’t work like that. It works, that there are twenty of us, who like to play football barefooted, and we establish an association and put energy, money, et cetera into it. So we don’t get the money from elsewhere. After that we can, of course, get more money, but in my opinion, the civic sphere should work like this. [...] So we always expect, in Hungary it is always like that: we associate, and someone will give the money” (Croat organisation, Pécs, culture).

Based on the interviews, most represented organisations can be characterized by financial instability. However, as visibility seems to be important source of legitimacy, this unstable financial background may lead to a pressure to apply for funding, whether the call is compatible with the organisations’ mission or field of activity or not.

“We have been forced into it, because we have to produce something each time, to get some grant next year” (German organisation, Pécs, youth).

“We have applied everywhere possible [...] We applied for every bullshit (sic!) there has been a call for” (German organisation, Pécs, advocacy).

“In the first couple of years we have applied to every possible call that was published, to ensure survival” (Roma organisation, Pécs, women).

As we see, the constant financial instability of some organisations forces them to be flexible but may prevent specialisation. There is evidence that often the non-

profit form of the organisation itself comes out of necessity: being a registered non-profit entitles you to apply for funding, but the reliance on the voluntary work of a smaller group of committed people makes it possible to tide over certain time periods without funding.

“For us it is easier. A civic association, that in 99 percent of the cases does not employ people, doesn’t have to pay contributions; there is no financial burden of operation for a civic association. I apply each year; the association applies to different ministries, institutions for grants. No one is entitled to get them, but if one gets them, one realises a project” (Roma organisation, Košice, culture).

As visible, the financial grant system has a strong influence on the activities of the organisations. Although the system matches the needs of the existing – cultural or in the case of the Roma cultural and social welfare – organisations, by funding these activities it also reinforces the status quo.

“Of course, most organisations are cultural, that’s for sure, and this might also be because culture is what you can get funding for” (Croat organisation, Pécs, culture).

“This is a forced path: the system pushes you this way” (Croat organisation, Pécs, culture).

It was also criticised by the Croats in Pécs, that as there is a separate grant system for the ethnic minorities, they are excluded from other sources. Others did not mention this problem, if there have been criticism, it was on the size of these grants. As we have mentioned, in Slovakia the grant system often gets criticised for being politicised and biased towards certain organisations, but this was not mentioned in the interviews. However, while some grant systems (Norwegian Fund and EU Structural Funds were explicitly mentioned) encourage cooperation and the pooling of resources, the general grant systems for the support of minorities seem to discourage it. Kin-state support was explicitly mentioned by all groups that have a kin-state: German organisations both in Košice and Pécs, Hungarian organisations in Košice and Timișoara and Croat organisations in Pécs mentioned that they get financial support from this source.

Contact with community

Interestingly this last aspect of civil society got the least emphasis. It was almost exclusively mentioned by Roma organisations, both in Košice and in Pécs. This may, of course, also be explained by the great interest in Roma issues: there is a competition – that was also explicitly mentioned by the respondents – among Roma and non-Roma organisations active in the field for the social welfare programmes and grants. Emphasising their direct contact with the community can be understood as a way to gain advantage in this competition. This of course raises the question, if they are also accepted as representatives of the community by the latter. However, our data are unfortunately insufficient to

answer this question.

“But the third sector is known to help and solve issues in places outside of the reach of the state, which also lacks information from the field, and non-governmental organisations are very much needed and social work...” (Roma organisation, Košice, media).

“And indeed, a civic organisation, that is really active and effective, surely has contact with the target group on more levels, and the people are more direct, and open up more easily, as for people and social workers sent by an official body. Besides I see that many people are disappointed about politics, so minority, Roma self-governments don't have as much credibility, and they are needed, as they can lobby, but the civic organisations are those who carry out the projects” (Roma organisation, Pécs, welfare).

“And I would like to add, that being a Roma organisation is strange. For me it is laughable, that an organisation from Bratislava, often non-Roma, or those that have access to these amounts of money, and they don't have an idea, don't know the localities, but they have the money. [...] And it is sad, because when their projects are over, they leave. Often they do a lot of harm, harmful activism, infect the people, and ruin the communities, and then leave, because they reorient themselves on another project” (Roma organisation, Košice, media).

“It is not necessary, that only Roma organisations would do this, but if there are Roma organisations in the area, they should be involved in solving the problems” (Roma organisation, Pécs, women).

Another kind of contact with the community is that envisaged by one of the Hungarian respondents in Košice, who said, that as a civic organisation, it would be their role, to “guide the community somehow”. Otherwise the ethnic community was rarely mentioned in the interview.

Contrast: Fake civil and institutions

In the interviews civil society organisations were most often contrasted with the “fake civils” and the “institutions” and in Hungary the organisation were often compared to the minority self-governments. “Fake civils” can be shortly defined as those who do their activity for the money and are willing to sacrifice their political autonomy and maintain strong connections with certain politicians or parties for the sake of funding.

“But one has to say, that 25 years have passed since 1989, and such a situation evolved, that certain civic organisation are tied to the apron strings of the power structure” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, coordination).

Institutions were mentioned first and foremost in relation to the finances as some ideal status, that can be characterised by normative funding and, as a result, stable operation. Several organisations, ranging from a German identity organisation, through Hungarian cultural organisation to Roma media have expressed the need to have more normatively funded institutions to

ensure the continuity of their operation. This confirms Kiss' assumption, that even though most of the organisations are formally non-profits, in fact these are established to substitute for public institutions. The only advantage of civic organisations compared to institutions mentioned was their flexibility, their operation is less bureaucratic.

“Well, as I see that, basically the biggest problem of the Hungarians in Slovakia is that there is no functional institutional system. [...] In the past Csemadok seemed like that, while it was getting regular funding from the state...” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, culture).

“The lack of institutions leads there that civic organisation substitute them and do what should have been done by institutions” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, coordination).

„1st Respondent: But [name of organisation] is basically a cultural centre.

2nd Respondent: Well, not exactly.

1st Respondent: Its activity... A cultural centre, but without the budget.

2nd Respondent: That's just it” (Hungarian organisations, Košice, culture and coordination).

“Unless the institutions that would deal with the community will be established the situation wouldn't improve. [...] For years we are requesting a system, a system of funding of the Roma media, because Roma media shouldn't and cannot function as a project” (Roma organisation, Košice, media).

The minority self-governments were mentioned as potential partners and sources of funding for the organisations. The respondents consider the MSGs more suitable for lobbying, but should not necessarily organise own events, instead they should help finance the organisations' events. In the case of the Croats, there is a strong connection, intensive cooperation and the pooling of resources among the civic organisations and the local, county and national Croat MSG, thanks to the overlapping membership and leadership.

Ethnic organisations

Finally, the respondents were also asked what they find necessary for an organisation to be considered ethnic (Hungarian, German, Roma, etc.) organisation. The mentioned criteria matched those mentioned in the literature review: language, target group, composition of membership and leadership, however, the most emphasis was on the ethnic nature of the activities: this can mean cultural events, lectures on history, but also welfare programs in the case of the Roma.

“Primarily culture, history, traditions” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, culture).

“For example, we also publish our catalogues in two languages, and there are Slovaks on our events, sometimes the presentation is in both languages, but the topic is Hungarian. Related to Hungarians. Our goal is to present Hungarian history, important persons” (Hungarian organisation, Košice, culture).

The aim of most of these organisations is to strengthen the community, the sense of belonging, the ethnic solidarity and identity, and they try to achieve this by presenting opportunities for the members of the community to meet and to get to know their heritage.

“Our main field of activity is to hold the German youth living in Hungary together. [...] We would like to strengthen the young German people’s identity, the sense of belonging to the German nationality” (German organisation, Pécs, youth).

Due to the different social positions of the Roma, this cultural and identity aspect is less emphasised, but not entirely neglected, in the case of the Roma organisations. These focus more on the social welfare and the empowerment of the Roma communities. But there are also Roma media organisations, that inform the public and the Roma community about news concerning the Roma and cultural organisations, too.

The target group may sometimes be the majority: events and media are not only to meet the cultural needs and inform the community, but also to present the ethnic community to the majority. The composition of the members and leaders is often necessary for an organisation to qualify as minority organisation, but it is not enforced, the organisations usually don’t exclude anyone, but it is important that there are members and leaders from the ethnic community. Language is also not universally emphasised: e.g. a significant proportion of Roma are Hungarian- or Slovak-speaking, and there are such Germans as well, who don’t speak the German language fluently and in everyday interaction use the Hungarian language instead. However, it seems to be of utmost importance for the Croats and Hungarians in Timișoara and Košice, and this language-preference often discourages interethnic cooperation.

“The fate of these common institutions is, that the working language will be Hungarian. But it is important for the nationality’s language to be used. [...] It is not good, if the Hungarian language comes into picture. Of course they have to speak Hungarian, but the most important about these institutions, workshops is to cultivate the mother tongue, this mixing of the nationalities is not necessarily a good idea” (Croat organisation, Pécs, culture).

Conclusions

In our paper we aimed to contribute to the discussion regarding the use of the term civil society in the case of ethnic minorities. As we have seen, scholars warn us, that the unreflected use of the term civil society organisation for the non-profits of ethnic minorities may lead to false conclusions regarding these organisations. In our paper we explored, in what ways the representatives – primarily leaders – of the non-profit organisations of autochthonous ethnic minorities use the terms of ‘civil organisation’ or ‘non-profit organisation’ and the term ‘minority organisation’. We made interviews in three Central European cities: Košice, Pécs and Timișoara.

The interviews also touched upon the perceptions of these representatives about the role of ethnic and civic organisations in the society and the conditions for their operation. The criteria mentioned were interconnected and also strongly connected to these conditions.

Based on the qualitative content analysis of the interviews we identified four defining criteria for civic organisations: independence, the motivation of members and leaders, state-funding and the contact with the community. Based on the interviews we may conclude, that these organisations are usually characterised by a low level of professionalization and financial instability: they most often rely on the voluntary work of a relatively small group of committed people, who sacrifice part of their spare time to operate the organisation, and are mostly financed from governmental grants and by the kin-states. Even if the organisations had paid employees and an office, they reported that their financial background is uncertain. We can agree with Kiss’ remark, that most of these organisations try to substitute for the lacking public institutions, and the non-profit form may often be a necessity: it is a way to get funding for these activities and it is suitable to tide over time periods without external funding. The funding also explains, why organisations stress that they are apolitical, but at least do not engage in party politics. Only a few operators of ethnic civil society think that civic organisations should be able to control the parties and influence political processes. The contact with the community is also ambivalent. There are organisations that emphasise their closeness to the represented community, possibly as a way to gain advantage in competition, while others don’t mention this aspect of civil society at all.

Notes

¹ In Hungarian these organisations are usually called ‘civil szervezet’ (civil society organisation).

² In Slovak the organisations are usually called ‘nezisková organizácia’ (non-profit organisation). Another term, which is used is ‘mimovládna organizácia’ (non-governmental organisation).

³ Kiss based on the pursued goals of the organisations identifies six sub-systems within minority institutional systems: administrative, educational-scientific, religious, political, cultural and economic sub-systems. Except the last one, which consists of businesses, all other consist of both public institutions and non-profit organisations.

⁴ Although the organisations of other ethnic minorities in Timișoara have been contacted by my partners, they were unwilling to participate. The interviews were made and transcribed in Hungarian and the selected quotes translated into English by the author.

⁵ For the analysis of the Hungarian debate on the so called „fake” civils [7]. and a selection of short articles on the subject in Gerencsér et al. 2013. In Slovakia these debates are often, but not exclusively centered on Csemadok (e.g. Lajos P.J. (2016, January 20). A Csemadok az MKP oldalán áll [The Csemadok is on the side of the Party of

the Hungarian Community]. Új Szó. Retrieved from <http://www.ujso.com>), and arise especially around elections (e.g. Finta M. (2016, January 25). Hol ér össze a civil szektor és a politika? [Where does the civic sector and politics meet?] Retrieved from <http://www.trafik.sk>) and in connection to the Slovak and Hungarian grant system (e.g. Round Table of Hungarians in Slovakia (2013, February 21). A problémás támogatások mutatják: rendszerszintű megoldás kell. [Problematic grants show: a solution on the level of the system is needed] Retrieved from <http://www.kerekasztal.org>)

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Andras Morauszki (Budapest, Ungaria). Cercetător științific, Institutul pentru Studii a Minorităților, Centrul Științelor Sociale, Academia de Științe a Ungariei.

Андрас Мораушки (Будапешт, Венгрия). Научный сотрудник, Институт исследований меньшинств, Центр социальных наук, Венгерская академия наук.

András Morauszki (Budapest, Hungary). Researcher, Institute for Minority Studies, Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

E-mail: morauszki.andras@tk.mta.hu

Table 1. Definition criteria of ethnic organisations

Tóth, 2006	Kiss, 2006	Fennema, 2004
self-definition as ethnic organisation	target group	target group (based on mission statement)
ethnic composition of membership	ethnic character of goals and activities	ethnic composition of membership
language used	ethnic composition of leadership	ethnic composition of leadership
operate in the area, where the ethnic group lives	language used	
target group		