

Minority Civil Society – A Specificity of What?

Book Review

Erdélyi Magyar Civil Évkönyv – 2014 (Transylvanian Hungarian Civil Year-Book – 2014), Ed.: Barna Bodó, Gordian, Cluj/Kolozsvár, 2014.

The reviewed volume covers a very interesting and somewhat scientifically neglected field of social life: the specific ‘world’ of the civil society in minority societies. Nine studies of the volume focus on the theoretical aspects of the minority civil societies and examine some peculiar respects of the Hungarian minorities’ civil society life in Transylvania (Romania), Slovakia, Vojvodina (Serbia), and the Subcarpathian region of Ukraine.

Tünde Székely in her study deals with the definitional questions and dilemmas of the concept ‘minority civil society’. The set of notions related to this issue consists – according to Székely – of concepts as cultural heterogeneity, multiculturalism, identity, nation-state, minority groups, multinational state, polyethnic state, policy of recognition, and others. She underlines the significance of the so-called ‘dilemma of modernization’. How must the minority civil society be seen: is it a ‘minority civil society’ or a ‘civil minority society’? What is the determining feature of this social form: an identity-motivated solidarity or a culturally framed response to the challenges of the social plurality? There is no unique definition for the variety of the historical and political situations in which several minority groups (societies) are included.

Orsolya Varga’s essay follows the significance of the concept ‘subsidiarity’ from its theological definition launched by Pope Leo XIII to its nowadays used European definition as a basic principle of democracy in the European Union. One of the conclusions formulated by the author is that the principle of subsidiarity must be implemented in such a way to assure a reasonable power-sharing with a clear and minimal setting and – at the same time – an optimal frame for the civil participation and the validation of a large spectrum of the interests.

A research paper signed by Réka Zsuzsánna Máthé focuses on the relationship between the NGOs and the governmental institutes and the efficiency of the public finances in this relationship. What is an essential hardship in this relationship regarding the minority civil societies is the personal and more ethnicized connection with the Romanian governmental authorities. Another

research paper written by Nóra-Csilla Veress examines the relationship between the NGOs and the authorities of the local self-governments, with a case study on Cluj-Napoca / Kolozsvár and based on a bulk of interviews with several actors of the Hungarian minority civil societies. The study highlights the fact that there is not a real partnership (on a long-term basis) between the city hall and the civil society. The same question was examined by Boróka Pápay, with special focus on two foundations having a special role in the minority civil society support.

Three studies (signed by Géza Tokár, András Ritz, and Mónika Bayerné Sipos) offer perspectives for an edifying comparison between three different regions: Vojvodina (Serbia), South-Slovakia, and the Subcarpathian region (Ukraine).

The study signed by Sarolta Borzási is only partly connected to the main topic of the volume. It is a short summary of the literature on the study of lobbying and it is completed with a short research on how the legislation of lobbying was implemented in Romania and accessed by the ethnic Hungarian civil society in Transylvania.

An important remark on this volume must be made regarding the authors. Most of them are young ethnic Hungarian researchers and some are civil society leaders. So, they are completing the scientific approach with a special emphasis on social activism.

Challenging the young researchers was a conscious tenor of the editor of the volume, Barna Bodó. Prefacing the volume, he emphasized the importance of having workshops gathering young researchers in this field.

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