



Looking Back:

The Year 1989 as a Cultural and Civilizational Break

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The transformations in East-Central Europe after 1989 proceed at two distinct levels: institutional and cultural. The complete transition to democratic polity and market economy can be effected only if appropriate cultural “habits of the heart” emerge and become fully established. The period of real-socialism has left a vicious legacy of “civilizational incompetence”, due to the impact of “bloc culture”. But the traditions of indigenous, national cultures as well as globalized Western culture may serve as an antidote, slowly eradicating the vestiges of communism. The major role in this process is performed by the young generation, who was able to escape the indoctrination and habituation by the communist system. Elsevier Science Ltd. Copyright © 1996 The Regents of the University of California

The Value of Looking Back

Some observers believe that Eastern and Central European societies are entering a “second round” of post-communist transition (Haggard and Kaufman, 1994, p.15). Others express anxiety about the future: “At present, post-Communist societies are in the midst of a journey toward an unknown destination and such journeys are full of uncertainties” (Rose, 1992, p.376). It may be the right time to look retrospectively and analytically at the “first round,” those turbulent six years that have passed since the “miraculous year 1989.”

Sociology is strong in post-hoc interpretations. Perhaps at the level of macro-historical phenomena this is the most that sociology can do. The value of such retrospective accounts should not be underestimated: they may considerably enrich our understanding of what is happening, what the future may bring, and what policies may conceivably help to shape the future in accord with our dreams.

“Revolutions of 1989”: the Name is Deserved

What was the nature of those events which transpired in Europe in the autumn of 1989 and which continued up to 1991/1992, the time of the final collapse of the Soviet Union?

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Most observers agree: it was a *revolution*, both in the historiosophical and sociological senses of the term. In the historiosophical sense because it produced a true break in the historical continuity and embraced changes at all major levels of social life, and in the sociological sense because it occurred due to the extreme mobilization of the masses and huge social movements—the eruption of collective action and collective behavior on the grand scale (cf. Sztompka, 1993a, pp. 301–321). It failed—and fortunately so—to meet only one of the traditional criteria, that is, there was no widespread violence (with the exception of Romania, where the violent outbreak was quite serious). But if we notice that the means of revolutionary action, the “repertoires of contention” as Tilly (1994) calls them, are historically changing, there is no reason to exclude from that category the massive changes by non-violent means, i.e. peaceful, smooth, “Velvet Revolutions.”

Such a view is supported by historians and sociologists alike. Trevor-Roper (1989, p.14) claims: “The revolutions of 1989 have been real revolutions: popular revolts before which armed governments, one after another, have collapsed; the recovery by nations of lost liberty.” Eisenstadt (1992, p.21) confirms: “the breakdowns of the communist regimes are revolutions—drastic, dramatic changes of regime.” And Tilly (1994) does not hesitate to include the year 1989 as a milestone in his account of “European Revolutions 1492–1992.” But we may go further than that.

If the concept of *great* revolutions is reserved for those which have had worldwide, global, truly historical impact, the year 1989 perhaps deserves a place among the other great revolutions in history: British, American, French, Russian, Chinese. Like those, the revolutions of 1989 have undoubtedly changed the world. Graubard (1992, p.v) is quite explicit: “The year 1989 with its unprecedented happenings in both Central and Eastern Europe must figure among the few whose consequences have transformed the world.” Similarly Tiryakian (1994, p.132) believes that “the post-1989 democratisation (...) is truly a miracle of epic historical proportions.” And Eisenstadt (1992, p.21) considers the breakdown of communist regimes as: “one of the more dramatic events in the history of mankind.”

Post-revolutionary Processes: Two Dualities of Transition

As a major break in historical continuity, the revolutions of 1989 have terminated some social processes, deflected others, and, most importantly, initiated some *new* ones. There are various ways in which the post-revolutionary processes may be classified.

In the burgeoning field of scholarship which has already been mockingly called “transitology” (Zon, 1993), two of the processes analysed most often are the emergence of political democracy, and the spread of the economic market. And perhaps most of the original contributions to “transitology” have focused on the tensions and contradictions engendered by building a democratic polity and a market economy during the same time span (what was called the dilemmas of “simultaneous transitions,” or “double transitions.” [Centeno, 1994; Armijo *et al.*, 1994; Rose, 1992; Schmitter, 1993; Sztompka, 1992]).

But the flow of changes coming in the aftermath of the year 1989 may also be approached in a different way and then perhaps another, and more basic, dualism can be seen. Some processes run at the level of institutions and organizations, they embrace the hard backbone of society, and produce new tangible structural arrangements. Such processes are most often instigated from above, by the government or its agencies. They become articulated by legislatures, safeguarded by laws, and enforced by state power. *Institution-building* usually proceeds by design, with various degrees of efficiency, various measures of success, and with various

unintended, and even unacknowledged, side-effects. The parliament, political parties, constitutional court, Ombudsman, private corporations, stock-exchange, banks and broker firms etc. are all examples of such institutions appearing in East-Central Europe after 1989. Most often they are not original inventions, but rather are emulations of quite old social arrangements, which have been well-established in modern societies of the West.

But there are other processes. They run at the level of *culture and civilization*. Cultural processes embrace the soft tissue of society, the intangible assumptions, premises, understandings, rules, and values. Tocqueville (1945) spoke of the changing "habits of the heart," while earlier Durkheim (1895) spoke of the "*manieres d'agir et de penser*." Such changes originate in the spontaneous push from below, proceed in a crecive, incremental manner, and produce shared, taken-for-granted routines of social life, safeguarded by what Sumner (1906) called the "folkways and mores" or which modern authors describe as deep normative structures: codes, frames, themes or discourses. Cultural precepts tell societal members what ought to be done and believed in, either because it is good, or because it is done and believed by most people, or because it has always been done and accepted. In other words, culture invokes the authority of righteousness, normalcy, or tradition, and derives its legitimacy from these sources.

By civilization, on the other hand, we mean a socially produced, shared universe of objects, materials, artefacts, utensils, technologies, beliefs, manners etc., consciously entertained by the actors (though with various degrees of articulation) and adopted as instruments for reaching their goals or satisfying their needs. Civilizational processes provide the reflection of deep cultural changes at the observable, surface level of everyday life: in the life-styles, aesthetic preferences, forms of conduct, typical utensils and technical devices, interpersonal manners etc. Thus, while culture is the most fundamental, deepest, and invisible layer, civilization is a more superficial and directly perceivable layer. *Culture-building* and the "*civilizing process*" (to use the term of Elias, 1982) do not proceed by design, but as an emergent, learned response to the conditions in which people live, the entire context of their "life-world".

The opposition of institutional and cultural-civilizational levels of change may be thrown into sharper relief by means of a metaphor borrowed from Brzezinski (1989): *building a house* is not the same as *establishing a home*. The former is only the shell, the empty framework ready for habitation, but not yet inhabited; it is a concern for architects. The latter is the living arena of social actions and interactions and of the human relations unfolding within that shell; it is the concern for sociology. The more or less explicit recognition of that distinction between the institutional and the cultural-civilizational spheres is also indicated by other terms, i.e. public sphere versus civil society; system versus life-world; structure versus agency. The shades of meaning may differ, but all of those oppositions point in the same direction and sensitize us to the same fundamental contrast.

The dichotomy of institution-building and culture-building is equally relevant in the political and economic domain; therefore it may be compared with the more common dichotomy of democratization and marketization (see *Table 1*).

The relationship between the institutional and cultural levels must be treated as two-sided and reciprocal. Institutions are one of the most important forces *shaping prevailing culture*. They provide the frame for the actions of participating individuals and demand specific conduct: they distribute rewards and punishments for conformity or deviance. Lessons from individual instrumental learning become shared by societal members and in this way cultural demands reach the level of

Table 1

	Institution-building	Culture-building
DEMOCRATIZATION	e.g. parliament, elections, political parties, ombudsman	civic culture, citizenship
MARKETIZATION	e.g. private firms, corporations, banks, stock exchange, brokers	entrepreneurial culture, work ethic

“social facts” *sui generis*, in the sense of Durkheim (1895); they become the seemingly given, external, and constraining rules of social life, and no longer the distributive property of each individual member, but a collective property of a whole society.

At the same time the internalization of certain cultural codes, rules, and values by societal members is the *pre-requisite for their meaningful actions* within institutions. I propose the concept of “civilizational competence” (Sztompka, 1993b) to describe the set of such cultural premises indispensable for a modern society of the democratic and market type. Let me explain this notion.

For a modern democratic and market society to operate, several resources seem indispensable. Capital, technology, infrastructure, a skilled labor force, a robust middle class, an efficient civil service, and a professional political elite would be some obvious examples. But there is also a less obvious, underlying cultural resource which may be called *civilizational competence*. By this in clear analogy to what the linguists call the “language competence,” I mean a complex set of rules, norms and values, habits and reflexes, codes and matrixes, blueprints and templates the skillful and semi-automatic mastery of which is a prerequisite for participation in modern civilization.

Two substantive sub-categories of civilizational competence coincide with two of the main areas of modern, developed society for which they are immediately relevant: the polity and the economy. First, there is the *civic culture*, indispensable for participation in a democratic polity. Some of its components include political activism, readiness to participate, concern with public issues, rule of law, discipline, respect for opponents, compliance with the majority and the like (cf. Almond and Verba, 1963). For example, a minimum awareness of citizen’s rights and duties is necessary for participating in elections. Such internalization by the plurality of individuals is a prerequisite for the viability and continued existence of the institution of political representation. If nobody votes, or nobody counts the votes, there are no elections, and no representatives. Second, there is the *entrepreneurial culture*, indispensable for participation in a market economy. Some of its components include innovative push, achievement orientation, individualistic competitiveness, rational calculation, fairness of contracts, and the like (cf. McClelland, 1961; Inkeles, 1976). For example, a minimum responsibility, fairness, and trust is necessary for the banks to operate. If nobody pays debts, or nobody capitalizes interest, there can be no credit.

Culture is not given, rather it is *socially produced*: a construct, a contingent achievement of human beings. There are three sources from which culture is generated: institutions, tradition and diffusion. The actual context of institutions elicits appropriate cultural responses (rules, values, codes etc.) via socialization and social control (sanctioning of conforming and deviant conduct). Causality

operates across levels from the institutional to the cultural. But in the cases of tradition and diffusion causality operates at the same, cultural, level. Thus, tradition is the direct influence of the culture of the past, which persists due to generational inertia; diffusion is the direct influence of alien, external cultures, which are adopted, imitated or emulated due to their pervasiveness, salience, attractiveness, or power of imposition (“cultural imperialism”).

Thus, at any given moment the culture is a co-product, the combined result of institutional pressure, inherited tradition, and diffusion from influential external cultures. The relative proportions of those influences will of course vary from case to case.

The institutional and cultural levels may fit together and may mutually reinforce each other. In such situations we may speak of a true *consolidation* of institutions and *adequacy* of culture. But both levels may also manifest a lack of fit, incongruence, or contradictions. For example, in the political domain new democratic institutions may not be matched with an adequate political culture. This seems to be the case in post-communist societies where the widespread cultural rules still dictate pervasive suspicion toward authorities (Sztompka, 1995), reluctance to get involved in public life, ignorance and neglect of public issues, political apathy, and electoral absenteeism. Similarly in the economic domain, capitalist institutions may already be there but the “spirit of capitalism” (to use the phrase of Weber, 1958) may be missing. Again, taking the case of post-communist societies the focus on security rather than risk may prevail, reliance on governmental support rather than on oneself may be typical, system-blame rather than self-responsibility may accompany failures, there may be reluctance to invest in long-range enterprises, and a general lack of discipline and diligence. In the diagnosis of Rose (1992, p.382): “Virtually the whole of the labour force, from managers to the factory floor, are inexperienced in the workings of a market economy.”

More generally, the divergence of institutions and culture presumably accompanies periods of rapid and radical social change. It is one of the common traits of revolutions, and it certainly applies to the revolutions of 1989. I claim, however, that the multiple processes initiated then are far from being harmonized or consolidated. The revolution is in an important sense unfinished, because there is the continuing *incongruence between institution-building and culture-building*. Students of transition confirm this diagnosis: “The newly founded institutions are in place, but they fail to perform in anticipated ways and thus become subject to ever more hectic cycles of renewed institutional engineering and concomitant efforts to ‘re-educate’ people so as to make them fit for their roles in the new institutions” (Offe, 1993, p.34); “The common problem facing Eastern European transformations is determined by the fact of ‘modernisation requirements’—simultaneously concerning the political, social and cultural spheres—mutually blocking instead of mutually stimulating one another” (Muller, 1992, p.146). The discrepancy between the institutional and cultural spheres makes for another, perhaps even more important, “*duality of transition*,” cutting across the duality of political and economic processes.

The Case for a Cultural–Civilizational Approach

The real meaning of the revolutions of 1989 cannot be grasped if we do not take the cultural–civilizational level into serious account. The selection of the cultural–civilizational perspective as particularly relevant for the study of post-communist societies is not a matter of theoretical taste, nor current vogue, but is implied by a diagnosis of the historical situation amidst which we live.

The year 1989 was not only a political break from an autocratic, mono-party regime toward a parliamentary, multi-party system—the ultimate victory of democracy; nor was it an economic break from a socialist, planned, command economy, to a basically free, capitalist market—the second birth of capitalism. Neither was it the radical transformation of institutions, or the restitution of some earlier social order—“the return” to Europe, to the West, to “normality” or whatever. Rather it *started the construction of a new social order* from a strange mixture of components of various origins. It was a major cultural and civilizational break, a beginning of the reconstruction of the deepest cultural tissue as well as the civilizational surface of society, the slow emergence of the new post-communist culture and civilization. It is the main claim of this article that such a major *cultural and civilizational break* is at the core of the post-communist transition.

If we do not turn our focus to the level of culture, to the realm of intangibles and imponderables (Sztompka, 1991) or “soft variables,” we shall neither be able to comprehend nor to overcome the obstacles and blockades that inhibit the processes of institutional change. I propose the switch of research focus from the study of institutions to the study of culture: a more hidden, deep but absolutely fundamental dimension of social life. There are influential supporters of this perspective among contemporary sociologists and political scientists: “cultural factors may play an extremely significant role in both political and economic development (...) The available evidence tends to confirm Weber’s insight that culture is not just a consequence of economics but can shape the basic nature of economic and political life” (Inglehart, 1988, pp.1219, 1229); “Symbolic elements are becoming, once again, more and more important in politics” (Lepenies, 1992, p.4).

Three Cultures in the Communist Period

With these theoretical points in mind let us turn back to the year 1989, and analyse the essence of the cultural break that occurred at that moment in the societies of Eastern and Central Europe. First, let us look at the situation obtaining before the break.

For several decades the cultures of real-socialist societies were shaped under the cross-impact of three *culture-generating sources*. First, the common institutional framework of autocratic polity and command economy, imposed from the core of the Soviet empire. “Russians are not only Russian, nor Poles Polish, Germans German, nor the lot of them simply human. They are residents of societies which all underwent between 40 and 70 odd years (very odd years) of communist rule. This was something special that they had in common, and that other societies did not have” (Krygier, 1995, p.7). The cultural response was “a philosophy of dependency instead of self-reliance, of an all-embracing collectivism and conformity over individualism, of commitment to the equalization not only of opportunities but also outcomes, of rigidity and extremism in beliefs, and of intolerance” (Seweryn Bialer, quoted in Reisinger *et al.*, 1994, p.195). This may be labelled as characteristic “bloc culture.”

Second, there were the indigenous cultural traditions, different in the various societies of the region, and often linked with a dominant religion. They were responsible for the great cultural variety among the countries politically enclosed within the same communist bloc; Poland was not the same as GDR, Hungary not the same as Romania etc. Some of those local cultures were better prepared for democracy, more congruent with democratic and market institutions (e.g. the Czechs), some were fundamentally at odds with democratic institutions (e.g.

Russia, see Reisinger *et al.*, 1994, p.188). “You can neither buy nor sell the spirit of capitalism and a sense for individual justice in a society which has never known a market economy nor experienced legal procedures comparable to those of the civil societies in the West” (Lepenes, 1992, p.3).

Third, there was the impact of so-called Western culture, originating in the most developed, industrialized, urbanized mass societies of Western Europe and America. To some degree that culture was smuggled unwittingly with the institutions of modernity implanted by force in communist societies: industrial production, urban settlements, and mass education. Even if modernity was strangely incomplete, missing some of its crucial political and economic components, even if it was only a “fake modernity” (Sztompka, 1993b), yet “Changes sometimes dubbed as ‘modernization’ produce fundamental shifts in people’s values and behaviours. (...) Industrialization of the economy, collectivization of agriculture, the resulting migration to the cities, as well as increased literacy and access to higher education all changed Soviet societies, making them more ‘modern’ and therefore more open to democratic and market reforms” (Reisinger *et al.*, 1994, pp.200–201). This may be labelled as a “convergence theory” mechanism. Apart from that, some aspects of Western culture penetrated directly from the West to various societies of the region through the mass media, personal exchanges, tourism etc., though to varying degrees depending on the rigidity of the cultural gates raised by the local authorities (again Poland differed markedly from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia from DDR etc.). This may be labelled as the “globalization theory” mechanism.

As a result, in each real-socialist society we may speak of *three cultures* in mutual tension: the bloc culture, the national culture, and the Western (globalized) culture. It was a peculiar case of the “cultural clash” *internal to a society* and manifesting itself along three axes.

The proportional significance of each of these culture-generating sources, and therefore the relative strength of the three cultures, differed not only among Eastern-Central European societies, but also internally among various segments (classes, communities, groups) within each society. We may expect that those individuals, or groups, or social categories which are most prone to fall under the impact of alternative cultural pressures—whether national or global—will be most insulated from the grip of communist culture and they will become the natural *avant-garde of cultural deconstruction* and reform. They will act as the leaders of the civilizational advancement, spreading the cultural message to other groups and social categories.

As a matter of fact, the three cultures were not evenly distributed in the populations of Eastern and Central European countries. There were groups most intimately involved in the operation of socialist institutions, and therefore most vulnerable to its cultural imperatives, e.g. political elites, party activists, managerial groups, professional officers, secret policemen, privileged “*nomenclatura*.” But there were also groups relatively insulated from the impact because of a-political occupations (e.g. scientists), the relative autonomy of self-employment (e.g. farmers or artists), participation in the private sector (e.g. shopkeepers or artisans), security of professional expertise (e.g. medical doctors or lawyers), and these were more exposed to alternative culture-generating influences. Some were sensitized to indigenous traditions (e.g. Catholicism, nationalism, aspirations to sovereignty, contestation against foreign rule), resulting in cultural localism, provincialism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia. In Poland, some segments of the peasantry were typically the carriers of such traditions. Others were oriented

toward the Western culture (e.g. work ethics, secularization, personal freedom, civil rights), resulting in cultural cosmopolitanism, liberalism, and tolerance. In Poland, also, such a cultural syndrome was most often found among professional groups, the intelligentsia, and some private entrepreneurs, who had skills and resources (cultural and economic capital) to penetrate the gates raised against the cultural flows; they had the requisite level of education, foreign language competence, international contacts, and a surplus of money for cultural consumption or foreign tourism.

Society-wide, the bloc culture was of course prevailing. It emerged either as adaptive patterns necessary to survive (or to succeed) in the given institutional environment (e.g. political apathy, submissiveness, lack of entrepreneurial initiative, opportunistic double standards, virtue of mediocrity, disinterested envy against all achievers, interpersonal distrust), or as a response to direct indoctrination by a controlled mass media and educational apparatus (e.g. primitive egalitarianism, acceptance of paternalism of the state, anti-elitism, anti-intellectualism, anti-capitalist stereotypes). The significance of indigenous traditions and Western (globalized) influences was limited, sometimes deeply experienced only by narrow minorities.

But it is in those relatively marginal groups which managed to escape the grip of communist culture that democratic opposition against the system was born. Taking an oppositional stand initiated a sort of self-fulfilling process. People who opposed the socialist system, self-consciously raised a mental barrier against its ideological and cultural impact, and they were more sensitive to the evidence of its counter-civilizational implications. Those who coupled their oppositional beliefs with actions, entering conspiracy or participating in anti-communist movements (Polish "Solidarity", Czechoslovakian "Charter 77", Hungarian "Democratic Forum" etc.), not only strengthened their attitudes by deeds, but provoked rejection and stigmatization by the authorities (discrimination, harassment, or outright oppression). In effect they were pushed to the status of outsiders, remaining at the margins of official culture—which in this way unwittingly saved them from its grip, and allowed them to preserve personal autonomy and self-identity. Obviously, they manifested a growing readiness to embrace alternative cultural orientations, whether national or Western.

The Idea of Civil Society: the Cultural Focus of Democratic Opposition

It is interesting to note that the cultural–civilizational focus which I am advocating in this article, was already appearing as crucial to the ideologues of democratic opposition. This is clear if we look at the meaning they gave to an old and entirely forgotten sociological notion that was dug out, revived, and put into the mainstream of public discourse. It was the concept of "*civil society*." The history of democratic opposition in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia may be written as the history of struggles for civil society, either so fragile or almost entirely destroyed under the communist regime (Ash, 1990a, p.194; Ash, 1990b; Tismaneanu, 1992; Szacki, 1994, p.112).

In the course of the struggle and the accompanying intellectual debates, the concept of civil society acquired three distinct meanings, indebted to the three theoretical traditions from which it was extracted. The first may be called the *sociological concept*, with antecedents in the classical theories of human communities and groups: those of Ferdinand Tönnies or Georg Simmel (even though those authors did not use the term itself). Here civil society is a synonym for

community (“*Gemeinschaft*”, as opposed to “*Gesellschaft*”), or mezzo-structures—the intermediate sphere in the variety of human groups between the micro-level of the family, and the macro-level of the nation-state.

From that perspective, the main weakness of communist society was defined as the “sociological vacuum, that exists between the level of the primary group and the level of the national society” (Nowak, 1981, p.17). “The social structure of our country,” Nowak (1981, p.17) explained, “would appear as a federation of primary groups, families and friendship circles, united in a national community which has very weak links of other types between the two levels.” The same meaning of civil society may be found in recent sociological literature, when it is conceived of as “the totality of social institutions and associations, both formal and informal, that are not strictly production oriented nor governmental or familial in character” (Rueschemeyer *et al.*, 1992, p.49). When the concept was used with such a connotation the ideological message was clear: to overcome state monopoly, authoritarian control, and totalitarian “colonization of the life-world”—to paraphrase Habermas (1987).

In this respect the struggle was highly successful. Long before 1989, there had appeared a dense network of unofficial, sometimes illegal, associations, discussion clubs, voluntary organizations, self-education groups, and trade unions, culminating in the powerful social movements of which “Solidarity” was the prime example. After 1989, we have witnessed a true explosion of such intermediate bodies, now official, legitimate and recognized. Numerous political parties have appeared and entered the parliaments through democratic elections. In this sense, civil society has been reconstituted, sometimes even in an overblown size (e.g. in Poland there are almost 100 registered political parties). It will take some time before this sphere regains normal proportions. Yet certainly, the “sociological vacuum” is no longer there.

There is another sense of the concept, which was also revived by Eastern European intellectuals. It is *the economic concept*, related to the classical heritage of Karl Marx and Max Weber. Here, civil society refers to the autonomous sphere of economic activities and relationships, the “mode of production” rooted in private ownership, moved by entrepreneurial initiative, pervaded by rational calculation, and aimed at individual profit. The actors operating in that sphere are labelled the “bourgeois” in traditional language, or the “middle class” in modern terminology.

In the hands of the democratic opposition, the ideological message implied by such a concept was to overcome the command economy centrally controlled by the state, and to eliminate the privileged status of state property as the dominant mode of ownership. In this respect, too, the battle has been considerably successful. After 1989, individual, private property regained its full legitimacy, the policy of privatization transferred large chunks of state capital into private hands, and there was an outburst of entrepreneurial activities, initially in the domain of small scale trade, financial operations, and short term investments, aimed at quick profit, but clearly evolving in the direction of serious, long range ventures of larger scale. As an example, in Poland within two years about 80 per cent of retail trade was put into private hands, and more than a half of GNP is already produced by the private sector. In 1993 the private sector accounted for 59 per cent of employment, and taking into account an extensive “gray area,” around two-thirds of the population are employed outside of the public sector (Poland: Economic Report, 1994, p.127). A lot is yet to be done in this domain, but a rudimentary market already exists, and a sizeable middle class has emerged. Civil society, in the second meaning of the term, has been at least partly reconstituted.

The picture becomes more complex and less bright when we move to the third meaning of the concept, which is central to the argument developed in this article. This may be called *the cultural concept*, derived from the heritage of Alexis de Tocqueville and Antonio Gramsci. Here civil society is synonymous with axiological consensus and developed emotional community, bound by the tight network of interpersonal loyalties, commitments, solidarities, and trust. It means mature public opinion and a rich public life. It means the identification of citizens with public institutions, a concern with the common good, and a respect for laws. In modern sociology, such a neo-Durkheimian, culturalistic interpretation of civil society is put forward by Alexander (1992, p.2): "Civil society is the arena of social solidarity that is defined in universalistic terms. It is the we-ness of a national community, the feeling of connectedness to one another that transcends particular commitments, loyalties, and interests and allows there to emerge a single thread of identity among otherwise disparate people."

Those in the democratic opposition who picked out such a meaning for civil society were fighting against another vicious legacy of the communist regime: growing fragmentation, atomization, uprootedness, and anomie. They were protesting against the inauthenticity of official politics, double standards of morality, lies of indoctrination, and propaganda. The ideological message was to rebuild and revitalize "the truth," the authentic meaning of social participation, and therefore to restore identity and dignity to each societal member.

The communist regime has never succeeded in fully destroying civil society understood in this way (in the Polish case, one may even say that it stopped trying quite early, around 1956). But whatever remained of a civil society was nevertheless pushed underground, became the "*civil society in conspiracy*," directly opposed to the state and its institutions. Nowhere and never before was the opposition of civil society and the state, the people and the rulers, "we" and "them", so clear-cut and radical. The idea of a nation, a cultural, linguistic or religious community rooted in a sacred tradition, was opposed to the state, the oppressive machinery of foreign domination. Instead of the hyphenated idea of a nation-state, we had two, not only separate, but mutually opposed concepts: the nation and the state.

The "civil society in conspiracy" was at the beginning restricted to narrow groups of activists, but it started to grow in the 1970s, and exploded into the phenomenon of mass contestation in the 1980s. For example "What Solidarity was able to provide, on a heroic scale, was the structure and practice of a social movement whose hallmarks were national mobilization and monolithic solidarity" (Kumar, 1992, p.15). Then the glorious year 1989 came and civil society came out of conspiracy, entering the world of normal politics. Its success pre-empted its longer viability. As Kumar (1992, pp.15–16) puts it: "The strengths of its period of opposition became the weaknesses of its period of rule, and of its relevance as a general model of civil society (...). It has in any case proved impossible to depart too far from its basic conception of civil society: as an organization (or 'self-organization') of society *against* the state."

Civil society in its cultural meaning, as a network of deep assumptions, codes, and frames for thought and action—related to a community of citizens, to national tradition, and to state institutions—has emerged from the communist period in a highly crippled condition. I am convinced that the main pains of the transition originate here, that the most resistant obstacles on the road toward an open, democratic, market society are not to be found in the economic or political

domains, but at this, much less salient, cultural level. Without the full reconstitution of civil society in its ultimate, cultural sense, the new social order cannot be built.

The Cultural Lag in the Post-Revolutionary Period

What happened in the miraculous year 1989? The revolution occurred primarily at the institutional level. The winning of power by the democratic opposition, able to mobilize massive popular movement in its support, opened the opportunity for major institutional changes. At that time "*the copying of institutions*" became a dominant approach (Offe, 1993, p.46). The political and economic system was rapidly reconstructed by means of legislative decisions implementing Western institutions (or better, Western institutions *as imagined by the legislators*, usually in their pure, pristine forms, no longer to be found in the institutional practices of the contemporary West). "The clock of the lawyer"—to use the metaphor of Dahrendorf (1990)—runs quickest. New institutions emerged: the legal skeleton for democracy and the market was put in place.

Then, the civilizational surface of the life-world is touched relatively quickly. The "queuing society" (with its producer's monopoly and endemic shortages of goods and services) changes into a consumer society. The drabness and greyness of life gives way to color, vitality, and pluralism of options. The security and certainty of mediocre life-standards safeguarded by the state, turn into the risks and insecurities of self-reliance, competition, and unlimited aspirations. The personal dependence and pervasive state control is released, considerably enlarging the experience of liberty. The uniformity of the media evolves into enormous pluralism and a variety of messages.

But to follow the new ways of life, to operate successfully within the new institutions, the people require new cultural resources: codes, frames, rules, new "habits of the heart." This demand is not easily met, and therefore the viability of the institutions is put in peril. "Copied and transplanted institutions that lack the moral and cultural infrastructure on which the 'original' can rely, are likely to yield very different and often counter-intentional results" (Offe, 1993, p.46). This happens for two reasons. First, because at the cultural level, what Dahrendorf (1990) calls "the clock of the citizen" runs much slower, and lags behind institutional developments. The cultural "habits of the heart" show surprising resilience. Even if no longer adequate to new institutions, they persist and present the most important barrier to a smooth and rapid transition. "The one consequence of social trauma absolutely precluded by culturalist assumptions is rapid reorientation" (Eckstein, 1988, p.796). And second, due to that cultural lag, the bloc culture leaves a lasting heritage of "trained incapacity," the inability to make proper use of the new institutional and personal opportunities. I have referred to that legacy as the syndrome of "civilizational incompetence" (Sztompka, 1993b). The typical, widespread culture is incongruent with the adequate culture, i.e. the culture supportive for new institutions. This, in my view, is the main secret of our constant surprises: the disappointments and frustrations with the processes of post-communist transitions.

We may conceive this situation as another, more *polarized "culture clash"*: between the new, pro-democratic and pro-market culture—cosmopolitan, secular and pro-Western, bound with new emerging institutions—and the anti-democratic and anti-market culture, linking in a strange alliance the conservative, nationalist, provincial, isolationist, and xenophobic themes of the traditional indigenous

culture, with the anti-Western, anti-capitalist, egalitarian, and populist orientations of the bloc culture. Six years after the revolution, the post-communist societies are still internally split, torn between those two cultural options.

Why does the domain of culture show such persistence, why are strong habits, accustomed codes, mental frames so hard to unlearn, to eradicate, and to dismantle? The plausible answer refers to the mechanism of socialization and *generational effect*. The bridge between the influences of the past and the future is provided by generations; congeries of people who—in their formative years—have happened to be exposed to similar, significant social forces, to have lived through similar, significant social events. There is a “generation effect, when a particular age cohort responds to a set of stimuli (...) and then carries the impact of that response through the life cycle” (Almond and Verba, 1980, p.400). The earliest lessons are best remembered. The strongest socializing impact is effected during the period of youth. As long as the majority of the population consists of the people whose young, formative years, and therefore crucial socializing experiences fall under the rule of the communist regime—one can expect the continuing vitality of the bloc culture. This explains how the influences of some former, and already replaced, structures may still be felt in the present. And this is why Dahrendorf (1990) estimates that the changes at this deep cultural level will demand generations. The generation maturing under socialism seems to be damned.

The Chances for Culture to Catch up with Institutions

But first of all, not necessarily the *whole generation* is damned, and second—that generation, as all generations, is drifting through and *leaving the historical stage* relatively quickly. Those considerations make the present incongruence of institutional and cultural levels not entirely hopeless.

As we indicated before, the real-socialist society was not evenly affected by communist indoctrination and the adaptive pressures of communist institutions. After all it is from within that society that the democratic opposition emerged, spread, and was able to mobilize large masses in the struggle against the system. It is within those groups, relatively insulated from the impact of the system and open to the influence of indigenous national tradition as well as to Western values, that by means of some sort of “anticipatory socialization” the alternative cultural complex was shaped, pre-dating the actual emergence of democratic and market institutions.

With the victory of the revolution, the carriers of that cultural complex, so far limited in appeal, acquired political power. They advanced from dissidents to the political elite. That raised the expansive potential of the new culture due to four mechanisms. First, immediately after the revolution the new democratic and market institutions were legislated into being and started to exert their socializing and controlling impact. Second, the indoctrination “*a rebours*” was initiated, both in a negative way—directed retrospectively against the communist past, unravelling the immorality, corruption, inhuman face of the defeated system, debunking communist ideology, and therefore undermining the bloc culture—and in a positive way—idealizing the Western institutions and ways of life (a good example is provided by the sudden career of liberalism in its classical form, with the already anachronistic ideas of an entirely uncontrolled market, unrestricted competition, extreme individualism etc.). Third, the pre-communist national traditions were revived and glorified (this is why Habermas (1990) calls the events of 1989 “the rectifying revolutions”). This significantly raised the influence of indigenous

culture (Catholicism, nationalism, regionalism). Fourth, the full opening toward the West was proclaimed and in some measure effected (under the slogan of "returning to Europe"). This dramatically enhanced the diffusion of Western culture (globalization, Americanization, Westernization).

At the same time the proportional distribution of the population resistant to the new culture-generating pressure as against those susceptible to such a pressure undergoes a two-fold change. First, new demographic cohorts replace the older generations at the central positions in a society. They are the people who were already maturing in the period of the decay of the communist system, when its cultural grip was much weaker and the awareness of its failures much wider, as well as those who were maturing after the collapse of communism in 1989. Young people born and raised at the period when the socialist system was already crumbling and approaching its demise have had the good luck to escape the most efficient and pervasive indoctrination and habituation. *Youth* gives a chance of independence. The proportion of those irreparably tainted by communist experience and therefore resistant to new cultural demands, is quickly diminishing.

And second, with the progress of democratization, marketization, and privatization, large segments of the population become involved in the operation of new institutions, link their vested interests with their development, and hence fall under their culture-shaping impact. The political class, the aware and responsible citizenry, the entrepreneurial middle class, and the professional groups grow in scope. They become the avant-garde of the new culture, and from them it emanates to other groups, still linked to the vestiges of socialist institutions (e.g. the working class in state-run, huge industrial enterprises, bureaucratic personnel in public administration, employees of socialized medical services or state-run schools etc.)

Some Reasons for Restrained Optimism

With the benefit of hindsight, wiser with the experience of the six years that have passed since the revolutions of 1989, we may attain a more realistic appraisal of the ongoing processes of post-communist transition. Maybe we could get rid of the "surprise syndrome" which has been haunting us all that time (Lepenies, 1992). And thus:

- We should abandon romantic hopes and elevated aspirations that the new social order can be constructed immediately. "The most one can say with much certainty," says Kornai (1993, p.62), "is that the transformation will take a long time, requiring a complete period of history."
- We should abandon the illusion of simple solutions, e.g. the belief that legislative reforms from above are enough to change an entire social life. And Schmitter (1993, p.1) predicts: "Political future, instead of embodying 'the end of history,' promises to be tumultuous, uncertain and very eventful." (Schmitter, 1993, p.1).
- We should recognize that societies are such as their members: what they think and do. The people are the ultimate movers of reforms, but also, paradoxically, "the main obstacle to reform is the people" (Przeworski, 1993, p.185). And therefore the crucial target of transformation must be the human agents and their dominant ways of thinking and doing, that is, briefly, the realm of culture.

- We should notice that these are all pre-conditions for the slow fading away of the vestiges of the communist culture, and the slow ascendance of a new cultural complex, fitted to the demands of the new institutions of political democracy and an economic market.
- And therefore we may indulge in the long-range optimism, that the *consolidation of political and economic institutions with the requisite cultural foundations*, is the feasible even though distant prospect. We may envisage the situation when “acceptance of a given set of constitutional rules becomes increasingly widespread, valued and routinized” (Haggard and Kaufman, 1994, p.6), or when “the ensemble of rules and institutions jells into regular, acceptable and predictable patterns that can reproduce themselves over time and command the allegiance of citizens” (Schmitter, 1993, p.8).

When that happens the revolutions started in 1989 will be completed. But—to repeat—this will not happen overnight. As Bronislaw Geremek, the veteran of Polish opposition wisely remarks: “Democracies are built only over time, through the forming and functioning of democratic institutions (...). The process is one of gradual maturation, both of democracy itself and of people in the ways of democracy” (Geremek, 1992, p.15).

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