

Civil Society Today

Principles and
Political Potential

Wolfgang Mazal
Bettina Rausch (eds.)

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Foreword

In addition to the separation of powers and the liberal constitutional state, active citizens who help fashion the community are central pillars of our democracy. In this respect, citizens are not only the addressees of the state's rules and norms, but also co-creators of precisely those norms. And, the community in a liberal state is more than government order; it is the interaction between people and their relationships to each other – in families and friendships, at work, and in organisations.

Active participation in the personal and public environment enriches many different facets of human life and, in doing so, makes our society more diverse and colourful. There can be no question that humans are political and social beings, and that their individuality can only fully develop within a community.

We find many different answers to how we want to organise our community, and our society, in democracies of the Western kind. Broadly speaking, the following differentiations can be made: Politics that are typically located on the left define themselves principally by way of the paternalistic state that monitors all spheres of life, and plans and regulates the way lives are led down to the smallest detail. In our eyes, although conservative politics relies on the state to set general parameters, it places individual freedom and responsibility at the core. It trusts the intrinsic drive in each and every citizen to want to make a contribution to a functioning community according to their abilities. This is the fundamental idea of the political concept of a “civil society” as a community of free and responsible people.

The Political Academy of the People's Party and the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies have extensively discussed and studied just how varied and heterogeneous the concepts of the civil society are in theory and practice in its current focus of research.

The essential basis for this can be found in the image of man rooted in the Judeo-Christian-Greco-Roman tradition concept of humankind with the dignity of the individual person as its foundation. However, this also includes the obligation of actively making use of one's abilities to benefit society, as expressed in the parable of the talents in the Bible. Or, to use Immanuel Kant's words: "Man has an individual imperfect obligation – namely, that of developing one's own talents – for oneself, as well as for others."

In this publication, we requested that highly-respected scientists, publicists, and practitioners give their fundamental thoughts on the potential and possibilities of the civil society in the 21st century.

Theoretical, historical, and philosophical contributions can be found here, as well as various case studies from practice. The diversity and pluralism of ideas of the contributions make it clear that the permanent voice and participation of an active public can enrich the political discourse and policy formulation of our country.

Wolfgang Mazal

Bettina Rausch



Fundamentals and theory

From the Community of Citizens to the Civil Society Political Participation in Antiquity and Modern Times

Simon Varga

Summary: This contribution focuses on the differences and evolution from the ancient community of citizens to the modern civil society. The question about the necessity and significance of political participation in antiquity and modern times forms the central point of this study. From the present socio-political perspective, it can be seen that the core of today's civil society still incorporates a large section of the community of citizens. In the final analysis, this awareness calls for community-political empathy – understood as civil rights and obligations.

Introduction

At first sight, linking antiquity and the present day in political affairs might awaken suspicions of anachronism, especially seeing that political practice has already undergone many metamorphoses over the course of history, and will obviously also experience even more changes in the future. However, at second sight, a project of this kind seems to be not only historically, but also systematically, logical. Already present in the early stages of Greek political thought in its classical tradition, a question – that is still unavoidable for life in a union or community and that many modern states still struggle with – was asked and attempted to be answered, in theory and practice: that of the level and significance of the political participation of the individual in the political community.

Although it is not possible to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the many historical developments leading from the community of citizens of ancient times to today's civil society in all its nuances,

even sketching these developments leads to the – in no way surprising – conclusion that, then and now, citizen participation was and is an essential necessity for the organisation of political coexistence – and will continue to be so. However, as already indicated, this is something of a truism. The two central questions deal much more with the intensity of political participation the citizens can demand and where the fundamental differences between the ancient community of citizens and modern civil society can actually be discerned.

This essay begins with a brief depiction of the immediate ancient political practice of the so-called community of citizens, connected with a historical-political overview of political life in the classical Greek period (1). This was followed by a change in the political theory of antiquity. In it, the fundamentals of the politico-anthropological philosophy of Aristotle and his concept of political participation in the course of the “best imaginable state” developed by him are discussed (2). The transformation from the ancient community of citizens to the modern civil society – especially based on sociological observations – will, at least, be touched on in the next step (3). Taking the current global socio-political developments into consideration, the next section handles the current importance of the civil society that, in my opinion, can still be regarded to a large degree as a community of citizens – and maybe even increasingly so – without questioning the modern developments and achievements such as human rights, democracy, and civil liberties in any way (4). Finally, the last point leads to an investigation of the foundation of community policy empathy as a civic right and duty (5).

1. Ancient political practice: Organisation, participation, and dichotomy

There can be no doubt that ancient Greece occupies an important place in connection with the development and fundamental understanding of the political in Europe and even beyond its borders. This pertains particularly to the so-called Greek classical period beginning with the military conflicts between the Greeks and the Persians to the coronation of the soon-to-be Macedonian King Alexander the Great – the time from around 500 to 336 BC. In this classical period, the Greek city states (Old Greek: *polis* (sing.); *poleis* (pl.)), including Athens, Sparta, and Thebes, achieved their uniquely great historical, political, and cultural importance of global significance, which would have been impossible in this fashion without the political organisation of the *polis*. And that occurred – surprising as it may seem – in spite of many internal political conflicts within the city states themselves, as well as those among the city states, and external military threats from other regions of the Mediterranean.

In the classical period, there were likely more than 800 settlements that could be classified as a *polis*; their physical appearance differed greatly although, “in principle, the inner structure of the settlement space was the same.”¹ This usually consisted of an urban centre with a political, economic, and cultural infrastructure with the economic and/or political agora, the meeting place for trade and politics in the centre, bordering on administration and cult buildings, as well as the land surrounding the urban centre that was necessary for agricultural purposes. For example, all of Attica belonged to the *polis* of Athens and citizens living anywhere in

1 Funke, Peter: Die griechische Staatenwelt in klassischer Zeit. In: Gehrke, Hans-Joachim / Schneider, Helmuth (eds.), *Geschichte der Antike*, Stuttgart 2006, p. 176.

Attica referred to themselves as Athenians even if they lived in a village far away from the main city itself.² It seems that Athens, the most influential *polis*, had a population of between 200,000 and 300,000 during the classical period with the majority of the inhabitants living in rural areas.³

The ideal of the “political self-administration and government by the citizens and striving for internal and external independence” was a characteristic of the political self-image of the city states.⁴ This shows that the goals of political autarchy and autonomy, which were inseparable from the striving for permanent economic stability to be able to provide the citizens with the goods that were necessary and desirable for life at the time, stood at the forefront of the endeavours of the city states. This suggests that there was active economic exchange among many city states. However, most *poleis* had their own army, their own legal system as well as their own calendar, and different priorities were even set in connection with the mythical cult within the individual city states.

The political self-image of the ancient city state of the classical era was founded on two historical-categorical facts of political practice (and, to a large extent, also of political theory) that have to be dealt with in any examination of the subject of political participation in antiquity: the division of the *polis* into free and unfree people as well as the paradigm of the free (male) citizen within the *polis*. In spite of “the great variety of social and state manifestations in ancient Greece”, the separation into free and unfree must be

2 Lotze, Detlef: Griechische Geschichte – Von den Anfängen bis zum Hellenismus, Munich 2010, p. 21.

3 Bürgin, Alfred: Zur Soziogenese der politischen Ökonomie – wirtschaftsgeschichtliche und dogmengeschichtliche Betrachtungen, Marburg 1996, p. 30.

4 Cancik, Hubert / Schneider, Helmuth (eds.), Der neue Pauly – Enzyklopädie der Antike, Stuttgart 2001, vol. 10, p. 23, s.v. Polis.

considered “a fundamental characteristic of any ancient political system”;⁵ and the same also applies to the limitation of civic rights and duties to the free (male) citizens of the *polis*.

From the political perspective, the differentiation between free and unfree was an everyday normality, a common political practice. The citizen was usually considered free and could lay claim to a number of civic rights for himself: political participation, acquisition of property, etc. However, these rights usually went hand in hand with duties: military service, political participation in accordance with the valid laws, the obligation to accept a public office, accompanied by the obligation to fulfil public offices to the benefit of the *polis* for a specific period, etc. On the other hand, those who were considered unfree, especially slaves in the so-called “state of unfreedom”, were granted no personal and political rights. But there were social differences among the unfree members of society, and the spectrum of the different activities and obligations was rather large. On the one hand, there were state slaves (official servants, watchmen, and labourers). On the other hand, there were house slaves, maids and manservants, who carried out a number of duties in the *oikos* (the household or family property) where they worked as kitchen help, tutors, nannies, family physicians, etc. Women and children also had absolutely no political rights, although the woman’s position varied from *polis* to *polis*. The rights – or, more precisely, lack of rights – of guests (the *metics*) and foreigners (the *xenoi*) were also defined differently in the laws of the individual city states.

5 Funke, Peter: Die griechische Staatenwelt in klassischer Zeit. In: Gehrke, Hans-Joachim / Schneider, Helmuth (eds.), Geschichte der Antike, Stuttgart 2006, p. 166.

In connection with the classical Greek era, it is necessary to bear the following in mind:⁶ **(i)** The dichotomy of the differentiation between “free” and “unfree” was a fact that was socio-politically accepted and unquestioned to a large degree in political practice even though there were occasional discussions about the (possible) justification for this separation in literature and philosophy. **(ii)** The differentiation between “free” and “unfree”, the designation of the “free citizen” in contrast to the “unfree slave”, not only reflected a formal legal status but also implied an ancient political self-awareness. It is already possible to identify this trace in the works of Aeschylus where the Athenians – after the Persians had asked them for the name of the ruler over the Athenians – were described as free citizens, the slaves of no master, and nobody’s subject.⁷ **(iii)** On the “unfree” side, the slaves worked in a number of areas and relationships, some of them confidential, which did not change the existing legal status in any way except that of the master’s claim of ownership. **(iv)** Slaves were defenseless to human trafficking; they were regarded as goods, as possessions, and as tools. **(v)** Unfree (men, women, and children) were not only expropriated legally and politically, but also – from the anthropological-philosophical perspective – in a worse position and seen in a different way than free people.

6 Cf. Varga, Simon: Perspektiven kosmopolitischer Menschenwürde in der Philosophie der Antike. In: Sedmak, Clemens (ed.), Menschenwürde – Vom Selbstwert des Menschen, Grundwerte Europas vol. 7, Darmstadt 2017, pp. 118–119.

7 Cf. Aeschylus: Die Perser. Übersetzt vom Emil Staiger, Stuttgart 2015, pp. 242–245.

2. Ancient political theory: Anthropology and participation in the best state

The thoughts of Aristotle form an indispensable – and, in almost all respects, important – component of ancient classical political philosophy. At the same time, he continued to cling to a fundamental differentiation between the free and unfree. In developing and presenting his practical philosophy, he nevertheless deals, in an astute and cautious manner, with the “philosophy of human affairs,”⁸ which is an inseparable symbiosis of ethics and politics as well as a concrete political anthropology, a political image of man in the broader sense,⁹ which has received a great deal of approval but also criticism in the course of the history of philosophy and political thought. The central pillars of this political anthropology will be depicted by way of three short points:

(i) In his *Politics*, Aristotle determines that man is a being that lives a political life by nature; in Old Greek, *zôon politikon*. However, according to Aristotle, this definition of man as a political being is not actually a unique feature of humans, seeing that, in his eyes, bees and other animals (such as ants, for example) also led their lives in a political manner.¹⁰ Aristotle’s definition of man as a *zôon politikon* is therefore, first and foremost, a biological view that applies to man and his nature – but not exclusively.

(ii) Only Aristotle’s second politico-anthropological definition describes man in a special manner. Man is not only a *zôon politikon*, a political being in the broader sense, but – going even fur-

8 Aristoteles: *Nikomachische Ethik*. Übersetzt von Ursula Wolf, Hamburg 2006, X 10, 1181b15.

9 Höffe, Otfried: *Geschichte des politischen Denkens*, Munich 2016, p. 54.

10 Cf. Aristoteles: *Politik*. Übersetzt von Franz Susemihl, Hamburg 2003, I 2, 1253a7.

ther – also a *zôon logon echon* – a being gifted with reason and language. For Aristotle, language and reason made it possible for man to “have a conception of good and evil, of right and wrong”, be able to enter into a political exchange about this with others, and organise coexistence in this way from a political perspective.¹¹ According to Aristotle, this definition provided the sole foundation for the difference between man and (other) animals.

(iii) The Aristotelian political anthropology positioned man and his lifestyle firmly in a political way of living with other people. The human being is therefore directly dependent on his fellow man for his survival as well as for the good and successful life in different ways. From this viewpoint, man is not only a *zôon politikon* like other animals – living politically by nature – and also not merely a *zôon logon echon* – gifted with reason and language – but, going beyond that, also a *zôon koinonikon* – a “community being”¹² who needs the connection to his fellow man just as the individual is needed by the rest of the community. A formal, superficial (political) coexistence, similar to “grazing on the same pasture”,¹³ is impossible for the life of man according to Aristotelian political anthropology.

Aristotle powerfully records this insight – which is fundamental for everything political – of the indispensable belonging to a community in the centre of the development of his political anthropology in politics: the one – the individual person – who is either unable to participate in forms of community, or who has no need

11 Cf. Aristoteles: Politik. Übersetzt von Franz Susemihl, Hamburg 2003, I 2, 1253a15.

12 Aristoteles: Eudemische Ethik. Übersetzt von Franz Dirlmeier, Berlin 1984, VII 10, 1242a25.

13 Aristoteles: Nikomachische Ethik. Übersetzt von Ursula Wolf, Hamburg 2006, X 9, 1170b11.

of the community with others because of his individual self-sufficiency, is firstly not part of the state (e.g. the *polis*) and secondly therefore either an animal or a god.¹⁴ But the wild animal on the one hand and the self-sufficient divinity on the other do not apply to humans and their nature, especially since they are dependent on different forms of community for their lives in many respects.

From an ethical-political perspective, this concept of belonging to a community demands active political involvement and the acceptance of political responsibility on the part of the citizen. Aristotle described this kind of involvement – in addition to other passages in the “Philosophy of Human Affairs” – in *Politics VII* and *VIII* where he develops his “best imaginable state”, the so-called “polis as required”.¹⁵ In the course of these ethical-political investigations, he initially deals with what he considers the desirable life of the citizen within the political community of this “best imaginable state” that inevitably includes an ethical-political foundation.¹⁶

On the one hand, Aristotle talks about the ethical, as well as political, indispensability of political participation on the part of the citizen within the political community, the *politikê koinonia*. The political participation is obligatory in this plan for the state¹⁷ as only the acceptance of civic duties (e.g. military, administrative, political, juridical, or cultic) could bring about civic rights – in the

14 Cf. Aristoteles: Politik. Übersetzt von Franz Susemihl, Hamburg 2003, I 2, 1253a26-29.

15 Cf. Aristoteles: Politik. Übersetzt von Franz Susemihl, Hamburg 2003, VII 4, 1325b36.

16 Cf. Varga, Simon: Vom erstrebenswertesten Leben – Aristoteles' Philosophie der Muße, Boston / Berlin 2014, pp. 183–185.

17 Wolfgang Kullmann finds it “noteworthy” that, within the framework of the *state to the best of its ability*, there would be the possibility of “withdrawing from political life and living “unpolitically” in manner of speaking.

broader and narrower sense – (e.g. subjective legal claims, leisure, self-interest, self-responsibility for one’s lifestyle, self-fulfilment). This period of essential and required political involvement from the citizen – as well as that needed for the individual care and work for the household and farming community – was described by Aristotle as a time of “non-leisure” (*ascholia*) because it demanded practical activities that the citizen had to fulfil immediately. All of this was completely in the sense of the political autarchy and autonomy of the polis.

On the other hand, however, Aristotle deals with the period of the free citizen’s “leisure” (*scholē*) in *Politics VII* and *VIII*. It investigates the period of the individual’s personal, meaningful way of life beyond politics and political participation. In other words: A person who honours his political civic duties in this Aristotelian “best imaginable state” and performs these duties according to the law and for the good of the *polis* conscientiously and virtuously merits – in the broader sense – the right to occupy himself with things outside of the political sphere. Fundamentally, this is a matter of the potential for an individual lifestyle (leisure) that can be decided on as one sees fit, but only after the period of political participation (non-leisure). This means only when the obligations in political affairs have been taken care of. And, for the leisure period, Aristotle recommends thoughtful philosophical study and education in general. Here, it would not be going too far to note that – at least in the texts mentioned – he had already thought about a kind of “educated class” of citizens.

3. From the community of citizens to the civil society: The modern era

From the philosophical perspective, the three most important points in the changes from the community of citizens of antiquity to the modern civil society can be portrayed under the concepts of individuality, independence, and society.

(i) Individuality

As previously mentioned, the Aristotelian practical philosophy in general, and its political anthropology, have experienced both acceptance and rejection over the course of history. In modern political thought especially, many Aristotelian positions of his ethical-political symbioses were questioned for their general validity. In the course of political thought, beginning in the modern era, a greater distance was established between ethics and politics in comparison with ancient classical theory. In addition to doubts about the Aristotelian basic constant that humans are by nature community beings, criticism was also expressed of the Aristotelian “practical-political way of life”, the *bios praktikos kai politikos*,¹⁸ and its binding necessity for the citizen.

In his philosophy, John Locke had already stressed the possibility of many different lifestyles and provided them with a new individualisation. He anchored these personal possibilities firmly on the basis of the fundamental rights to “*life, liberty, and happiness*”. However what is modern about the modern era is not the postulation of the “*pursuit of happiness*” – which Aristotle had already dealt with – but lies in two other details: first, in the definition

18 Aristoteles: Politik. Übersetzt von Franz Susemihl, Hamburg 2003, VII 2, 1324a27.

of this pursuit of happiness as an activity that anybody – not just the free (male) citizen – can organise and determine for him- or herself, and second, all should do as they see fit. According to John Locke, all people look for happiness in the organisation of the way they lead their own lives, but they do not all look for the same kind of happiness or happiness in the same things. John Locke summarised the maxim of the modern individual, when compared with antiquity, in the following way: “Although people choose different things [in connection with the individual lifestyle], they all make the right choice.”¹⁹

Accordingly, individual life concepts cannot – or can hardly – be generalized, let alone represented in a single overall picture. John Locke’s – not entirely irony-free – criticism of the practical-political philosophy of antiquity is that it tried to do so anyway and thus had an extremely limited perspective on the conduct of human life. And so, he states that one “might have as reasonably disputed, whether the best relish were to be found in apples, plums, or nuts, and have divided themselves into sects upon it.”²⁰

(ii) Independence

In addition to the growing awareness of the individual in the knowledge of individuality, there was also the need for the independent person, as was the case in the course of the philosophy of Enlightenment most recently. Unlike in ancient philosophy, this

19 John Locke: *Versuche über den menschlichen Verstand*. Übersetzt von Carl Winckler, Hamburg 2006, Book II, XXI 55. (English: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10615/10615-h/10615-h.htm#link2HCH0024> – (Book II, 56) accessed 28.11.2020).

20 John Locke: *Versuche über den menschlichen Verstand*. Übersetzt von Carl Winckler, Hamburg 2006, Book II, XXI 55.

now applied explicitly for all people. In a text from 1783, Immanuel Kant answered the question of “What is Enlightenment?” with the following words: “Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another.”²¹

At this point, the individual person is responsible for himself. In short: independence cannot be prescribed but has to be developed out of the person, the individual. And the individualisation or subjectification of the human mentioned in a first step now demands – in a second step – the independence of the individual, which should be achieved in the course of the history of the political enlightenment, in particular through the equality of all people before the law, and the right to education, freedom of expression, solidarity, separation of powers, etc. That goes hand in hand with the individual’s self-determination of his or her own way of life within the legal provisions of the modern state. But Kant was already aware that the individual’s path to independence is not an easy one – and he also provides possible reasons for this: “Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a portion of mankind, after nature has long since discharged them from external direction (...), nevertheless remains under lifelong tutelage, and why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians. It is so easy not to be of age.”²²

21 Kant, Immanuel: Was ist Aufklärung?, Stuttgart 2002, p. 9. (English: <https://resources.saylor.org/wwwresources/archived/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/What-is-Enlightenment.pdf> – accessed 28.11.2020).

22 Kant, Immanuel: Was ist Aufklärung?, Stuttgart 2002, p. 9.

(iii) Society

From the politico-philosophical perspective, individuality and independence, in particular, form two cornerstones of the modern understanding of society in contrast to the ancient political community. Of course, there are also many other aspects that play a role. This makes it clear that the comparison between the community of citizens and our civil society is not merely a semantic project. However, this comparison between community and society had already become a topic of discussion in sociology in the 19th century, indicating that this development thesis is in no way new. In his treatise *Ancient Law*, published in 1861, the historian Henry Sumner Maine dealt with the development of the political community from antiquity to the modern society as a development “*from status to contract*”.

Following in the footsteps of Henry Sumner Maine, the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies made observations on – and divided apart – these two levels in a broader sociological form from the perspective of the period in his publication *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society), which was published in 1887. He distinguishes the community will (if people are in favour of life within the community of the village, in a sports club, or in religion) from the social will (if people approve of taking part in public life, in forms of political involvement, or participation in a stock corporation). According to Ferdinand Tönnies, the difference between community and society lies in the fact that, on the one hand, the community is self-sufficient and can be chosen freely, while on the other hand, society is viewed as an individually applicable instrument that people can make use of or not.

To summarise: No matter to which politico-sociological extent and regardless of all kinds of side effects (even if they are positive),

individuality as well as independence have contributed to man, in the course of his individual and varied striving for *life, liberty, and happiness*, being able to participate in social forms of coexistence, and actively help to shape the political society – or not, if he so chooses. In keeping with one’s own subjective judgement on the one hand and to the extent allowed by the laws of the land on the other, today people are – in principle – free to participate politically or lead a completely apolitical life, in the narrower sense, in our modern understanding and reject political participation in light of their own lifestyle. A fact that in ancient times – once again with the focus on the theory and practice of the classical Greek period – was neither accepted anthropologically nor in the politics of the community.²³

4. On the topicality of also thinking of the “civil society” as a “community of citizens”

On no account should the comparison between the ancient community of citizens and modern civil society be overused, especially since there are socio-political and scientific developments between these two perspectives that can hardly be portrayed in a single overview – if at all. But still – first and foremost – the currently acute global COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that, on the one hand, the modern civil societies are possibly more like civic communities than the historical, sociological, and philosophical

23 In the Hellenist era (directly following the Classical period), the various philosophical schools, including the Cynics, Stoics, and Epicureans, had already developed the first approaches to detach the human being from the immediate and categorical necessity of political participation. All of these schools made the attempt to relativise the political in its significance for the personal lifestyle of the individual. A basic tenet of the philosophy of the Hellenist period was that, in the final analysis, the political could not be made solely responsible for the good and successful life of the individual.

developments would lead us to expect and, on the other, the individual, independent citizens living in a society – and therefore left to their own judgement as to the extent of their political participation – would like to believe. This is compounded in this time of crisis by the fact that rationalisation, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism have, in no way, made the life of the people and their subjective lifestyles any easier.

Through the rationalisation processes in all areas of life and relationships, globalisation was, and continues to be, an additional thoroughly rational result and that with all its positive and negative consequences. Today, the economy, politics, and science take place in an increasingly global context. And, according to the sociologist Ulrich Beck, this leads to the necessity to alter the perspective from which society (or societies) is observed. Ulrich Beck believes that global problems – such as the pandemic that has had a worldwide impact – can only be solved in a global context.²⁴ Ecological, economic, healthcare, and political crises have long not only had an impact on the country, region, or continent hit by them.

On the one hand, the COVID-19 pandemic shows just how fragile modern societies are in many parts of the world. Ulrich Beck also serves as an interesting point of reference in this case as, faced with the global developments, he spoke about risk societies as early as 1986. Characteristic for these risk societies is that they can easily tip from one extreme to the other due to modernisation and mechanisation – in short, research and development. On the other hand, it can be observed that modern societies are still dependent on a basic level of participation on the part of the citizens – in this current, acute crisis, by paying attention to the health-related development in one's own country and possibly

²⁴ Beck, Ulrich: *Der kosmopolitische Blick – oder: Krieg ist Frieden*, Frankfurt 2004, pp. 7–10.

even beyond its borders, supporting any measures necessary to contain the pandemic, or reducing some personal habits one has become fond of – and which have usually developed out of a certain level of independence – for a certain period of time. All of this makes it apparent that – despite the many developments that have taken place – the civil society, at its core, also means a society of citizens. It would only take the actions of a few people to not only upset the hoped-for effects in the health, economic, and political areas, but – going even further – counteract them.

It can be concluded that, although the developments from the ancient community of citizens to the modern civil society were clearly accomplished through individualisation and independence, and by following the path towards the open societies of modern democracies, the community of citizens is still in existence – or must be. This can be recognised more clearly in times of crisis than in other periods. Evidence of this was provided in the speech given to the Austrian people at the beginning of November by the Federal President Alexander van der Bellen in connection with the regulations on the second corona lockdown in Austria. In his six-minute address, he appealed to “the community” six times and did not speak to or about “the society” even once.²⁵

25 Alexander van der Bellen made an appeal to “Austrian men and women, and all those who live here” and asked for their understanding of the new measures “in the name of our community”. He continued by saying that the hardship that were to come as a result of the COVID-19 orders would be “especially difficult for some members of our community” to bear as well as that “community is not just an empty word”. Cf. <https://www.bundespraesident.at/aktuelles/detail/tv-ansprache-anlaesslich-der-verordnung-zum-2-lockdown> (Accessed: 10. 11. 2020).

5. Community policy empathy as a civil right and obligation

And now it is necessary – in a final step – to use five points to compare ancient times with the present; however, all of the aforementioned limitations of the comparison must be taken into consideration.

(i) Ancient political theory, as well as large areas of political practice in the classical period, were already aware of the crucial necessity of the political participation of the citizen in the community, in the sense – and for the benefit – of the whole political body (also for the all sections of the *polis*), and demanded that this be fulfilled. However, this participation was not only considered a political, but also a moral obligation. Nevertheless, the wellbeing of the political community of the citizens of the *polis* was mostly given priority over that of the individual. Individuality, as well as independence in the modern sense of the word, was not in demand to this extent.

(ii) The developments from the ancient community of citizens to the modern civil society is connected with many significant and constitutive achievements, especially in Europe. They will not be questioned or criticised here – but they include, as mentioned previously, most notably the individuality and independence of the specific person in his life in society. In a subsequent step, this contributed to separating the community and society more clearly from each other than before. In this separation, political participation was transferred to the social area and removed even further from the immediate individual and independent way of life (of course, this did not happen everywhere).

(iii) However, the two aspects mentioned above should not lead to the assumption that the modern civil society does not still pre-

serve a kind of community of citizens at its core. As just shown, how much the human being is a “community creature”, and not merely a social, individualised person in an environment that is completely free of politics, becomes crystal clear, especially in times of crisis. As Aristotle determined: The human being is dependent on his fellow man for his mere survival, on the one hand, and for a good and successful life, on the other. This forms the cornerstone for understanding the human (political) community. And, this perspective is still valid.

(iv) Seen from this politico-philosophical perspective of the human being as an individual, independent “community creature”, it can be further deduced that one cannot be completely indifferent to the life of the other – especially in one’s own state. The foundation of this non-indifference can be expressed with the necessity for a minimum of community political empathy. In the modern understanding of the political, ethics and politics are not as far away from each other as they might seem at first glance when observing current political practice. (Once again: There was already an awareness for the indissoluble symbiosis of ethics and politics in ancient times.)

(v) In the modern understanding, this community political empathy can be classified, from the ethical-political perspective, as a civic right and obligation. On the one hand, the citizens have a right to not be left behind, by politics on one side and their fellow citizens on the other, within the socio-political discourses and developments. On the other hand, it is possible to recognise the ethical-political challenge facing the individual and independent person within a political community, as well as society, of showing consideration for others and, ultimately, also recognise the individuality and independence of the other.

The Civil Society and the Bourgeoisie

Ernst Bruckmüller

Summary: The modern formulation of the “civil” or “civic” society describes the common commitment of people in areas outside of their family and professional spheres – and usually outside of politics. “Citizens’ initiatives” can aim at influencing politics and the administration and, in special cases, even at changing the political system (as the občanské forum 1989 – citizens’ forum – did in the Czech part of former Czechoslovakia). This essay poses the question of the extent to which previous concepts of the bourgeoisie and “bourgeois society” have anything in common with the modern phenomena of the civil society. This is because, as a rule, civil-society activity takes place within the framework of legal possibilities, such as the right to personal freedom, the right to carry on a business, the freedom to practise a religion and express oneself, freedom of the press, freedom of association and assembly, the right to petition, etc. that were achieved by “bourgeois” visionaries, pioneers, revolutionaries, and politicians.

Citizen society, civil society, and the bourgeoisie

Today, when one speaks about the civil society or citizen society, one usually means the involvement of people in a great variety of areas outside of actual “politics” as well as their family and professional spheres. This involvement expresses itself in many ways in local, regional, and superregional initiatives in the fields of culture, the environment, the third world, care and support for asylum seekers, etc., but “civilian initiatives” can also have influencing politics and the administration as their goals. In authoritarian states, the civil society can even develop into a powerful move-

ment to change the political system.¹ It is worthwhile remembering the *občanské fórum* (citizens' forum) in the Czech part of what was once Czechoslovakia that was established on 19 November – only two days after the beginning of the Velvet Revolution in Prague.² The terms “bourgeois society” and “civil society”, as well as *občanské fórum*, are oriented towards mature, actively interested citizens who are prepared to become involved.

The following considerations deal with the question of the extent to which former concepts of the bourgeoisie and “bourgeois society” of the 19th and early 20th centuries have anything to do with the modern manifestations of the civil society. In modern democratic constitutional states, civil-society activity usually takes place within the framework of the legal possibilities achieved by “bourgeois” visionaries, pioneers, revolutionaries, and politicians. The central freedoms of the civil society include the right to personal freedom, the right to carry on a business, the freedom to practice a religion and express oneself, freedom of the press, freedom of association and assembly, and the right to petition. These are complemented by the protection of the private sphere (domiciliary right) and confidentiality of correspondence – although this is something that most of our contemporaries have voluntarily done away with by using the internet.

However, there is a conceptual problem in German that most other languages are not aware of. The German word “Bürger” denotes both the (fully entitled) inhabitant of a pre-modern city

1 <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zivilgesellschaft> (accessed 3. 11. 2020).

2 https://www.bing.com/search?q=obcanske+forum&form=PRUSEN&pc=EUPP_UE12&mkt=enus&httpsmsn=1&msnews=1&rec_search=1&refig=64bde755d3b54d88bbd2f1cb325b839e&sp=2&q=SC&pq=obcanski+forum&sk=HS1&sc=3-14&cvid=64bde755d3b54d88bbd2f1cb325b839e (accessed 3. 11. 2020).

and the (fully entitled) citizen. French, on the other hand, differentiates between “citoyen” (citizen of a state) and “bourgeois” (inhabitant of a town, with its root in “bourg” that can mean a market or – in the form of “fauxbourg” – a suburb). English recognises the “citizen”, as well as the “burgher” (city resident), and, in Italian, we have the “cittadino” and the “borgnese”. It is obvious that they have their roots in the Latin “civis” and the “civitas” connected with it, and the Germanic-late-Latin “burgus”, which originally only meant a fort but was later expanded to include “civil” settlements, markets, and cities.³ Slavic languages also differentiate between the citizen (“državljan” in Slovene) and town resident (“meščan” in Slovene – and very similar in Russian).

However, “zivile”, with its roots in the Latin “civis”, has remained alive in German alongside the local word. It was originally used as a contrast to the military but soon came to denote a certain – “civilised”, non-violent, equitable – behaviour when dealing with other people. Borrowed from the French “civil” (from the Latin “civilis”) in the 16th century, it meant middle class, patriotic, national, and public.⁴ During the Enlightenment in the 18th century, “zivilisiert” – in the sense of enlightened, non-violent, good behaviour – was added although the old bourgeois concept of “Ehrensamkeit” (respectability) and its inherent factors of being of legitimate birth and upright behaviour still resonated.

The behaviour required a juridical standardisation: In 1789, the great Austrian enlightener Gottfried van Swieten (1733–1803, son of the famous doctor Gerard van Swieten) defined the “bourgeois society”, as opposed to a “horde of wild people”, by “those principles of their affiliation” that there can be “no right without obligation,

3 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burgus> (accessed 3. 11. 2020).

4 <https://de.wiktionary.org/wiki/zivil>

and no obligation without right.”⁵ The “civil society” (= society of citizens) therefore needed a “civil law” as a basis. This was codified at the time and came into force as the “General Civil Code” (ABGB) in the year 1812.⁶ The term “citizen” was first encountered in legislation during the reign of Joseph II. The ABGB also assumed a common citizenship of the residents of those Habsburg (Austrian) countries in which the ABGB was put into effect (but not in Hungary!).

But was society – not only in Central Europe but throughout the continent – so advanced that it could be interpreted as a society of people with equal rights? Feudal dependencies actually still existed in most regions. In no way could those living in rural areas, who made up the majority of the population at the time, be considered as being members of this new general bourgeois society. In 1789, the French Revolution asserted the abolishment of all feudal bonds in Europe with the victory of its slogan of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”. A few years previously, Joseph II had at least done away with serfdom in his “Austrian monarchy” (from 1781, first of all in Bohemia), but the farmers still had to rely on the manorial lords for their land and property. This dependence continued in the Austrian Empire until 1848; it was considered a component of the “state constitutions”, meaning that these conditions were not included in the ABGB (they were not regarded as a lease!)

5 The van Swieten citation, after: Ernst Wangermann, *Aufklärung und staatliche Erziehung*, Vienna 1978, p. 79.

6 There is a wide range of literature on the ABGB. Here, I only refer to: Walter Selb, Herbert Hofmeister (eds.), *Forschungsband Franz von Zeiller (1751–1828). Beiträge zur Gesetzgebungs- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*. Vienna – Graz – Cologne 1980.

The genesis of the “bourgeois society” in the Habsburg monarchy

Where can we look for the core of the new “bourgeois society”? It originally was comprised of men who were not dependent on domiciliary rights and not subjected feudally – therefore, first and foremost, townspeople. They were “citizens” in the traditional sense of possessing the civil rights of a town and being the subject of a monarch (and not a noble lord!). A new, educated bourgeoisie configuration, dominated by civil servants, but also including writers, professors, teachers, and scientists – many of them in civil service (and more than a few ex-Jesuits after the repeal of their order in 1773) – developed out of this old urban bourgeoisie in the years after the reign of Maria Theresa and Joseph II. In addition, the emerging supra-regional market (and the almost equally significant market in the rapidly expanding residence city itself) resulted in considerable entrepreneurial growth, the prosperity of which formed the foil against which the bourgeois culture of the Biedermeier period could later develop. This new entrepreneurship was usually favoured by a state factory charter; i.e., it was possible to run a business without adhering to the restrictions and stipulations that the individual guilds, associations, and professional societies had formerly prescribed. This shows that the new educated bourgeoisie and new entrepreneurship were both the products of the state in the making!

Entrepreneurship, which was not regulated by a guild, and for which the name of “fabricant” was soon introduced to distinguish it from “master craftsman”, originally had no connection to the new educated classes. The entrepreneurs only gradually achieved some of the social standing that the intelligentsia had already claimed for itself. The state, which needed both, awarded

outstanding members of the two groups with titles of nobility.⁷ These peerages (from a simple “von” to “knight” – or “baron” at the most) characterised the “second society” with their upper-class lifestyle who ranked behind the traditional high nobility but combined their sophisticated modes of behaviour with scientific, artistic, and literary interests. Schubert was honoured in these circles, and this is also where Grillparzer and Bauernfeld socialised. Grillparzer’s close ties were due to his uncle Joseph Sonnleithner’s connections. These circles were also the principal clients for painting which, along with music and theatre, rapidly blossomed in the Biedermeier and pre-March periods. Its master artists Friedrich von Amerling, Moritz Michael Daffinger, Josef Danhauser, Peter Fendi, Josef Kriehuber, and Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller created many portraits of members of this society.

The “second society” and the middle classes

The “second society” can be considered the leading group of the new bourgeois class that referred to itself as middle class. As early as in 1770, a rhyme typifying the self-awareness of the new middle class made the rounds:

*“No-one’s lord, and no-one’s slave
That is the right of the middle-class”*

The middle class therefore found itself between the ruling system (sovereign, bureaucracy, military, and nobility) and those who were still subjected to feudal domination – the mass of the farmers, as well as those dependent on domiciliary rights, apprentices, labourers, messengers, servants, and maids. In an any-

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, the author refers to his *Sozialgeschichte Österreichs*, 2nd ed., Vienna – Munich 2001.

mous document published in Leipzig in 1843 “Pia desideria of an Austrian Writer”, Eduard von Bauernfeld described all the intellectually active segments of society, “Professors, academics, artists, fabricants, tradesmen, economists, and even civil servants and clerics”, as belonging to the middle classes that were urgently demanding that censorship be relaxed and a general change in the political situation:

*“... the Viennese have changed; they have become desperately serious. Here, as everywhere else, industry has set up its throne; a people that forms trade associations no longer has time to deal with what they prefer most: fried chicken, the Theatre in the Leopoldstadt, and the music of Strauss and Lanner.”*⁸

With the Lower Austrian Trade Association (1839), the Inner Austrian Trade Association in Graz (1839), the Juridical-Political Reading Circle (1841), and the Concordia Writers’ Club (1844), the still-young middle-classes created new, modern organisational forms – ultimately also discussion forums in which, in spite of censorship and the police, certain demands on the state were also formulated.

Numerous problems were waiting to be solved – the farmers’ demands to abolish the feudal system, the growing need of the lower classes, and the national discontent that was becoming increasingly pressing, as well as the paralysis of the government that had been playing absolutism without a monarch (since the death of Franz I). Ferdinand I (1835–1848) was only nominally in power.

8 Anonymous (Eduard von Bauernfeld), *Pia desideria eines österreichischen Schriftstellers*, Leipzig 1842, p. 16.

1848 – “... bourgeois revolution” –?

The long-expected revolution erupted on 13 March 1848 – it was a reaction to the Parisian February Revolution as well as Kossuth’s inflammatory speech in the Hungarian Parliament that was meeting not far from Vienna in Pressburg (Bratislava) at the time. Bourgeois circles prepared several petitions to be presented to the court, but the demands were expressed most clearly in the petition that the students formulated in the Aula and handed over to the Lower Austrian State Parliament on 13 March. The first success came soon after the first shots had been fired and the first people had been killed (“the fallen of March”). Metternich, the hated symbolic figure of the old regime, was overthrown on the same evening (the fact that he had already been disempowered was not known outside of court circles).

The Revolution quickly chalked up other victories. Freedom of the press, arming the people (national guards and the Academic Legion), and the promise of a constitution were announced on 15 March. When the so-called Pillersdorf Constitution was enacted on 25 April, it seemed as if the majority of the bourgeois demands had actually been fulfilled. But, the constitution, which was modelled on the Belgian version, had its weaknesses. It had been issued, or imposed, from above and allowed for a two-chamber system and an absolute veto from the monarch.

The “storm petition” of 15 May opposed this and especially the extremely restrictive electoral procedure that had been proclaimed on 9 May. The so-called May Revolution was borne mainly by students, craftsmen, and labourers whose situation had not improved since March. This led to the “bourgeois” revolution finding itself in a decision-making crisis. What was more important – especially for the members of the upper middle-class: the expansion of

personal and political rights or the preservation of the Habsburg Empire? Faced with these alternatives, quite a few the dissatisfied bourgeois citizens remained silent. Or – like Franz Grillparzer in early June in his famous poem on Field Marshall Radetzky (“Good luck, Commander! Get it done! [...] Austria is on your side”) – came out in favour of the nation state, the military, and ultimately, on the side of the counterrevolution.

However, the Austrian Reichstag assembled before the victory of the counterrevolution – this was the first elected parliament in the Western sector of Habsburg Monarchy (elections to the lower house had been held previously in Hungary – but only entitled members of the nobility had taken part). The election resulted in a clear bourgeois majority: approximately 55 per cent of the 383 representatives belonged to this class. Almost one quarter – 92 – were farmers. They considered the question of the constitution relatively unimportant; their main concern was with the agrarian reform to abolish the landlord’s primary ownership and resulting contractual obligations on the part of the farmer as well as the landlord’s jurisdiction and police force. This was actually passed by the Reichstag at the end of August and made the farmers fully entitled citizens. The differences between citizens and labourers, property owners and those without possession, intensified during these debates. When the empty state coffers caused the Minister of Labour to cut former subsidies, this resulted in mass demonstrations by the workers who were bloodily dispersed by the bourgeois National Guard (“Prater Battle”, 23 August 1848). It proved impossible to overcome this split.

The rest is well known: The Croat Banus Jelačić invaded Hungary, leading to war between that country and the imperial army. When it was planned to send troops from Vienna to Hungary, the October Revolution broke out and ultimately led to the military

conquest of Vienna by the emperor's forces on 31 October. This was followed by numerous arrests and executions.

But, similar to the retarding element before the catastrophic last act of a tragedy, the Reichstag assembled once again – this time, in Kremsier (Kroměňiče) in Moravia in the imposing castle of the Archbishop of Olmütz (the imperial family had been housed in his residence in Olmütz since October 1848). Here, the exclusively “German” liberals were isolated in a Czech environment and there was no danger of a popular uprising for this parliament. However, the Reichstag performed extremely positive work until its dissolution on 7 March 1849 – a draft for a constitution was agreed on: it not only proclaimed the principle of the sovereignty of the people and civil liberties, but also aimed to solve the problem of the coexistence of the different language groups in the multinational state. At the same time as the dissolution of the parliament, Prince Felix Schwarzenberg's government proclaimed its own constitution (once again: imposed from above) dated 4 March 1849. The parliamentary representatives who were thought to be radical were arrested, and several were sentenced to death (including the “Preacher of the Revolution”, Anton Fuster, Dr Josef Goldmark, Dr Ernst (von) Violand, and the “liberator of the farmers” Hans Kudlich, who – like many others – was able to flee in time).⁹

The struggles for independence in Hungary – with Russian help – and Italy had been crushed by the summer of 1849.

9 Wolfgang Häusler, *Schubumkehr. Von der Tradition der demokratischen Revolution 1848 zu Deutschnationalismus und Antisemitismus*, in: *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur* 64, 2020, no.1, pp. 4–8, here p. 9.

Neo-absolutism – restoration or bourgeois control?

In contrast to the old form of absolutism, neo-absolutism was characterised by resolute government. Agrarian reform was quickly introduced. Now the “Empire of Austria” became a genuinely unified state for the first time, having been given a unified administration, a unified customs territory, and a unified (private) legal sphere. The decision-making authority was concentrated on the young Emperor Franz Joseph. The bureaucracy became the pillar of this new system of rule. It could be said that, as compensation for political codetermination, the German-Austrian, bourgeois-bureaucratic element was de facto given control not only of the bureaucracy but of all people living in the empire. Seeing that, after 1848, the German-Austrian bourgeoisie developed into the beneficiaries and bearers of the counterrevolution, Habsburg centralism, and concept of large national state, their memories of the “bourgeois” revolution were later relatively insignificant. At the same time, a slow change in the German bourgeoisie’s traditional feeling of cultural superiority led in the direction of an increasingly radical German nationalism (and increasingly radical antisemitism) in which, finally, anticlericalism remained the sole remnant of the once liberal heritage.¹⁰

The entrepreneurs also profited from the new unified state. During the Revolution, they had already taken the side of the government and military. The most important thing for them was the preservation of greater Habsburg Austria, with equal rights throughout the country and a uniform customs and currency area. If the counterrevolution guaranteed that the bourgeoisie would achieve their goal, and this was threatened by the Revolution, they would inevitably become an ally of the restoration. One

¹⁰ Häusler, *Schubumkehr*, passim, sees the failure of the bourgeois revolution as the reason for this.

small example:

On 27 March 1848, Giuseppe Miller-Aichholz, a Viennese wholesaler from Trentino, wrote to his father (in Italian) in Cles that the behaviour in Milan and Venice was hair-raising, that they had broken their oaths and were unfaithful traitors. In June, he travelled to Innsbruck as a member of a community committee to beseech the emperor to return to Vienna. On 13 August, he enthusiastically told his father about Radetzky's victories over the Lombards and Piemontese. In March 1849, Miller was a member of the deputation of Viennese citizens chosen to thank the young Emperor Franz Joseph for the constitution and dissolution of the Reichstag. Only a few days later, he travelled to the war theatre in northern Italy, together with other councillors, to present Radetzky with the diploma making him an honorary citizen of Vienna. This put an impressive seal on the alliance between the upper classes and the army.

The brief reign of the liberal bourgeoisie

Initially, the "German" bourgeoisie only dominated in Austria in the form of the bureaucracy.¹¹ However, simultaneously with the retraction of "civil" liberties, the entrepreneurial upper classes were granted considerable freedoms. The state's difficult financial situation increased the possibilities of the financial bourgeoisie to have an influence, seeing that the state needed a tremendous amount of money to develop the new court and administration

11 Waltraud Heindl published the most important works on Austrian bureaucracy in the 18th and 19th centuries: *Gehorsame Rebellen. Bürokratie und Beamte in Österreich 1780 – 1848*, Vienna – Cologne – Graz 1991; and: *Josephinische Mandarine. Bürokratie und Beamte in Österreich vol. 2, 1848 – 1914*, Vienna 2013.

system with its countless new civil servants. At the same time, the expenses for the army and (new!) gendarmery remained high.¹² And they increased even further when Austria occupied the Romanian principedoms during the Crimean War and stationed an army in Galicia. These politics led to a state of permanent hostility with Russia, without being able to win the liberal Western powers (England and France) as allies. Finally, after the defeat near Solferino in 1859, the Emperor was informed that there could only be new loans for the highly-indebted state with parliamentary representation – at least for a control of the state’s finances. In this way, the unwilling Emperor was forced to establish representative bodies from the individual parliaments and imperial Reichsrat that were principally intended to act as the taxpayers’ controllers of the state’s non-transparent expenditure policies.

The voting rights for the communities and individual parliaments, which were legislated within the framework of the “February patent” in 1861, from which the representatives in the Reichsrat were to be elected were quite clearly tailored to satisfy the interests of the bourgeoisie. Seeing that it was, in principle, a matter of controlling finances, the right to vote was linked to the tax payments: each person who paid a direct tax (property, trade, building, or income tax) in the communities was entitled to vote. However, only the top two-thirds of community voters, and those in the cities who paid taxes amounting to more than 10 guilders annually, were entitled to vote for the parliaments. Those in possession of an education patent – teachers, professors, priests, doctors, engineers, and attorneys, as well as captains in coastal

12 Fundamental information on these problems: Harm-Hinrich Brandt, *Der österreichische Neoabsolutismus. Staatsfinanzen und Politik 1848 – 1860*, 2 vols., Göttingen 1978. The resulting discussion is documented in: Harm-Hinrich Brandt (ed.), *Der österreichische Neoabsolutismus als Verfassungs- und Verwaltungsproblem*, Vienna – Cologne – Weimar 2014.

regions – were also eligible. The aim was to ensure that community councils, parliaments and the “Reichsrat” were dominated by “property and education”.

It was not until 1867 – after the defeat at Königgrätz – that these representative bodies were given more responsibilities and all citizens were given the five fundamental constitutional rights (“December Constitution”) that had long been demanded by the liberal bourgeoisie: independence of the judiciary, the separation of justice and the administration, and a clear definition of the positions of the parliament and (imperial) government. This resulted in the introduction of the first government to be made up almost entirely of men from the bourgeoisie – the “citizens ministry”. To provide a balance to so much bourgeois culture, its head, the Minister-President, was “Carlos” Prinz Auersperg, the “first cavalier of the empire”. The bourgeois ministers actually did particularly good work. Here, I should mention the passing of the Elementary School Law that was presented to the Reichsrat by the Minister of Education Hasner Ritter von Arta (1818–1891). In the years before 1875, the representatives of the bourgeoisie, German, centralistic liberalism developed considerable problem-solving competence in areas that, in the future, would make “civil-society” commitment easier. These included the Cooperatives Law (1873), which complemented the freedom of association in the area of economic activity that had been attained in 1867. The liberals also simplified the self-organisation of workers through the coalition freedom. However, after several confessional laws, its creative powers became paralysed around 1875. The liberals became the defenders of the already-achieved legal and material possibilities, but they lost their role in the forefront of bourgeois society. They truly became conservative.

The weaknesses of the bourgeoisie of the Habsburg monarchy

The stock exchange crash of 1873, and the prolonged economic crisis that followed, shattered faith in the supposedly so beneficial power of the free market, as well as in liberal politics. This was further aggravated by shameless corruption in the circles of the liberal parliamentarians who had been rewarded with shares in railway companies for passing various railway laws.¹³

The antiliberal criticism targeted the bourgeois liberals as politicians who cashed in on their office who exploited farmers, small tradesmen, and labourers, and even deprived them of their political rights. Did they not benefit from this state, whose authoritarian orientation was, in fact, extremely advantageous to the bourgeoisie, which (from a theoretical perspective) was so strongly focused on independence and personal freedom – insomuch as the state provided the bourgeoisie with everything they needed, like a gigantic common market, protection of property and parliamentary budget control? This criticism went hand in hand with those antisemitic positions that continued to live on among many Catholics as a result of the church's condemnation of Jews as the "murderers of Christ". In the Catholic "Vaterland" newspaper from 20 December 1871, the liberal economic laws (abolition of the guilds, freedom of trade, mobilisation of peasant property, abolition of usuary laws, etc.) were criticised as tearing down "all the barriers" that protected the Christian people to the benefit of the Jews. "The workers and craftsmen are moving into the factories, property into the hands, houses into the possession, and the people's wealth, into the pockets, of the Jews (...)."¹⁴

13 Ernst Bruckmüller (ed.), *Korruption in Österreich (Austriaca)*, Vienna 2011.

14 Cited after Häusler, *Schubumkehr*, p. 9.

The defensive position taken by bourgeois liberalism from around 1875 was also connected with the numerical relationships. From around 1870, it would have probably been possible to circumscribe the largest section of bourgeoisie with those who were entitled to vote in cities and industrial locations. Later, the extension of the electoral law made this increasingly less likely. If it can be assumed that “bourgeois” presupposes a certain income, the statistics on personal income tax, which were introduced in 1896, provide a first approximation. At the time, around 6.5 per cent of all employed people were taxpayers. The 33 per cent (or about 300,00 wage earners) who had an income of more than 2400 crowns must certainly be classified as middle-class. Assuming that an average bourgeois household was made up of 4 people, the middle classes consisted of at least 1.2 million people or about 4.6 per cent of the total population of the Austrian part of the empire that totalled around 26 million in 1900. The prominent liberal politician Ernst von Plener (1841–1923) also referred to the small size of the Austrian middle classes during the debate on universal suffrage in 1905/06 – according to his calculations, while 3.4 per cent of the Austrian population was subject to income tax, the figure was 9 per cent in Prussia and as high as 13 per cent in Saxony.¹⁵

This picture changes if the Western half of the Habsburg monarchy (Cisleithania) is compared with the territory of the Republic of Austria. Of course, this is due to the fact that, after the collapse of the monarchy, the most important bourgeois centre, the metropolis of Vienna, came to lie on its territory.

Around 1900, about a quarter of all taxpayers lived in Vienna and they earned almost exactly one third of all taxable income in

15 Speeches by Ernst Frh. v. Plener 1873–1911, Stuttgart – Leipzig 1911, 987 (Speech in the Upper House on 2 December 1905).

old Austria. The dominance of Vienna among the higher income brackets emerges even more clearly: In 1907, only a quarter of the low-bracket taxpayers lived in Vienna, but this rose to 45 per cent among the “rich” (over 12,000 crowns annual income) and close to 52 per cent among the “very wealthy” (over 40,000 crowns annual income). This shows that more than half of all top incomes were assessed in Vienna!¹⁶

If one considers the comparatively small number of bourgeois existences, it comes as almost no surprise that these classes were relatively weak in the overall system of the monarchy. The strength of these groups was diminished even more by three additional problems:

- 1 The not especially large bourgeois classes were divided into a few metropolitan (especially Viennese) configurations and many groups in small and medium-sized towns with few parallels in connection with wealth, culture, and political positions. The dense network of large medium, and small large, towns that existed in Germany (and England) was missing. This differentiation was further increased by the fact that, although the Viennese bourgeoisie clearly dominated the economic sphere, it did *not* take the lead in the cultural and political life of the monarchy – as was the case with the Parisian bourgeoisie for example. This is because, on the one hand, the Viennese bourgeoisie was consciously *German* – this hindered any identification on the part of this leading bourgeoisie with the non-German middle-classes and on the other hand, it was strongly perceived to be “*Jewish*” – and

16 Joseph von Friedenfels, Die individuelle Bewegung der Personaleinkommensteuer-Zensiten und die Höhe ihres Einkommens in den Jahren 1906 – 1908. In: Mitt. d. k. k. Finanzministeriums, no. 1 1913; Beiträge zur Statistik der Personaleinkommensteuer in den Jahren 1903 bis 1907, Vienna 1908.

this created a considerable gulf between the liberal upper classes and the increasingly antisemitic middle and lower classes. This perception also prevented the identification of the – mainly German-national (or: Christian social) – antisemitic medium and small towns with the liberal bourgeoisie in Vienna.¹⁷

- 2 The ongoing democratisation of the political life that ultimately led to universal suffrage for men in 1906 undermined the hardly resilient, precarious domination of the German-Austrian bourgeoisie even more. The nationalistic, antisemitic, and socialist mass movements threatened the bourgeois positions and contributed to “bourgeois” changing from being another word for “progressive” to a metaphor for cautious, security conscious, progress sceptical, and defensive to the demands for further political modernisation. It is possible that democratisation did not reach old-Austria too late, but too early – before the “gentrification” of society that needed to precede a modern democracy.
- 3 The bourgeoisie increasingly differentiated itself into middle classes oriented on national languages. In this way, any individual “national” bourgeois configuration became automatically involved in a war on several fronts: Against the agrarians (nobility and farmers), and their strong ability to enforce themselves in the political system, against the increasingly strengthened workers’ movement, against the specific other national movements, against the petit bourgeois – usually antisemitic – criticism from the cities, and, possibly even against the state.

17 John W. Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna. Origins of the Christian Social Movement 1848 – 1897*, Chicago-London 1981 (unchanged paperback edition, Chicago 1995).

However, what made all these bourgeois classes stick *together* until 1914/18 was that they were obviously able to participate in the economic boom and earn considerable wealth. As Roman Sandgruber put it so appropriately, the decades before 1914 were a “dreamtime for millionaires”.¹⁸ Although old-Austria had introduced a “progressive” income tax in 1896, the highest rate only lay at 5 per cent! A person who had a good hand for making money could become fabulously wealthy. This was still accompanied by a certain faith in advancement and security, and in the progress of technology and science. And the forms of propriety, civility, everyday culture, summering in the country, stays in the renowned spas – in short, a supernational bourgeois culture – remained across all of the borders separating nationalities and religions. In general, the middle classes progressed upwards economically, and it is possible that this positive material development among the non-German bourgeoisie could have made it possible to smooth the national contours and develop a new consensus at some time.

1918 – the end of the bourgeois world?

However, a global conflagration that the Habsburg monarchy would not survive was ignited in Vienna in 1914. Not only the monarchy collapsed in 1918; this was also the fate of the secure world of the bourgeoisie – the world of solid, traditional business relationships between Reichenberg, Prague, Prossnitz, Vienna, and Budapest; between Lemberg and the Balkans, Trieste and Alexandria. The common market and unified state crumbled. What happened to the middle classes at the time? The traditional security strategies of the middle classes (even the lower ones) proved to be deceptive. Neither being in possession of securities (especially government

¹⁸ Roman Sandgruber, *Traumzeit für Millionäre. Die 929 reichsten Wienerinnen und Wiener im Jahr 1910*, Graz – Vienna 2013.

bonds) nor a tenement building and neither having a high-level position in the state administration nor in the private service sector offered protection against suddenly losing one's wealth – going as far as putting one's very survival in question – in the wake of the inflation that occurred during and after the war. Even those extremely cautious people of private means who did not fall for war bonds lost as much as three or four fifths of their fortunes.¹⁹

But this rupture did not affect all bourgeois classes in the same way. Of course, almost all of those in possession of Austrian (and Hungarian) bonds suffered certain financial losses. However, just how quickly the Czechoslovakian redevelopment bonds issued immediately after the foundation of the state in 1918 were over-subscribed is astonishing – the Czech bourgeoisie obviously still had sufficient financial reserves, which they had withheld from old-Austria, that they willingly put into the hands of their own (!) new state. In words that have often been quoted, Otto Bauer – the Austrian Social Democrat who is considered one of the leading thinkers of the left-socialist Austro-Marxist faction – expressed that the main losers as a result of the change were the members of the German-Austrian, and particularly Viennese, bourgeoisie:

“... The same process of currency devaluation...has pauperised broad layers of the old bourgeoisie. At first, this fate hit the men of private means... and, with them, the house owners were expropriated... The higher civil service was also depressed by the devaluation of the currency... It was the old Viennese patriarchate, the top strata of the Austrian intelligentsia, large sections of the middle

19 Ernst Bruckmüller, *Das österreichische Bürgertum zwischen Monarchie und Republik*. In: *Zeitgeschichte* 20/1993, no. 3/4 (Schwerpunkt: Bürgertum) pp. 60–84. In particular, Ernst Bruckmüller – Elisabeth Ulsperger: *Friedrich Pachers Einschätzung der materiellen Situation vor und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, in: *Zeitgeschichte* 20/1993, no. 3/4 (Schwerpunkt: Bürgertum), pp. 104–112.

and lower classes, who had become impoverished by the devaluation of the currency. They had actually been the ruling class of the Habsburg monarchy. They were the bearers of Austrian patriotism, of old-Austrian traditions. They had provided the Habsburg monarchy with its civil servants, with its officers. For a century, they had been the bearers of a specifically Austrian culture, Viennese literature, Viennese music, and Viennese theatre. They are the ones who were really defeated in the war. It was their empire that collapsed in October 1918. And they lost their wealth together with their empire...²⁰

However, rent control in particular enabled impoverished middle-class people to maintain a standard of living that would have been impossible in a completely free housing market.²¹ Leisure and summer holiday habits had also hardly changed. On the contrary – immediately after the war, people often sought refuge in the summer retreats in the silent hope that the farmers would still be able to find some food for them. The lack of capital also did not lead to a significant buyer's market for summer holiday homes – this is

20 Otto Bauer, *Die österreichische Revolution*, Wien 1923 (now in: Bauer, *Werkausgabe*, vol. 2, Vienna 1976), S. 755 f.

21 “Es läßt sich nicht zahlenmäßig nicht abschätzen, wie weit der Verarmungsprozeß fortgeschritten ist. Aber als Tatsache kann er nicht verleugnet werden, wengleich der äußere Anschein nicht die ganze Wirklichkeit merken läßt weil der Mieterschutz der breiten Masse des Bürgertums die Behauptung ihrer Wohnung und damit des äußeren Rahmens ihrer Existenz ermöglicht...” (It is impossible to quantify how far the impoverishment process has progressed. But it cannot be denied that it is a fact, although the external appearance does not reveal the whole reality, seeing that rent control has made it possible for the broad mass of the bourgeoisie to maintain their apartment and, thus, the outer appearance of their existence.) *Das österreichische Wirtschaftsproblem*. Denkschrift der österreichisch-deutschen Arbeitsgemeinschaft (Edited by Bruno Enderes, Karl Herrmann, Benedikt Kautsky, Rudolf Kobatsch, Hermann Neubacher, Edmund Palla, Erich Seutter-Lötzen, Gustav Stolper and Max Tayenthal), Vienna 1925, p. 21 f.

also evidence of a quite astonishing continuity.²²

Material deprivation – political disorientation?

The inflation destroyed a great deal of capital, especially when investments had been made in state securities (and here once again – especially in war bonds.) There is hardly a bourgeois biography in which this fact is not mentioned, seeing that it affected almost everyone belonging to this class in any way at all.²³ The rent-control legislations that, de facto, expropriated the property owners had a similar effect – Otto Bauer already provided an accurate description of this. Up until 1914, it had been a common security strategy for members of the middle classes to own an apartment building to provide for their old age. Heinrich Röttinger (1869–1952), who retired from his final position as Director of the University Library in 1933, had an annual income of more than 16,000 crowns in 1914; only 34 per cent came from his salary (which still amounted to 5400 crowns), while 36 per cent came from renting and 15 per cent from his investments. Not untypically, the last two items were

22 Marie-Theres Arnbom, Friedmann, Gutmann, Lieben, Mandl, Strakosch. *Fünf Familienporträts aus Wien vor 1938*, Vienna – Cologne – Weimar 2002.

23 It would be tedious to list the numerous examples. Friedrich Engel-Janosi never forgot to refer to the “wisdom” of the economist Schumpeter that a crown is a crown, cf. F. Engel-Janosi, ... aber ein stolzer Bettler, Graz 1974, 71: “Die Besuche österreichischer Finanzgrößen bei den Eltern hatten schon ihre Spuren in Gestalt voluminöser Pakete von Kriegsanleihen hinterlassen, sie erwiesen sich später als vorzüglich geeignet zu Tapezierungs Zwecken. (...) Man mußte wirklich ein so bedeutender Nationalökonom wie Professor Schumpeter sein, um dem Zauber der Formel ‘Krone ist Krone’ so völlig zu verfallen ...” (The visits Austrian financial stars made to my parents left their traces in the shape of voluminous packets of war bonds that later proved themselves to be ideal for wallpapering. (...) One would really have to be such an important economist as Professor Schumpeter to completely fall for the magic formula that ‘a crown is a crown’).

reduced to zero after 1918, partly due to devaluation and partly to the systematic disposal of property and securities. This was the first time that the government official had to rely entirely on his salary.²⁴

Experiencing insecurity was a central shock for the highly developed desire for security felt by the members of the bourgeoisie of the late monarchy, which Stefan Zweig portrayed so lovingly in his writing.²⁵ The inflation resulted in civil servants losing more than 85 per cent of their real income (1920: civil servants received 14 per cent of the peacetime purchasing power and, in 1925, their salaries were still only about 56 per cent of what they had been before the war).²⁶ This material loss of position was underlined by the levelling of incomes during the inflationary period: In March 1922, a coal deliverer earned 1300 times as much as he did in 1914; for a hairdresser, this was only 400, for a university professor 214, a court councillor 124, and for an assistant doctor only 100 times as much. At the same time, a skilled worker in the metal, sugar, or electrical industry earned up to 1.8 million crowns, while the salary of a ministerial councillor was only 1.5 million crowns.²⁷ Although the wage gap widened again after the stabilisation of the currency (autumn 1922), the relations remained completely different from traditional concepts. By no means, had the labour-

24 Marija Wakounig, *Konsumverhalten des Wiener Bürgertums im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, in: *Jahrbuch des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Wien* 44/45, 1989, pp. 154–86, here p. 174.

25 Stefan Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers* (Frankfurt/M. 1970).

26 Arnold Madlé, *Die Bezüge der öffentlichen Angestellten*. In: Julius Bunzel (ed.), *Geldentwertung und Stabilisierung in ihren Einflüssen auf die soziale Entwicklung in Österreich* (Schriften des Vereins für Sozialpolitik 169, Munich – Leipzig 1925), pp. 131–136. As a comparison, workers and employees received around 75 per cent of their real pre-war wages in 1925.

27 Siegfried Strakosch, *Der Selbstmord eines Volkes. Wirtschaft in Österreich*, Wien – Leipzig – Munich, 1922, p. 50 f.

ers become “rich” – they still earned very little compared to their counterparts in other countries.²⁸ Nevertheless, the perception of the levelling for the affected “bourgeoisie” meant precisely the loss of the social advantages that had previously defined being “bourgeois”.

In the first years after the war, the feeling of material deprivation became mixed with the experience of social powerlessness due to the dominance of the left wing in the streets and political process: “Supported on the streets and with the means of trade union struggle, assured of the Bundeswehr recruited from their ranks, social democracy is able to allow itself the tremendous luxury of leaving all responsibility to the bourgeois parties, seeing that, in reality, it remains dominant, even if there is a bourgeois cabinet. However, the pillars of the old regime – the citizens and farmers – are leaving the field, intimidated, uncertain of their own destiny...”²⁹

The experience of persistent material deprivation continued for quite a few “bourgeois” even after “bourgeois” coalitions had taken over the government. The Geneva Protocol for the Reconstruction of Austria of 1922 forced an extensive reduction in the number of civil servants. It was proclaimed that the number of public employees was to be “reduced” by the round number of 100,000. By the end of 1925, 83,386 had actually retired or been dismissed, in addition to 10,000 who had worked for the Southern Railroad Organisation. The total number reached about 50 per cent of those still active, i.e., about one third of all the people employed in public service had been affected by these measures. In the following years, there was only a slow decrease in the number of public employees. However, this was then accelerated as a result of

28 Franz Haber, *Österreichs Wirtschaftsbilanz. Ein Vergleich mit der Vorkriegszeit*, Munich 1928, p. 95.

29 Strakosch, *Selbstmord*, p. 110.

the collapse of the Creditanstalt Bank and the enormous costs for its reorganisation that were covered by the state. In 1926, around 200,000 people were employed in government administration, federal enterprises and the railroads; this decreased to 166,000 in 1933 (this later increased slightly due to the number of soldiers and police officers hired).³⁰ The succession of bank failures that followed after the stabilisation crisis of 1924 had a similar effect. The Association of Banking and Savings Institute Officials had 24,500 members in 1924; this reduced to 11,000 in 1926 and even further to 7,700 in 1931.³¹

A high percentage of the bourgeois groups who had been hit hardest by the collapse of the monarchy, inflation, rent control legislations, budget restructuring, and bank failures lived in Vienna. The fact that “republic” lacked the positive connotation the word generally has for us today for these impoverished members of the bourgeoisie who were unsure of their status is unpleasant, but it is not incomprehensible. What is less comprehensible is that the “bourgeois” parties and governments showed so little commitment to the interests of their clientele. The radical pay cuts that the employees of the Creditanstalt were expected to accept as a result of the bank’s crisis even prompted Otto Bauer to speak in the main committee of the National Council. He stated that although he had actually nothing against such cuts, he would like to be permitted to state that, by doing this, the bourgeois parties were sawing off the branch they were sitting on.³² It seems possible that this approach was an expression of certain antisemitic currents among the Christian Socials and Greater Germans (bank directors

30 Ernst Bruckmüller, *Sozialstruktur und Sozialpolitik*, in: Erika Weinzierl – Kurt Skalník (eds.), *Österreich 1918 – 1938*, vol., 1, here pp. 406–407.

31 Bruckmüller, *Sozialstruktur und Sozialpolitik*, p. 406.

32 Alexander Spitzmüller, “...und hat auch Ursach, es zu lieben.” *Vienna – Munich – Stuttgart – Zürich 1955*, p. 71.

were frequently Jews) and, in connection with this, probably also an attempt to gain popularity by attributing guilt to, and taking massive action against, bank directors and officials.³³

The memoirs of Alexander Spitzmüller (1862–1953) offer a wide range of material for this behaviour – especially on the part of the Christian Socialists: In spite of his clearly Catholic stance, the one-time state official, then bank director (of the *Creditanstalt*), Austrian Trade Minister, and the last joint Finance Minister of the Austro-Hungarian empire, always remained an outsider for the Christian Socialists. He never received the thanks due to him for the energy he invested as governor of the Austro-Hungarian Bank (until its liquidation at the beginning of 1923) and as head of the *Creditanstalt* during the crisis of 1931/32; quite the contrary, everything possible was undertaken to hinder him in carrying out these arduous tasks.³⁴ Spitzmüller's memoirs are not the only case. Those of Hans von Loewenfeld-Russ, who, as a highly respected nutritionist, not only served the monarchy but also the young republic with unwavering loyalty, described the blockade of any further public career by the Christian Social Party as the result of a statement he made in the cabinet that seemed to expose him as sympathising with the Social Democrats.³⁵

Entrepreneurial circles, therefore, started looking for alternatives early on. They supported the *Heimwehr* as a military force

33 On the *Creditanstalt* crisis: Spitzmüller, as well as Dieter Stiefel, *Finanzdiplomatie und Weltwirtschaftskrise. Die Krise der Creditanstalt für Handel und Gewerbe*, Frankfurt/M. 1989. On the application of the enabling act for the war economy, cf. Peter Huemer, *Sektionschef Rudolf Hecht und die Zerstörung der Demokratie in Österreich*, Vienna 1975.

34 Spitzmüller, *ibid.*, p. 371 ff.

35 Hans Loewenfeld-Russ, *Im Kampf gegen den Hunger. Aus den Erinnerungen des Staatssekretärs für Volksernährung 1918–1920*, Isabella Ackerl (ed.), Vienna 1986, p. 331 ff.

against the Republican *Schutzbund* of the Social Democrats. The management of the “Alpine” conglomerate in Styria, in particular, promoted the various *Heimwehr* organisations. Here, the management attempted to weaken the social democratic unions by supporting a “yellow” *Heimwehr* union. Bourgeois frustration became particularly evident in the results of the Vienna municipal and province election of 1932, when the Christian Socialists suffered severe losses to the National Socialists.

End of the bourgeoisie?

Despite the often-invoked losses and cuts – that occur in every memoir – the end of the monarchy did not (yet) mean the end of the bourgeois world. This did not happen until 1938, when the Jewish bourgeoisie (or, more precisely, the bourgeoisie of Jewish descent, because this had nothing to do with religious beliefs) were robbed of all their assets.³⁶ As Peter Melichar once expressed in a conversation, the “aryanisation” files contained the most complete material on the cultural history of the (so-called Jewish) middle classes of the interwar period. The “aryanisations” undoubtedly created a much more profound break in the continuity of the bourgeois world that could be followed up to this point and now came to an end, destroyed by flight and, in the worst cases, by deporta-

36 Exemplary for the banking sector: Peter Melichar, *Neuordnung im Bankwesen. Die NS-Maßnahmen und die Problematik der Restitution* (Veröffentlichungen der Österreichischen Historikerkommission. Vermögensentzug während der NS-Zeit sowie Rückstellungen und Entschädigungen seit 1945 in Österreich, vol. 11, Vienna – Munich 2004); Peter Eigner – Peter Melichar, *Enteignungen und Säuberungen – Die österreichischen Banken im Nationalsozialismus*, in: Dieter Ziegler (ed.), *Banken und “Arisierungen” in Mitteleuropa während des Nationalsozialismus* (Geld und Kapital, Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für mitteleuropäische Banken- und Sparkassengeschichte, Alois Mosser, Alice Teichova, Richard Tilly (eds.), 2001, Stuttgart 2002, pp. 43–118.

tion to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz.

The major ruptures that took place in 1918, 1938, and 1945 can therefore be interpreted as three stages on the path to the post-bourgeois era – in the first, the Austrian bourgeoisie lost much of its economic power, and then – in the second starting 1938 – large sections of this bourgeoisie (the large Jewish portion) lost their property, homeland, and – all too often – their lives. In the third, after 1945, the former Great German-Liberal bourgeoisie experienced a similar – albeit nowhere near as catastrophic – deprivation.

Let us therefore assume that those classes that dominated “bourgeois” society in the 19th century largely lost their livelihoods in 1918, 1938, and 1945. Did the end of fascism, national socialism, and communism bring about a renaissance of the bourgeoisie? There are continuities in quite a few families, as well as enterprises, but family companies in particular tend to be unable to continue operating as such after a few generations. The bourgeoisie cannot be reconstructed as an economically, intellectually, and culturally dominating class in the style of the German-liberal bourgeoisie of the second half of the 19th century.

I return to the statements about the civil society made at the beginning of this essay. Put in a nutshell, the question is: How many traditional bourgeoisie does a democratic, civil society of free “citizens” need if it is to function successfully? Was the great crisis of 1914–1918 so catastrophic because it hit the bourgeoisie so severely? And was the inability of the new states to offer the “old” bourgeoisie of the monarchy a suitable new home one of the (several) reasons for the relatively rapid downfall of the order in 1918/19? And: Is a democratic “civil society” possible without social groups that – whether they consider themselves “bour-

geois” or not – still represent the canon of values that were characteristic of the “classical” bourgeoisie: a high level of esteem for the self-determined individual, as well as personal achievement and efficiency, combined with the belief in the proficiency of free associations and participation in the self-administration of the community, an optimistic, science-based concept of human development, coupled with a deep distrust of all ready-made solutions prescribed “from above”?

On the other hand, many things that the bourgeoisie of the 19th century strived, and paved the way for such as developing the possibilities for education, promoting technical advancement, and improving the material opportunities and living standards of broader levels of society, had actually been realised when the bourgeoisie came to an end so that, today, many more people live a more “bourgeois” life than in the long-past age of the bourgeoisie. And they also have many more opportunities for “civil society” commitment.

Fundamental Principles of the Civil Society

Which Trends Do We Need to Protect Ourselves Against?

Werner J. Patzelt

Summary: A civil society of the Western style is not achieved once and for all. A civil society can only develop when – and for as long as – its complex cultural prerequisites exist. In addition, there are several trends that are currently endangering the civil society. As has so often been the case in history, political thought and speech are now subjected to rather strict regulations and restraints. These are guaranteed by creating taboos, and censorship imposed by oneself or others, as well as the social exclusion and condemnation of dissidents.

1. Fundamentals of a Western-style civil society

It is often the case that, when one is looking for insights that are beneficial for the present time, it is a good idea to dwell on some thoughts from the past. If these still seem plausible today, they contain lessons that have remained valid. One of the core statements in the dialogue by the Roman politician and intellectual Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC) “De re publica” fulfils this in our search for the fundamentals of a civil society: “Est [...] res publica res populi, populus autem non omnis hominum coetus quoquo modo congregatus, sed coetus multitudinis iuris consensu et utilitatis communione sociatus.” Translated into English in a way that suits our purpose, this means: “The civil society is an affair of the people; however, they should not be understood as a group that has come together in one way or another, but as the collaboration of many such groups that become connected to form a society through their agreement to uniting regulations, as well as common benefits.” The principles of a civil society understood in this man-

ner include *rules* that are followed jointly, as well as experiences of *common benefits* arising out of actions in keeping with these rules. The benefit is the *common good*.

Cicero's concept is based on one of the central concepts of the Greek polymath Aristotle (384–322 BC). With the Greek city state – the *polis* – in mind, he spoke of the *kononia politiké*, the citizenry united by binding law, and binding ethics that – precisely through the acceptance and performance of public offices – aimed at a “good life” for all. Of course, neither Aristotle nor Cicero thought about equal rights for men and women. They also found the status of a slave without rights completely normal. However, restrictions of this kind, which we find intolerable today, can be shaken off without changing anything about the core concept of this kind of political vision: Self-aware citizens do not only take care of their own interests – in Greek: of *tà idia*, which makes them “idiots”. They also care for the interests of the community they belong to: for the common good of a polis as “*politai*”, and as “*cives*” for the common good of a “*civitas*”, a “*res publica*”.

Naturally, what we are referring to here could be described as a “civil society”. However, this term has become somewhat stale through its Marxist connotation. There, the “*bourgeoisie*” follows the feudal lords as a class and precedes the “civil” society of the socialist style. That is the reason that the German term “*Zivilgesellschaft*”, which emulates the French and English expressions of “*société civile*” and “civil society”, has been in use for many decades. Nevertheless, the Germanised concept of the “*Zivilgesellschaft*” also includes comparisons such as “civilised vs. barbaric” and “civil vs. military”. The first is absolutely reasonable, seeing that regulations, complete with their orientation on the common good, actually create important boundaries to a barbaric law of the jungle based on self-interest. The second comparison, on the other hand,

is in no way appropriate. The *politai* of a Greek popular assembly, who practised democracy (rule by the people) were actually none other than the men of this civil society who were capable of – or had experience in – war. Indeed, in the most important form of Roman-republican popular assemblies, the – purely male – citizenry appeared in a military formation, albeit without weapons, in the so-called centuriate assemblies. It was precisely in this sense that, when the right to vote was introduced in the 19th century, it was accompanied by the expansion of compulsory military service – modelled on the “levée en masse” of the self-defensive French Revolution. Germany’s first Federal President called conscription the “legitimate child of democracy” and the model of the “citizen in uniform” was developed for soldiers. It is obvious that examples of this kind fade in societies in which the following formulation became common – and which is even legally incontestable in Germany: “Soldiers are murderers”. In times of peace, which seem to be natural, it might be possible to understand and even treasure this separation between soldiery and citizenship. However, peace is like summertime in that it is often followed by a stormy period in autumn.

2. Intellectual challenges facing Western civil societies

In the meantime, another apparently self-evident fact has become fragile. This is the differentiation and contrast between the civil and religious community. This was not characteristic of antiquity and the early modern era but has definitely shaped our concept of a civil society since the Enlightenment. In the Western world, this concept of the civil society was preceded by the Christian dualism between “secular” and “religious” rule. After reciprocal, absolutely painful, disputes since the Enlightenment, the concept that – although it had been shaped by the Christianity

it dialectically opposed – the Western state no longer had any need for genuinely practised Christianity to be able to develop itself as a “*societas perfecta*” in the sense of the Greek polis. Of course, the Western state, complete with the civil society supporting it, continued to live precisely in those conditions that had been moulded by Christianity and that it would be unable to reproduce – let alone create anew – itself. Going beyond the individual argumentative purpose – “transcending” it – these conditions include the justification for those rights to protection and freedom that have the common denominator of “human dignity”. For their part, these rights require a liberal, democratic, and social constitutional state to remain guaranteed. But as long as there is no lack of Christian, or *functionally equal*, prerequisites for this kind of formation of a civil society and its state, the secular state in the Western tradition only needs *some kind of* civil religion to give expression to its moral foundations and, ultimately, perception of sense not only discursively, but also symbolically – and, therefore, appealing to the emotions – as well as stabilising socially in this way. This religion must not necessarily be Christianity as long as it is possible to make “human dignity” the key element of social and political order convincingly.

But now there are extremely influential *alternatives* to the formerly Christian character of a (civil) religion that unites individuals to form a nation. In particular, there is very special alternative in those Western states that have a large Muslim minority in their population. Members of this group often also – or even *above all* – feel that they are part of an Islamic culture spanning many societies and states. However, precisely this culture, which dates back to late antiquity, did not produce the Western state and the society that supports it, but, in many cases, even expressed its *opposition* to both. What is important in Islam is not the contraposition of the “state” and “church”, or a dualism of “politics” and “religion”.

It is much more a matter of the relationship between “Dar al-Islam” and “Umma”. The latter is – completely corresponding to the Christian church as an “assembly of believers before God” – the community of Muslims. On the other hand, the Dar al-Salam – which can be translated as “house of peace”, in contrast to the “house of war (Dar al-Harb) – refers solely to that part of the world that has really already been *pacified*: namely, through the establishment of precisely *these* rules, both politically and as a form of state. A “*societas perfecta*” is therefore not possible in the orthodox thought of Islamic culture on the basis of *any* civil religion but only there where religious *Muslims*, who have been guided in the right direction, govern. It is therefore a matter – for the sake of peace – not only of the religious character of an *individual* society and its state, but of the questionable legitimacy of a *special path* of those societies and states that precisely do not allow themselves to be guided by Islam in which, however, Muslims live permanently.

Viewed in such contexts, the very concept of a society that is understood in a *non*-religious manner, as has become customary in Western cultures, seems subversive for Muslim societies and is regarded as an act of aggression by more than a few Muslims. This, in turn, is ascribed not only to the different intellectual foundations of secular-Western and religious-Islamic societies but also to the diminishing supremacy of the West that humbled and deeply damaged the “ethically superior” world of Islam. In this way, political religion becomes directly linked to political power struggles and revenge.

Acting on the foundations of civil society today, therefore, demands having arguments that are – or could, at least, become – compatible with internal debates on Islamic self-understanding. By the way, when considering China’s rise to become a dominant global power, it should be remembered that, in the future, West-

ern ideas of a civil society will also find themselves in competition with completely different East-Asian convictions on the just relationship between the state and the people living in it. However, these combine well-established insights into traditional Chinese statecraft, which were only slipped into the once-fashionable garb of Communism, with such new possibilities of governance based on modern technology relating more to scientific data and “harmonising” social control than on trying to cultivate the willingness of a self-determined citizenry to participate. Whether a political model of this kind is inferior or superior to the Western version must be treated as an open question. The desired answer can only be provided if one’s own efforts to bring about or secure a really “good life” are reinforced through sustainable, successful politics.

In any case, civil society of the Western variety is not something that can be achieved once and for all. Anyway, it can only come about as soon as – and for as long as – its complex cultural requirements are satisfied. But, even then, it remains threatened by anti-pluralist currents regardless of their origin and goals. It can only counter the allure of ideological righteousness, and the willingness to believe in religion, with cumbersome considerations about the fact that being open to criticism is what makes learning possible, and that all historical examples of politics founded on a specific claim to truth are terrifying. A civil society can also threaten itself. This occurs especially when those civil-religious formulas and civil-liturgical practices, which guarantee the stability of the civil society through symbols appealing to feelings, are used tactically and instrumentally to defend current cultural-hegemonic positions against new competition. That is when communication-hygienic rules of political correctness develop into quasi-religious taboos, concern about the preservation of civil liberty becomes political witchcraft, and securing equal rights for all leads to a new caste structure separating the “decent” from the “evil”. In essence,

these are precisely the new internal trends in our Western civil societies that, in the meantime, are impairing all the opportunities that a form of pluralism that flourished for many years granted us. For the sake of the wider common good, we should therefore attempt to better understand – and apply more honestly – those rules which, in the West, have so frequently turned selfish individuals and self-righteously competing groups into a public-spirited civil society that takes an active part in its community.

3. Indispensable rules for a civil society

How is it possible to keep a society and its state permanently capable of learning, to be able to adapt to new internal and external challenges and, in this way, realise the common good time after time? The best possible answer seems to be: As long as there is no emergency requiring immediate action, one must initiate unloaded discourse about – real or hypothetical – problems, organise open-ended debates about the causal connections of problems, and make social disputes about solutions possible. Only after all of this has taken place should decisions about what to do next be made. These, in turn, are best designed as majority decisions, because this is precisely the way to create pressure for the widest possible consideration of various opinions and interests. Of course, the majority principle established in this way also includes the protection of minorities. And this political approach has to go hand in hand with a basic attitude of always being ready to start learning *anew*.

The name given to a political system operating according to these kinds of rules is *pluralistic democracy*. Among its characteristics are a willingness to accept, and even reverse, diversity – not only in matters of skin colour, but also political opinions; acknowledging

the right of the individual to define his interests independently and responsibly as a matter of course – and there, especially those that one objects to oneself; and the legitimacy of dispute – even when one is at risk of losing the argument. It is also important for pluralistic democracy that the area that can be disputed, without the parties risking social ostracism, be kept as broad as possible. On the other hand, the areas that are not open to question should be kept as small as possible. It is a fact that dictatorial regimes and their subservient societies are characterised by the minimisation of what can, and the great increase in what cannot, be questioned. This ranges from the dominant role of a single party to the law of God directly influencing politics.

The name given to the “non-dispute” area of a pluralistic democracy is “minimal consensus” and it is made up of three partial consensuses. There is the *consensus of values* that is principally composed of the consensus that everyone has the same human rights, including that of being different from others in terms of appearance, sexual orientation, religion, and political leanings. Then there is *procedural consensus*. It includes non-violence and the majority principle, together with the protection of minorities. Non-violence is an especially important aspect. Intimidation through the threat of violence, the anticipation of violence, and violence itself reduce the diversity of viewpoints and interests that are freely brought into the dispute. This is precisely what reduces the opportunities for learning in and through dispute and this deprives a pluralistic democracy of its central advantage. And there is finally *regulatory consensus*; for example, a consensus that demonstrations on the street are allowable, but that final decisions will be made in parliaments or by the courts. Shaping a state in a way that there can be disputes about as many topics as possible and that, as a result, the ability of politics and society to learn is optimised, is the “highly effectual secret” of pluralistic democracy

and the great advantage of functioning civil society.

An additional, extremely special, value of this kind of society is that it is possible to *criticise* those in power and the existing conditions, and that it does not demand the *affirmation*, the justification or defence, of what already exists. It is much more the case that, in a pluralistic democracy, the citizenry always takes a *critical* stance towards any claims that somebody or something is right because that is the way it has always been – going beyond the minimal value, procedural, and regulatory consensus. However, criticism is more than just emotional grumbling. The demonstration of standards for judgement, complete with their rational justification, and likewise the assessment of those already existing based on the same standards, which claim to be logically correct, are also part of this. In other words: Pluralistic democracy is strengthened through rational criticism, not through the emotional defence of existing conditions.

These rules of the game of pluralistic democracy are based on experiences made by trial and error in designing political systems and the societies supporting them. Ultimately, they integrate the “algorithm of evolution” into political practice. However, when all we know about the development of complex systems, from biology, over culture, and into the world of institutions, is taken into consideration, this is really the best possible way for guaranteeing the ability to learn and efficiently coupling systems with their environment. The four steps of the evolutionary algorithm are variation, selection, retention, and as differential reproduction, which looks like this in society and politics: A wide variation of perspectives, priorities, proposed solutions, and self-evident actions required for solving new problems arises through the practical use of the right to diversity, as well as the fear-free articulation of opinions and interests, in continuous controversial discourses.

This then leads to an *internal selection* from the variety offered; i.e., that which is not appropriate to the existing system of pluralistic democracy with its proven routines, or does not fit into the current discursal structure, is dismissed. This kind of internal selection is carried out in a sensible manner based on a minimal consensus on human rights, non-violence, the principle of majority, and protection of minorities, as well as tried and tested organisational structures. This is followed by the *external selection* in such a way that not all of those political measures that have been agreed on in pluralistic discourse – with or without a majority decision being reached – will prove themselves in political practice. It is a fact – and this is especially true in politics, which usually acts under conditions of uncertainty – that the path to be followed hardly ever leads to learning from, at best, “well-intentioned” attempts, from inevitable errors and political corrections. *Retention* then means the preservation of what has proven itself – in the interim or often just until further notice. This can later develop into a component of the internal selection factors that prefilter whatever will actually be tried out in praxis.

Two basic political attitudes usually come into play when dealing with internal selection factors. Conservatives attempt to be guided by what is already tried and tested, while progressives want to experiment with new things, especially under new conditions. *Both* are really necessary if political structures are to remain stable over the long term and maintainable if the contexts around them change. If the latter fails, there is the danger of slipping into a fragile form of statehood and, in the worst case, into a state of civil war and anomie. However, if it is possible to preserve what is fundamentally time-proven through *reforms*, structures of this kind can expand even further; for example, institutions such as the rule of law, separation of powers, and periodic elections can take the place of their authoritarian alternatives in an increasing number

of countries. That is precisely what is meant by “differential reproduction” as the concluding step in the evolutionary algorithm. It is clear that this kind of differential reproduction forms the foundation of the global expansion of the democratic system elements that have taken place over several “waves of democracy”.

Seeing that the conditions for political action are repeatedly changing, and that it is necessary to deal with new challenges from time to time, it is sensible to attempt to not bring this “algorithm of evolution” to a standstill – especially in the state and the civil society that supports it. But that is exactly what happens when attempts are made to protect things or structures that are taken for granted through subtle threats – or even crass use – of violence against people who question what already exists and expect changes. Damage to the foundation of a civil society and its state therefore begins with the avoidance, suppression, or disruption of controversial discourses. Unfortunately, conservative concepts and structures all too often become an irresistible political temptation for those who, for the time being, exercise political-cultural hegemony, benefit from the prevailing situation, and are, therefore, satisfied with the status quo and – in spite of new challenges – act in a purely affirmative manner, i.e., not critically rational as would correspond with the utilisation of the algorithm of evolution.

4. Radicalism as an acceptable ferment; extremism as a poison to be eradicated

A *radical* is a person who gets to the bottom of things, develops an argument until it is absurd, drives a thesis to the utmost exaggeration, and represents a position without any sense of proportion. Radicalism is therefore equally disturbing to moderates and conservatives – and that can even be good and desirable. It

is precisely radicalism that drives discourse and political projects forward and presses for those innovations that moderates and conservatives are only too happy to avoid. However, two things are essential if radicalism is not to endanger a discourse-open system. First, rules are necessary that tie radical argumentation to the *imperative of logic*, radical activity to the *leash of non-violence*, and radical politics to the *chain of the rule of law*. Second, it is to be desired that each form of radicalism has its counterforce, and each thesis its antithesis. That is precisely when a dialectic of progress based on trial and error can have the greatest effect.

When all of that is given, radicalism – the risk game of an open society as it were – may develop fruitfully as a ferment of social change. For example, it exists in the form of left or right radicalism, religious or anti-religious radicalism, and there is also a radicalism of liberty, equality, and justice. If, however, there is a lack of either effective rules of the game in radical discourse, or of counterforces to radical positions – and conservatism is an essential component here – radicalism can also become a threat to an open society. It would be likely to drift apart, become polarised, and end in disputes that could go as far as civil war. A stable order, on the other hand, is not only able to tolerate radicalism but also profit from it – especially if conservatives have strong arguments. Put briefly: Although many are disturbed by radicalism, it can do good; although radicalism can be ruthlessly stupid, its fundamental attitude is not reprehensible.

Extremism is a completely different matter. An extremist is a person who – for whatever reasons and no matter where – works towards the eradication of a liberal democratic basic order. According to the famous formulation given by the German Federal Constitutional Court in 1952, this is an order “*that, by excluding any form of violence or arbitrary rule, represents a rule of law founded*

on the self-determination of the people according to the will of the respective majority and liberty and equality. The following, at least, must be counted as belonging to the fundamental principles of this order: respect for the human rights concretised in the constitution, especially the right of the individual to life and free development, popular sovereignty, the separation of powers, the responsibility of the government, the legality of the administration, the independence of the courts, the multi-party principle and equal opportunities for all political parties with the right to form and exercise an opposition in keeping with the constitution.”

Anyone who aims at doing away with this order – for the sake of human dignity or liberty – must be fought against; and that not only going as far as to forbid his political organisation or the forfeiture of his basic rights, but going even further, and using armed force if necessary, as expressly approved in Article 20.4 of the German Constitution. On the other hand, a person whose aim is not to eliminate the liberal democratic basic order, but only do away with individual regulations or institutions of a liberal, democratic state is simply a dissident, or a radical at most, who has got on the wrong track. A person of this kind can only be approached with the normal means of political discussion.

In this context, in its ruling on the prohibition of the German Communist Party, the Federal Constitutional Court expressly stated that a party, and a political position in particular, “*is not unconstitutional if it rejects individual positions, or even entire institutions, of the Constitution. Rather it must reject the highest values of constitutional order; the fundamental constitutional principles, which make the constitutional order free and democratic, principles on which, at least, all parties must agree if this kind of democracy is to function meaningfully at all... [A party or political position is] also not unconstitutional if it does not recognise these*

highest principles of a free democratic basic order, rejects them or counters them with others. Rather, there must be an active, combative, aggressive attitude towards the existing order; it must deliberately impair the functioning of this order and, in the further course, wish to eliminate this order itself. This means that the liberal-democratic state does not act against parties with aims that are hostile to it of its own accord, but merely defends itself from attacks on its basic order. This legal construction of the elements of an offence rules out abuse of the provision in the service of zealous persecution of inconvenient opposition parties.”

The reasons a person or group has for fighting the liberal democratic basic order, or their political aims, are completely irrelevant for determining extremism if the criteria mentioned above are used. However, it serves to provide desirable information if, for example, right-wing or left-wing extremism, Islamist extremism, or “middle-class extremism” is spoken about. But the use of such a term can never take the place of *investigating* whether those labelled as extremists *really* plan to attack and eliminate the free basic order, which is recognisable by its clear criteria. By the way, when assessing the ethical and political worthlessness of opposition of this kind, the source of the motives for extremism is completely irrelevant: whether they come from the middle of society, from the upper or lower classes, from the left, or from the right, or from another edge of the political spectrum does not play a role. This is because extremism *always* attacks everything that makes a pluralistic democracy possible and so advantageous as an embodiment of political order.

5. Current trends threatening the civil society

It can unfortunately no longer be taken for granted that open public dispute is not only legally possible, but that it is also guaranteed that everyone can represent an opinion in every situation and without fear of being threatened with violence. As has happened so often throughout history, there are now rather strict regulations and restrictions governing political thought and speech. They are assured by creating taboos, censure by oneself or others, as well as the ostracism and condemnation of dissenters. Starting points for the use of political force can always be found along such enforced criteria of political correctness. Their forms begin inconspicuously but soon reach ugly levels of escalation. They are all the more frightening, seeing that political violence is often motivated by unquestionably good intentions.

A starting point for many manifestations of violence that endangers freedom is that one reacts to political positions that one does not like with a kind of “political arachnophobia”. Disgusted and – genuinely or supposedly – driven by fear, the troublemaker is attacked with words and whistles, or other means, although he is generally only aggravating and not really dangerous. Many are motivated to use this kind of behaviour because they feel that grim situations they are aware of from history are looming up on the horizon; that is why they are determined to “nip it in the bud”. This reaction unfolds particularly easily whenever a connection can be made between somebody with a different opinion and National Socialism. It is then usually the case that communication is ruled out and forms of exclusion practiced that, in turn, make use of some subtle – and some very crude – techniques of the use of force.

The techniques employed to ostracise dissidents begin with refusal to question one's own mindset and not even wanting to attempt to comprehend those connections that are so important to the person with a different opinion. This kind of ostracism goes further when it is considered a sign of special competence to be able to "explain away" everything that has caused the dissident to take his political position. One can make fun of "obviously unfounded" fears or pass them off as being "merely a pretext" – and portray the "real reasons" in appropriately dark colours. It is possible to achieve even more if the opponent is deprived of important terms, or if their use in the public sphere has been prevented or made slightly scandalous by setting "limits to what can be said". This is intended to show that the distinctions and evaluations that are important for those who think differently can only be put forward against directly expressed contradiction – showing that the opponent is wrong through his choice of words alone.

The next stage of ostracism is reached when it becomes possible to attach labels to the opponent that show that somebody is *really* a "bad person". The best way to begin is by judging him to be a "notorious troublemaker" or "political diehard". A "strategic context formation" of this kind is particularly effective in Germany if it is possible to describe somebody as a "right-wing populist", "fascist", or – really popular in recent times – as a "racist". And, in case the person is not directly recognisable as being evil, speaking of the "extremism of the middle" that the person to be outcast personifies, usually helps. It can also be particularly practical if it is possible to portray the marginalised person as being the incarnation of type that is dangerous to the general public. In that case, the demand for exclusion is no longer specifically directed against a fellow human being, who might even be likeable under different circumstances, or his particular actions, but simply *against evil* and its embodiment in the *enemy*. This makes it possible to assert

one's own moral superiority that can no longer be refuted for all practical purposes.

It is highly plausible that anybody who has been branded as being a “latent Nazi” or “populist” will be deprived of any possibilities for public appearances. You cannot provide a platform for a right-wing radical or racist; he can therefore no longer participate in talk shows on an equal footing – and, naturally, also not on discussion podiums and rostrums. The result of this kind of process reaches perfection as soon as the dissident not only shows weakness that justify his exclusion, but also reacts to such pressure by *accepting* his role as an outsider and, full of defiance, proves *himself* to be increasingly wrong.

The ostracism can go even further. The aim is to bring the dissident before a “virtual court” – for example, to “finish him off” on a talk show and then post the relevant video clip on the internet. It might even be possible to pin an investigation by the public prosecutor on him; there must be something behind it! The goal has been reached when the person who is to be rejected is regarded as “not to be taken seriously”, when he is no longer seen as a “trustworthy expert” – and maybe not even an “acceptable fellow citizen”. And the exclusion reaches the desired conclusion when the opponent withdraws from the public sphere. In a dictatorship, he might be incarcerated, exiled, admitted to a psychiatric institution, or possibly even murdered.

All of these steps can be rounded off perfectly with *schadenfreude* towards the “bad guys” and with self-celebratory symbolic actions by the “heroes”. This becomes particularly effective when this *schadenfreude* is not only accompanied by serious threats, but when these are put into practice in an exemplary fashion: from preventing public speeches to rededicating cakes to be used

as accusatory projectiles, from discourse-preventing chants and throwing stones at demonstrations to attacks on offices, vehicles, and people. All of these activities have now become a mutual practice that damages an existing civil society from within and undermines the foundations of its pluralistic democracy.

6. Lessons to be heeded

It will only be possible to enjoy the advantages of a civil society as long as desirable argumentativeness or radicality does not result in violence, or the respective opponent – even if he is a radical – is not confronted with violence. That makes it absolutely essential to accept and adhere to the following rules. First, violence that is against the law must be categorically rejected – regardless of who it is aimed at, and independent of all motives except self-defence and in an emergency. Police action must be taken against any actually executed violence. Second, violence is to be rejected even more strongly as a means of internal politics – this also applies to violence in the form of intimidation although it might still be within the framework of law. Concern about the consequences of substandard politics or indignation about the arrogance of the political opponent never justify violence or the threat of it.

We would be well advised to not only draw up such principles for the functioning of a civil society in the abstract, but also to consider their concrete consequences, and take them to heart in practice. That is why we should attempt to relate these principles to the issues of immigration and integration, which will definitely remain with us for some time to come, and – specifically – to the recurring attacks on refugees and their accommodation. Although this example is substitutable, it is particularly instructive in the present situation. No matter how radical the political

disagreement, it must be handled in this way: It is unjust to come down on civil-war refugees and asylum seekers, foreigners living in the country, and fellow citizens with a different appearance, just because one is dissatisfied with the deficiencies in migration and integration policies.

This makes refugee and asylum seekers' accommodations absolutely the wrong places to protest against migration and integration policies. It is deplorable to try to get attention by organising demonstrations of this kind in places where those people, who can do nothing at all about the conflict that needs to be fought out in a country, become the target of aggression. It is also unjust to translate concerns and indignation resulting from the inadequacies and flaws in immigration and integration policies into hostility against overtaxed mayors and district executives, and even against those police officers who have to maintain public order and secure the rights of everybody to demonstrate under such difficult circumstances. And the fact that somebody looks different or has been socialised by a culture different from one's own does not in any way justify belittling or despising others and treating them accordingly. Anyone who does this, anyone who acts in a racist manner, has a damaged moral compass or bad character. And anyone who – despite willingness to engage in a dialogue – cannot be won over to humane coexistence must, quite simply, be excluded from the acceptable political discourse.

Put in a nutshell: For the sake of the continued existence of a civil society and its pluralistic democracy, it is necessary to fight violent radicals and all extremists – then, thanks to the self-evident assertion of non-violence, one will be able to afford the radicality that is so important for political educability and make the pluralistic democracy especially educable in this way. Of course, this is a complex view, and often an emotionally difficult attitude. How-

ever, without accepting the necessary intellectual and emotional costs, it will quite simply be impossible to benefit from the great value of the civil society and its pluralistic democracy.

The Phenomenology of the Civil Society

Manfred Prisching

Summary: There is no single civil society – there are only civil societies in the plural. There are numerous, different phenomena, entities, groups, institutions, mental attitudes, and activities collected under this label. The heterogeneity of the concept of the “civil society” creates difficulties, seeing that the institutional can conflict with the normative localisation; the organisation with the mental attitude. One thing is certain: It is not possible to protect, generate, guarantee, or develop community spirit through institutional measures. However, it is possible for institutions that allow, make possible, promote, and strengthen private activities to grow through community spirit. There can, therefore, be no civil society without citizens.

I intend to approach the matter using a linguistic-empirical method. The vocabulary employed to speak about the phenomenon that is described as the *civil society* or *civic society* (van den Brink et al. 1995; Jessen et al. 2004) includes the following concepts: *active participation, commitment, legitimation, social resource, participation practice, dialogue (among the administration, politics and the citizenry), projects, public benefit, general welfare, volunteer work, responsibility, citizenship, social responsibility, associations and unions, federations and foundations, philanthropy, sponsorship, democratic public opinion, locality, fragmentation, basis activity, self-organisation, self-regulation, activation, protest, criticism, democracy, publicity, and social capital*. Factual and normative, descriptive and desired, institutional, ideal, and practical phenomena are described in this way and, not so rarely, all in a muddle. Jürgen Kocka says, “There are social-science concepts that spread like epidemics, that degenerate into slogans of political rhetoric, and whose upsurge is pur-

chased through fuzziness” (Kocka et al. 2001, p. 4). That does not sound good. But Kocka continues, “On the other hand, you have to ask yourself what makes the concept [civil society] so attractive. Protesters in Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest rediscovered it in the 1980s and made it the core of their indictment of the Communist dictatorships in their countries. The concept had already started to play a certain role in the politico-scientific discussion in Latin America and South Africa. Communitarian and liberal authors in the West soon started to resort to the concept when they took a stand for minority groups or economic deregulation, against the alleged domination of the patronising state. In the left camp, the concept was used to claim the right to public space as a medium for democratic self-fulfilment and to stress the rights of the self-determining society of discussing, responsible citizens against the constraints of the apparatuses of the market and state” (Kocka et al. 2001, p. 4). This shows that there are completely different contexts (and probably also different contextual accentuations) connected with the civil or civic society. *We are the people. We are community. We are the entrepreneurial society. We are “the” society. We are the critical. We are democracy.* But here we notice some contradictions. The concept can imply being left in peace *or* actively participating. It means the private *or* public sphere. It entails the free market *or* is non-market. It alludes to political involvement *or* distance from the state. Hans Joas formulated it in this way: “Which social forces can assure that the market and state, as the two dominating mechanisms of modern socialisation, can be relativised and modified by a third principle so that we are not faced with the alternative of either simply passively accepting the consequences of unregulated market activities *or*, conversely, relying exclusively on intervention by the state to overcome them with the risk of a stifling bureaucratisation of social life?”¹

1 file:///C:/Users/admin/Downloads/BBAW_BA9_Joas.pdf (accessed 9 September 2020).

The civil society or civic society² is usually spoken of in a positive way, the concept (similar to “democracy”) augmented with all *desirabilities*, even though the real phenomena that are labelled in this way are completely different. There is a loose connection with a conceptual world that has been tagged the bourgeois society (comprising the *moyenne* and *haute bourgeoisie*, educated middle classes, and a bourgeois lifestyle) (Riedel 2004); however, seeing that this society has faded away, the content of the concept has also shifted even though the aftereffects of the formerly effective attitude can still be felt. The concept is nuanced in a variety of ways internationally, and there are also historical shifts. Certain discussions – such as the debate on communitarianism – blanket themselves with the concepts.

First of all, this indicates that: There is *no civil society* – there are only *civil societies in the plural*. Numerous, different phenomena, entities, groups, institutions, mental attitudes, and activities are collected under this label. It is difficult to compare a voluntary fire brigade with the squatters occupying an autonomous centre, the Caritas and Volkshilfe social organisations with populist groups from the right, university professors who sit on the advisory board of their institution with the members of a village choral society or the uprising in Belarus with demonstrations by the AfD (Alter-

2 Attempts are sometimes made to define the two terms in a way that they represent something different; however, fundamentally, that does not produce very much. Nevertheless, the contexts differ: The “civil society” began its career in Eastern Europe in the 1980s to protest against a totalitarian state that it needed to fight to obtain free space. On the other hand, in Western countries – especially those in Central Europe – indications of a “collective” forming outside of the market and state led to sometimes neurotic anxieties and strategies that quickly evoked the “people’s communities” of the past. However, in the various political camps, we find individual traditions ranging from the subsidiary principle of Catholic social teaching, over the cooperative principle of agricultural movements, to the early organisational forms of the workers’ movement.

native for Germany) in the West. Beatrix von Storch (AfD) also actually made use of the term in her criticism of the migrants' riots in 2020: "If injunctions forbidding entering public squares and streets on weekends are issued, as happened in Frankfurt, we will lose our struggle for the public space in Germany. That is the beginning of the end of a free civil society."³

Even if one makes an attempt to only compile a list of the various concept-clusters, one notices that the variants of the concept of the "civil society" are always twofold: positive contextual definition and negative distinction, force and counterforce, stance and anti-stance. If one makes a mental effort to amalgamate all of the central elements, the result is a – albeit somewhat hazy – contour of a *civil society in the singular*. We will now take a look at the ambivalences of the term and then probe the conceptual meaning.

Ambivalences

The heterogeneity of the concept of the civil society creates difficulties because the institutional can collide with the normative localisation, the organisation with the mental attitude. In the simplest case, the *institutional* localisation would mean the third sector, outside of the market and state. *Normative* localisation (or the "mental attitude" of the civil society, if you prefer) is more challenging, but a certain "ideological substance" is part of it.

As a concrete example, the institutional perspective focuses on organisations that aim to integrate refugees; there are also xenophobic associations that follow the opposite targets. There are protest marches by those in favour of, as well as those opposing,

3 <https://www.presseportal.de/pm/110332/4657941> (accessed 20 August 2020).

democracy. There are demonstrations for and against President Erdogan. The actual cases of the conflicts in Belarus are “a chance for the civil society”⁴ or “NGOs and the Civil Society in Belarus.”⁵ The EU has established a fund “with the intention of supporting the Belarussian civil society.”⁶ If one follows the institutional concept, it is only natural that mosque-based associations that preach fundamentalism and hatred, and construct parallel societies, must also be included under the concept of civil society. That conflicts with the positive association we connect with the term. We would prefer not to count Ku Klux Klan marches in the USA and groups with a similar mindset as manifestations of an “honourable” civil society. However, if we exclude the disagreeable phenomena of the late-modern world from this concept, it becomes nothing more than a profession of sympathy: Activities that one feels close to are part of it, while one would prefer to reject those that one regards with indignation.

This leads us to “mindset”. Obviously, only understanding the manifestations of the civil society institutionally does not go far enough; it is much more the case that their institutional categorisation must be linked to a normative, judgemental, ideological component. As one example: The civil society is not simply a phenomenon of the third sector (outside of the market and state) but is also necessarily connected with an attitude that gives the market and state the appropriate place, while simultaneously demonstrating a special *regard for self-organised groups of the civil society outside of the market and state*. Then, the civil or civic society is not only seen as a stopgap whose actors take care of refugees and

4 <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2016-02/belarus-europa-beziehung-aufhebung-sanktionen/seite-2> (accessed 27 August 2020).

5 <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/publikationen/publikation/did/ngos-und-zivilgesellschaft-in-belarus/> (accessed 27 August 2020).

6 <https://orf.at/stories/3177521/> (accessed 27 August 2020).

guarantee caritative services because – scandalously – the state does not do this in an appropriate or sufficient way, as it actually should; much more, activities of this kind are held in high esteem. In this case, the normative components are included in the term.

Jürgen Kocka addresses all of the mentioned elements in his definition: “‘Civil society’ means [...] a plan for human cohabitation, which originated in the Age of Enlightenment and has since been frequently changed and still continues to be changed. The concept is defined in different ways, in various constellations, against different opponents for the given situation, and by different spokespeople. Certainly, there was great variability in the level and kind of realisation of this plan, and there still is. [...] As a rule, it can be said: A high degree of social self-organisation belongs to the ‘civil society’; e.g., in associations, societies, and movements, with the corresponding resources such as communication possibilities, education, and trust. The ‘civil society’ also includes legitimate diversity, controlled conflicts, and a specific approach to violence: restraining, containing, and minimising it. ‘Civil society’ incorporates a culture of civility encompassing respect for tolerance, independence, and performance, as well as a willingness for personal involvement and collectively transcending purely personal goals” (Kocka et al. 2001, p. 10). If we follow this definition, we can create a “packet” that limits the all too arbitrary use of the term “civil” or “civic society”. I will use six keywords to investigate this heterogeneous field.

1. The moderate state

The civil society is sympathetic to – but mistrustful of – the state. It stresses life outside of state regulation and supervision. This is aimed at the third sector: Civil society is an antithesis to the expansive, all-inclusive, omnipresent state, and also opposes a comprehensive market-form organisation. The society was once proportionally “larger” (compared with the market and state) (Polanyi 1977). Markets have expanded in modern times and the state has developed into a powerful regulatory instance. A *remnant* remains after the separation of the two forms of the market and the state – this is the “private” society that is so difficult to define: the independent, everyday life of the people. However, it does not only mean “private privacy”, the routine in one’s own kitchen, and not petit bourgeois cosiness: Civil society assumes the differentiation between the private and public spheres, and the view of “public privacy” is also part of the conceptual meaning. Watching a crime series on television or pruning the trees in one’s garden does not fall under the concept of “civil society”, but it does apply to showing an interest in public affairs, being elected to the parish council, or demonstrating for better environmental policies.

The late modern era is (with Western – and especially European – states in mind) a rich, even luxurious, society and the comforts enjoyed by those living in such a structure have not only contributed to the dynamics of industrial development, but also to the constructive performance of the modern state structure. The state’s apparatuses have accomplished impressive feats, especially when one observes the European achievements of the systems of the *social market economic model*; this also applies when a comparison is made with other prosperous countries such as the United States. Their proven efficiency has not only led to more and more services being planned for them, but also to an increasing overestimation

of this efficiency. A mindset has become widespread: If there is a problem, there must be an administrative political solution. Under these conditions, problems of any type do not trigger the involvement of the citizens to actively roll up their sleeves, but to ask about the responsible authority and appropriate forms. The state is a problem-solving entity. The public can lean back. Although there is no intention to question the efficiency of the state, the belief in the civil society is linked with the notion that – first of all – individuals are considered to be responsible for finding a solution to their problems, especially when they are petty matters.

In the long run, the attitude of handing over all problems to the “service centre” of the state leads to individual incapacitation. Tocqueville already described that in a famous passage – and nothing has changed. There is no need to dramatise this as the dawning of a dictatorship; it has more to do with the evaluation of the voters’ diminishing feelings of obligation and self-efficacy. The feeling of being responsible, or accountable, for *anything at all* is slipping away. Faced with the lack of any kind of limiting criteria, state paternalism leads to the all-encompassing competence of the state (Hennis et al. 1977). There are some interpretations that include this as a programmatic claim because they want to have all problems eliminated through intervention by the state. However, over time, the insinuation of the state being responsible for – and capable of – everything leads to a disgruntled perspective. In view of the overestimation of politics, it is thought that villains or idiots must be responsible for preventing a positive outcome if the state has difficulties in solving problems.

“The civil society provides the elixir of life of freedom; its creative chaos of associations gives people a chance to live their lives without having to beg from the state or other powers. The concept that probably sums all of this up the best is [...] the status of being

a *citizen* (Dahrendorf 1992b, p. 559). This means being independent, taking responsibility, and participating. Some problems can be handed over to the civil society to solve without the necessity of state authorities becoming involved. This is because the general competence of the state cannot be had free of charge. That is why the *tax burden* is steadily increasing, and – seeing that too little money is flowing into the state’s coffers – the state’s debt burden is also on the rise. On the other hand, a high national debt decreases the resistance to crises. In no way is it only inefficiency that leads to half of the value added being siphoned off in some countries, but also its undefined, expanding field of competence. With the allocation of duties and activities to the third sector, the paradigm of the civil society would see a lesser necessity for entrusting an increasing part of the social income to the state. Handing over substantial resources to the state that then redistributes them is referred to as the *allowance society*.

The civil society reminds one that it is fundamentally the public of a liberal-democratic order that is able to organise its own life; that there are personal initiatives that do not have to give way to the lethargy they have stirred; that state systems are actually rather efficient; that it is, first and foremost, the self-trust of the individual that is appealed to, and not only trust in security systems that make the life of the individual snug, comfortable, riskless, and boring. However, the “bourgeois society” was once the bearer of the “civil society” and, faced with the dissolution of this experiential space, some have the radical impression that: “the civil society has come to an end.”⁷ There are still a few new variants, such as the species of the “enraged citizen” (Hessel 2011): Middle-class people who also want to take part in the hefty abuse of politicians once in their lives, or elder intellectuals who verbally concentrate their

⁷ <https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/elite-und-politik-die-buergergesellschaft-ist-am-ende-ld.1306099?reduced=true> (accessed 20 August 2020).

frustration over no longer being able to play a significant role. As simple resentment phenomena, they are all hardly helpful in promoting a democratic order.

The civil society is therefore a term that implies both *dissociation* and *localisation*. It relates to structures in the social “private” sphere that are employed against state bodies or market institutions. *Civil society is the third sector*: non-state and non-market. The civil society is not the state police, but crisis intervention teams that are usually voluntary; the civil society is not the state hospital, but it is the Red Cross; the civil society includes charity foundations and interest-related workers’ associations, scholarship programmes for needy students, student leagues and sports clubs, civic initiatives, Freemasons, environmental groups, and women’s projects. A description given by the German Federal Office for Political Education (BPB) states, “Civil society is the world of private initiatives, associations, colleagues, friends, and neighbours. It is considered the ‘third sector’ alongside the economy and politics.”⁸ It can include a cellar theatre that is able to support itself financially, an adult education centre that transmits the knowledge that universities have turned their backs on, free meals for the needy that are not provided by the state, and a self-help group that offers a platform where people can report on their own experiences and offer consolation to each other.

However, demands are sometimes made (to the political entities) that give rise to doubts that the bodies that present themselves as civil-society institutions actually want to exist as distanced from the state as described above. For example, on its home page, the “Stiftung Bildung” (Foundation for Education) demands a “Ministry for the Civil Society”, a central committee in the Bundestag,

8 <https://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtsextremismus/41629/zivilgesellschaft> (accessed 18 August 2020).

the appropriate service centres in the communities, a legal right to leave of absence for social work, as well as pay for the period of involvement, core funding by the state for all civil-society organisations, and the provision of inner urban space for the civil society.⁹ It is quite clear that an ideology of this kind expects the state to provide everything. However, a nationalised civil society is not a civil society.

2. Areas of freedom

The concept of the civil society should address and guarantee those freedoms that undermine and eliminate the control and surveillance state (in good or bad faith). It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at new technologies, seeing that recent observations have revealed that a connection has developed between civil or civic societies and social platforms and other electronic facilities. The net provides the organisational support for a wide range of civil-society activities.

It is especially the case in a complex society like ours that the almost comprehensive responsibility of the state requires all-inclusive information, all-inclusive regulatory systems, and all-inclusive controls. The digital age provides the range of technical instruments necessary for the expansion of state controls. This does not happen under the perspective of control, but also of care; not under the perspective of information collecting to allow the state to intervene on all levels, but under that of helping its citizens; not under the perspective of suppression, but under that of eliminating danger. This also includes positive categories that provide help and legitimation to the expansion of state activities: increase

⁹ <https://www.stiftungsbildung.com/starke-zivilgesellschaft-jetzt/> (accessed 20 August 2020).

in efficiency, provision of services, and accuracy. Even Vladimir Putin only wants to “fight terrorists”. And Xi Jinping merely wants to “educate” the Uighurs. Each camera serves to fight criminality and each electronic health card serves to provide a better diagnosis (and there is really nothing wrong with that).

It is necessary to know a lot about the people – also about the individual – in order to provide the most suitable “help”. It is necessary to use technical apparatuses to be able to feel as they do, to be of service. (Marketing experts have always known that. But “empathy” is full of preconditions and includes information in a pluralised world.) From this perspective, it is the technical-state control systems – much more than one’s fellow man – that represent true empathy; and it is necessary to trust the state if this is to be achieved. Of course, a perspective of this kind makes strong inroads into everyday behaviour going as far as the physicality of a person. One example: If it is possible for any teacher to use cameras, facial recognition, and emotional analysis to produce a daily balance that analyses the extent to which he or she was able to hold the attention of the greatest possible number of students, and it can be shown how many students lost concentration or were bored for how many minutes during the course of the morning, surveillance has already progressed to the extent that one can no longer banish it from one’s own thoughts (Mau 2017). This is because one is aware that one’s behaviour is being observed, recorded, and judged every minute of the day. “Private” behaviour is subjected to precise calculations and, in this way, ceases to be “private”. One is always “on stage”. One has to consider every blink of the eye one makes. That really does not sound very much like freedom. This permanent observation is not without consequence. There is no need to deal any further with the classical accusations that the omnipotence of a control state also concerns political behaviour, initiatives, and movements. Knowledge of this kind in the hands

of political authorities might be considered principally harmless in Central European regions; however, it should be borne in mind that democracies can also “topple” into a condition that requires a certain amount of interpretive effort to be described as a “well-formed democracy” as the example of the United States shows. Knowledge about the population is much less harmless in Turkey or Belarus. In contrast, the civil society is devoted to a liberal mindset that insists on good reasons for the state becoming involved in private life. It is a notion that sees a wide section of society as a territory that is not under the control of politics and bureaucracy.

For the time being, the comprehensive information about the individual’s behaviour that exists in Western-democratic societies is mainly used as a resource for marketing purposes. There is no need to consider each recommendation that the individual comes to appreciate as a consumer as some form of tricky manipulation – intelligent marketing, which knows its audience (as groups or individuals), actually makes offers that correspond with the consumers’ preferences. It is possible to get this information in a harmless way: “People who bought X were also interested in Y”; however, this can also be based on individual profiling on the basis of previous activities, or can represent targeted actions that result from comprehensive individual tracking of internet activities. Everybody knows what Google and Amazon do and they are still used by most people because they are useful and convenient – they have reached the implicit decision that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. But some uneasiness still remains. In a comprehensive study, the Bertelsmann Foundation announced: “In order to master the digital change successfully, we need a strong, involved civil society.”¹⁰ That is probably accurate,

¹⁰ <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/themen/aktuelle-meldungen/2019/januar/digitalisierung-braucht-mehr-zivilgesellschaft> (accessed 20 August 2020).

but it is still formulated very generally. It is increasingly true that more information is being collected, but the comparatively harmless unease that marketing activities trigger can be used for completely different purposes at any time by totalitarian regimes. In the relevant situation, any kind of expression of opinion can be construed as insulting the president, ridiculing the state, being blasphemous, or showing that the person making these statements is preparing terrorist activities or belongs to a criminal organisation, and can be used for criminal offences. There are countries in this world in which any deviation from the official government opinion can be regarded as a criminally relevant statement. (These strategies are more elegant than Novichok.) In spite of what was naively believed at the start, the internet is not only an instrument for the civil society, suitable to be used for organising anti-authoritarian protests and basis-democratic assemblies, but also an instrument that can be used for the opposite purpose: for the control and suppression of the electorate and civil society. American employers can ask for applicants to provide access to their confidential internet profiles¹¹ – that is where one can really feel the absolute limit in the deprivatisation of the private.

The dynamic-destructive potential of electronic network possibilities has revealed itself over the course of the corona developments. It has been a source of long lists of conspiracy theories – some of them fraudulent, and others, dangerous – tips, offers, and interpretations (Hepfer 2015; Meyer 2018). This is the area where mask opponents and other asocial actors get together, and it also provides those bubbles in which the anti-immunisation lobby and others encourage each other in their craziness. The concepts of the civil society and civic society have long found their way into

11 <https://www.bpb.de/apuz/157544/privatheit-und-oeffentlichkeit-im-digitalen-raum-konflikt-um-die-reichweite-sozialer-normen#footnode1-1> (accessed 27 August 2020).

the language of all kinds of special interest groups. Even if it is only a matter of a few thousand bizarre characters with the desire of making the world aware of their observations of angels and aliens, or their feelings about Soros and Gates, it is commonly conceived that they are speaking as representatives of the civil society. It is not sure whether liberal democracy will survive the internet or whether it will be eroded and ultimately destroyed by it.

3. The moderate market

The third sector of the civil society is not only a free space that distances itself from the state, but also a countermodel to the market. Civil society does not mean the vulgar-liberal state. Civil society includes the broad, multi-faceted area of volunteer, unpaid, non-professional community service (volunteer work, self-help, neighbourhood assistance). Many of these activities fall within the sphere of charity work, others are seen as involvement on behalf of the disadvantaged, discriminated, and voiceless, and a third group, in contrast, is involved in leisure time fun. In this sense, civil society means self-organisational competence benefitting the common good, as well as public discourse, In contrast to simple citizen voters and a consumerist orientation on entertainment. One particular variant is the classical concept of the honorary position: This is a person's voluntary, formalised, binding, and ongoing involvement resulting from accepting an office – normally without any pay; the widespread involvement in organisations, societies, committees, foundations, and similar bodies; the (essentially unpaid) work on advisory boards and expert committees, or in religious communities.

The concept of the civil society invokes initiatives that do not follow the general trend towards conforming with the market.

Markets and market-like relationships are efficient mechanisms for the provision of goods and services, and for the reconciliation of interests between people. The circumstances that are regulated conforming to the market are based on cultural developments and decisions. Extreme liberal concepts imagine an optimum of society in a situation in which the greatest number possible – practically all – interpersonal services are dealt with in a market-conforming manner. However, this discussion has usually taken place between the market and state – and not between the market and civil sector – and all kinds of public entities have been privatized in recent decades. It should actually not be the duty of the state to operate a (loss-making) tourism agency or to employ gardeners with the status of civil servants. It is possible to purchase services, and that has usually proved to be better and cheaper. The days of nationalised industry (with the state having access rights to essential resources such as coal and iron – not least, for military purposes) have also passed. The liberal arguments can be followed this far. However, even enthusiastic market theoreticians have never recommended privatising monopolies (such as the urban water supply). Nevertheless, sometimes an extreme liberal view of the world can go so far that hardly any state functions are seen as having any sense – when all is said and done, it could be possible to also organise schools and universities as marketable institutions, and the same applies to theatres and museums, communal service facilities, entities in the health sector, etc. Ideas like this are usually not treated as serious recommendations in Europe; that they often bring no improvement in performance, while giving rise to many difficulties, can be observed in some of the subsystems in the United States, such as the country's health and education sectors.

There are not only the well-known cases of market failure, which have also been analysed by staunch supporters of market constellations, but also numerous cases that cannot be processed over

the market (for institutional, psychological, or moral reasons). The characteristics, mechanisms, and (above all) positions of the civil society are needed. Doctors who strive for a market-conform optimum would not only violate the interests of their patients but also cause the health system to collapse. Teachers who (in a market-rational calculation) limit their activity to the absolute minimum necessary do not correspond with our ideals. In general, markets are not moral events, but they are very efficient – and, in order to buy a smartphone, the only moral moment needed is the one constituted by the market and no empathy (and information) going beyond that. We do not want to do entirely without the moral component in other areas.

Western liberal-democratic systems are not natural development biotopes for active people; there are always civil-society – and non-civil-society – mindsets. To a major extent, the late modern period is an *entertainment society*. Large sections of the economic and social mechanisms are not involved in making a living; (in a broader or narrower sense) many branches are part of the entertainment sector that has expanded tremendously in the past hundred years. This involves accommodation and gastronomic businesses, (active and passive) sport, major portions of the cultural sector, part of the educational offer, events, and nightlife (Prisching 2009). For example, sports clubs can be almost totally classified in the third sector. The German Olympic Sports Committee published a policy document with the title of “Sports Clubs – Educational Players in the Civil Society.”¹² However, when observing football clubs, one could have the impression that they are increasingly becoming enterprises that conform to the mar-

12 https://www.dosb.de/sonderseiten/news/news-detail/news/sportvereine-bildungsakteure-der-zivilgesellschaft/?no_cache=1&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=90d75ac37c7054464c8abdc9505f2cf0 (accessed 27 August 2020).

ket. (However, if owning a club is no more than the cool hobby of a rich sponsor, it must be positioned in the civil society sphere.) The *Wirtschaftswoche* announced: “Today, Football Clubs are Corporations.”¹³ And hardly anyone would think about describing Formula 1 Racing as a civil-society initiative.

4. Liberal care

The civil society considers the European social system a magnificent achievement, but distances itself from all-encompassing, paternal care. The counter-term would be *welfare dictatorship*. The welfare state is one of the great social creations of European culture; it produces a balance between dynamics and motivation within the framework of an industrial society, and the desire for dignity and fairness in an economic system that is intended to provide a good and successful life (Prisching 1886). There is agreement that political dissent begins with the extent of collective public services. It is always informative to make a comparison with the American mentality that generally regards health insurance for all as a lack of freedom, even as Communism, and not (as in the European sense) as securing the liberty of the individual life.

When dealing with the problem of the social state, those suspicions, which understand the notion of the civil society only as a decoration for a secret denationalisation under the dictum of ensuring society, come to the fore: reduction of the welfare state, cutting employees’ rights, reduction of state transfers. One could cut state programmes by placing them in private care, or even in the hands of the market. It is the simple equation: less state = more

13 <https://www.wiwo.de/unternehmen/dienstleister/die-bundesliga-gmbh-fussball-vereine-sind-heute-konzerne/10348344.html> (accessed 27 August 2020).

civil society, or less state = more market. There are actually some cases that have been argued in this way in order to open up new market areas. However, simultaneously, the growth of the civil society is not an automatic reaction to the withdrawal of the state; it is much more the case that simple neglect and impoverishment can also be the result.

Going beyond the collective security system, the civil society leaves some areas, which do not need to be taken care of by the state, open. In Austria, these are not only the major organisations like Caritas and Volkshilfe, but a major part of the socially-active sector organised in the form of (more-or-less institutionalised) private initiatives – even if they are financed to a large extent from the public coffers. Civil society initiatives were praised during the refugee crisis of 2015, from the people who welcomed immigrants at train stations to those who offered them temporary accommodation: “From refugee to fellow citizen: What contribution can the civil society make in the future?”¹⁴ “Multifaceted: On the role of involvement by the civil society in the migration society.”¹⁵

In any case, solidarity is finding itself under pressure in the late modern era. Seeing that a large slice of solidarity has been handed over to collective security systems, the availability of the collective system has weakened any individual preparedness for activity. Even more: The latter is no longer even visible. The idea of an individual exercise in solidarity is suppressed when there are responsible bureaucracies in the background. Solidarity becomes one of the state’s obligations: The state has to provide money, the state has to pay for art, the state has to compensate for financial

14 <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/kurzdossiers/228570/zivilgesellschaft-und-integration> (accessed 27 August 2020).

15 <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/kurzdossiers/227526/engagement-in-der-migrationsgesellschaft> (accessed 27 August 2020).

risks, the state is the universal institution that ensures the removal of all of life's risks and hardships. Even if a small bank files for bankruptcy, there is astonishment that all possible losses are not covered by the state.

There is no universal rule for solving the problem of how individual freedom can be balanced against care. The idea of the civil society is closely linked to the free area that leaves decision making up to the individual – even though these decisions might be foolish.¹⁶ However, the civil society cannot be equated with the inviolability of one's own living room, or friendly relationships to people in the neighbourhood. The terminology of the civil society will also be resorted to for post-corona considerations, namely, in the sense of a community orientation: "As a civil society, we have been subjected to a new simplicity and our personal space has been severely restricted, with the result that we have experienced how important the family, neighbours, friends and social solidarity are – especially when physically distanced."¹⁷ Here, the civil society stands solely for "private privacy". However, this concept would be superfluous if it only characterised the everyday areas of life.

16 It is possible to argue in favour of the state whenever the spheres of interest of others are involved: You have to wear a safety belt when you drive; you are no longer allowed to smoke in restaurants. However, care of this kind can very quickly lead to a *therapy society* that dictates how the individual citizen has to live. No European state would introduce a total ban on alcohol anymore, and there are also discussions on permitting soft drugs. But there would undoubtedly be a certain feeling of unease if vegetarian canteens were made mandatory.

17 <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/wirtschaft-verantwortung/bloss-nicht-zurueck-in-die-normalitaet-li.83243> (accessed 20 August 2020).

5. Anti-bureaucracy

The civil society recognises the efficiency of modern states, while cultivating mistrust against over-regulation. State bureaucracies have shown themselves (since the Age of Enlightenment and, especially, in modern times) to be enormously effective machines. The state's responsibility for everything and its expansive competences have been driven forward not least because the apparatuses of the state have been able to demonstrate their efficiency and advantages in handling specific problems – it is therefore expected to assume additional duties, and entrusted with performing them. The previously mentioned historic-empirical findings contrast with a bad reputation: Bureaucracy is positioned in the context of formalism, slowness, inefficiency, and arbitrariness. The asymmetry between performance and perception is a result of the fact that everybody who comes into contract with bureaucracy would like to do without all the formalistic stuff in his own case, while making sure that the applications made by others are subjected to a painstaking administrative examination to ensure that the tax payers' money is not wasted.

The civil society has a better image. It is thought to be more efficient, more flexible, and less bureaucratic. It seems to be closer to the people and capable of understanding the specific situation of the individual, while the bureaucracy officiates following formal criteria and is therefore not able to make case-by-case decisions. The civil society is therefore seen as a sphere of human warmth, care, and closeness, as a place of compassion, in contrast to the cold and anonymous bureaucratic apparatus. Of course, this is not fair to the state's apparatuses where "conforming to the rules" must be considered one of their advantages. Individually varying decisions in particular spark feelings of injustice. In contrast, when some organisations grow, they are forced to develop standardised

“anonymous” criteria for their activities. Unlike the local choral society, automobile associations, such as the ÖAMTC and ARBÖ in Austria, are not cosy little clubs. The Active Citizenry Association reports: “The boards and directors of civil foundations say that as much as two-thirds of their time is taken up with bureaucratic work.”¹⁸

6. Commitment

The civil society is demanding when it confronts a society poled towards entertainment with the concept of involvement. Robert Putnam prophesied the downfall of private involvement: *bowling alone* (Putnam 2000).¹⁹ The civil society is a concept with an *idealisation and inviting character*: Civil society means (in the politico-normative understanding) the members’ active participation in public life, involvement, and the citizens’ participation in decision-making processes. These are fundamental elements of a

18 <https://www.aktive-buergerschaft.de/zwei-drittel-buerokratie-ein-drittel-ehrenamt-buerokratie-belastet-buergerstiftungen/> (accessed 28 August 2020).

19 It is sometimes questioned whether there is actually a decrease in club life – as a whole, membership numbers are increasing. However, there is a structural shift behind these figures: from a membership that required actual involvement and participation (meeting once a week) to a form of membership that represents an anonymous relationship. If, for example, the membership of the Austrian ÖAMTC automobile association – numbering more than two million in a country with a population of barely nine million – or of the German ADAC, with more than 20 million members, is counted as belonging to the civil society sector (they are both really private associations), one misses the commitment that is so crucial. The ÖAMTC asks for no more commitment than paying the annual dues. The Austrian Red Cross also has more than one million members whose activity is limited to making a payment. At the same time, these are major organisations that cannot be resorted to if statistical fodder on the active club life of the civil society is required.

democratic ideal. Commitment of this kind can become collectively solidified as shown in civil rights movements ranging from those in the 1950s and 1960s in the USA to the ones in Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. In this sense, the “decent” citizen who is aware of his democratic duty is part of the civil society: the “defiant” citizen (Keupp 2010). The children who do not want to go to school on Friday have been generally well received, especially as they formulated concerns that had become part of the mindset (not everyday action) of the middle and upper classes – in developed countries in any case. Protest is particularly attractive when you are preaching to the converted. Sometimes things become more political: “Belarus’ civil society challenges Lukashenko.”²⁰ Sometimes, the civil or civic society takes the place of what was known as the “people” two decades ago. However, it is easier to chant “We are the people” than “We are the civil society”.

It sounds like something from the good old days when we say: “If associations and initiatives orient themselves on democratic values and are themselves democratically structured, they can be something like a school of democracy. But they can do much more: through ‘agenda setting’, they can also thematise the problems that state authorities are afraid to tackle – like right-wing extremism – in the public arena. [...] It is a matter of defending civil values with civil courage. It cannot happen without the involvement of the civil society.”²¹ Another contribution published by the BPB focussing on the variety of the third sector is much more sceptical: “Can the great number of sports clubs and the high level of the services provided by caritative organisations, lead to the conclusion that the civil society in our country has a specific character? Are we

20 <https://www.nzz.ch/international/weissrussland-proteste-gegen-lukaschenko-ld.1560383?reduced=true> (accessed 20 August 2020).

21 <https://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtsextremismus/41629/zivilgesellschaft> (accessed 16 August 2020).

civil because we are members of an association? Do foundations promote democracy? It is clear that, here, scepticism is justified. The wide variety of civil-society organisations with a level of active participation on the part of their members alone is still not an indication of a strong democracy.”²² These doubts obviously focus on those comforts that result in a trivialisation of the civil society. Everything is turned into “proof of democracy” even if one is only taking care of one’s own front garden or having some leisure-time fun. There is an amount of pseudo-commitment regardless of whether we are dealing with private, everyday tasks or a quasi-democratic activity.

However, the trivialisation of the civil society is a reduction – a reduction of what being a citizen means to soup kitchens and entertainment. There, it seems appropriate to remember that the revitalisation of the concept of the civil society made its way westwards from the countries of Eastern Europe towards the end of the 20th century, from those Communist dictatorships that came to an end through the commitment of brave people who risked their freedom and lives (Dahrendorf 1992a). That is not really outdated as we see in the civil and civic society movements in Belarus in 2020 – there, bodies and lives were actually part of the game, and Western chatter about one’s own “struggles” starts to sound self-satisfied and ludicrous.

The politico-activist component is addressed when – in connection with the consequences of the corona pandemic – it is said: The civil society players “have been severely limited in their everyday work through the rescindment of central rights of assembly. It remains to be seen whether trust and solidarity will be able to develop to the same degree in the present dynamised digital space

22 <https://www.bpb.de/politik/grundfragen/deutsche-verhaeltnisse-eine-sozialkunde/138719/probleme-der-zivilgesellschaft> (accessed 18 August 2020).

as through direct interaction” (Klein 202). The statement on the Greenpeace homepage is somewhat more positive: “The work of the civil society strengthens social cohesion. This can also be observed in the corona crisis: The civil society is involved in many ways, in catastrophe protection and in health care, and it continues to insist on solidarity.”²³ However, the detailed portrayal of the positive meaning of the civil society leads (logically) to the demand for sufficient funding by the state.

We can establish a border on both sides. On the one hand, apathy (privatisation) is not the elixir of life for a liberal democracy. On the other hand, “protestantism” (in the sense of protest as an ideology, an end in itself, and pleasure) is more a threat than a contribution. It is hard to differentiate some forms of protest from entertainment (Betz et al. 2017). The fact that a demonstration takes place somewhere almost every day is not an indicator of a living democracy. However, demonstrations can all invoke the term: not only honourable organisations like Greenpeace or Global 2000, but also small hordes of madmen (like the “deniers of the state” in the Staatenbund in Austria). That is why it is in no way superfluous to deal with the extensive intellectual world that has its origins in the European history of ideas.

Résumé

Ultimately, those intellectual elements that come together to form the image of the civil or civic society are products of the European intellectual world and its long history. This intellectual history is heterogeneous itself; it is full of contradictions. That

²³ https://www.greenpeace.de/sites/www.greenpeace.de/files/information_material/s02911_gp_corona-pandemie_demokratische_teilhabe_studie_06_20.pdf (accessed 18 August 2020).

is also the case with the concept we are dealing with here. However, it is the intellectual world that is part of the concept that supports the “matter”: The matter of the third sector, of liberty and self-determination, of involvement and community spirit. It is about “habits of the heart” (Bellah 1993) or “mindsets” (Hitzler 2010). Community spirit can be secured, created, guaranteed, and developed through institutional provisions. Community spirit can also make it possible for those institutions that permit, make possible, promote, and strengthen private activities to grow. There can be no civil societies without citizens. Those citizens who bear the civil society are not “clients” of a service-providing state: they are cosmopolitan, without being globalist; they think democratically, fully aware of the preconditions of the complex project; they think liberally, with limits; they are loyal to the state and know that constructive – but not vicious – critical faculties are part of this; they are pragmatic and understand what is doable; they do not get involved with illusions and fictions; they are demanding – especially of themselves; they treat the other with respect, but also judge whether one deserves that respect. Of course, they obviously fall short of such ideal images.

The Civil Society – A (neo-?) Liberal Project

Alexander Bogner

Summary: The debate about the civil society is multifaceted and full of contradictions. This essay introduces two central threads of the debate: In the tradition of political liberalism, civil-society involvement is considered to be a guarantee for individual liberty because it limits the responsibility of the state to the minimum. In contrast, the left camp asserts that the appeal to public spirit and personal responsibility is merely a flanking measure of neoliberal politics. This contribution shows that an argument about the role of the state and the future of democracy is actually at the core of this debate.

The debate about the civil society is multifaceted and full of contradictions. Something like a standardised theory of the civil society does not exist, and the civil society is not (yet) an established title in the area of social diagnoses, although the debate about the civil society does have time-diagnostic elements (cf., Bogner 2012: 110ff.). The civil society is primarily present within the framework of a political discourse that exhibits strongly normative premises. Major questions are argued about in this discourse: It is concerned with the role of the state, cohesion in society, and the future of democracy. There can be no doubt that these topics are suited to evoke political opinions, and we then encounter the civil society in two contradictory forms in the social-scientific discourse: on the one hand, as a political hope, and on the other, as a social threat scenario.

In the first, the positive, interpretation, the civil society makes an appearance as a scenario of hope. Seen in this light, citizens assume the responsibility for improving social conditions – of

realising those values that make up the programmes of modern life (equality, participation, and openness). Instead of waiting for the “strong” state to become active, the citizens organise and take responsibility for their own community and, in this way, initiate a departure from a state-centred concept of politics. This society of active, politically-interested citizens reduces the responsibility of the state to the minimum and, consequently, guarantees individual freedom: That is the liberalistic emphasis of this position.

In the second, the negative, interpretation, the civil society appears as a political discourse that works in the sense of an individualisation of responsibility. Social insecurities are interpreted as risks to be individually mastered, that the citizens should protect themselves from market-compatible behaviour, personal initiative, and prevention. Faced with the lack of care from the social state, the individual is therefore increasingly pressured to understand himself as the independent planning instance of his own destiny. The appeal to public spirit and personal responsibility is the only other side of neoliberal politics; that is the capitalism-critical emphasis of this position.

These two interpretations of the civil society will be dealt with in more detail on the following pages. Special attention will be given to Ralf Dahrendorf, the most important theoretician of the social society and sometime FDP politician. His plea for the civil society is linked to criticism of the (over) active state that has always been a characteristic of political liberalism. In order to make this connection transparent, I will start by talking about the historical roots of the discourse on the civil society that is still of importance for understanding the current constellation.

Criticism of the active state

How active, and how powerful should the state be allowed to be? Or more exactly, “How far should the state’s care for the wellbeing of its citizens go?” This is exactly the question posed by Alexander von Humboldt in his famous 1792 essay (Humboldt 2017), and his answer was: “The well-meant care of the state must not go too far; if that were to occur, the state would transform the vital, multifaceted, and creative society of active citizens into a dreary, uniform, passive mass.” In regard to *politics*, Humboldt saw the greatest danger in people developing into submissive subjects who would rely on the state for almost everything and therefore forget how to think for themselves. From the *social* perspective, Humboldt diagnosed the danger of a disintegration of the community: The interest in the wellbeing of the other would reduce at the same rate that trust in the omnipotence of the state increased. For us, that means: Compassion and empathy reign supreme as long as people seriously have to depend on each other due to the lack of a central state and state welfare (like the pioneers in America). Human coldness has the upper hand in the modern social state. The fate of those close to us has become a management obligation of the state that is responsible for everything. In *cultural* matters, Humboldt prognosed a decline in the potential for creativity and innovativeness. The versatile person is formed through the open competition between different ideologies and interests and, in this way, makes a contribution to cultural progress. The active state, however, inhibits development processes of this kind because its multiple regulatory attempts hinder any form of creativity and, ultimately, “want to turn humans into machines” (Humboldt 2017: 86).

At this point, we see that liberalism understands the active state as the source of a comprehensive “passivation” of its citizens that finds its expression in political apathy, a lack of public spirit, and a

disastrous subject mentality. That is the reason that political liberalism has always taken a critical stance on state activities to support wellbeing, education, innovation, and commerce. The state should limit itself to guaranteeing legal security and, in this way, provide all of its citizens with the foundation for a life of freedom. Here, freedom is understood as a *political* value (as freedom from domination and arbitrariness), not as a commission to free people from misery and physical need – as in socialism. However, if freedom is considered an economic value, the state, inevitably, takes on the role of a guarantor of social equality – this is the socialist model. In the light of the towering importance of this *economic* value, the power potential of the state and (enforced) measures, which are suitable for establishing an autocracy (of the party, of experts and planners) and threaten individual freedom, then also appear legitimate. The history of real socialism offers an amount of illustrative material for this kind of development dynamic. In short: The vision of a social, almost unlimited, democracy leads to the rights to freedom diminishing and, consequently, the end of democracy (Hayek 1996).

In other words: An active state, which sees helping its citizens have a good life by protecting them from the risks of poverty, illness, and old age as its duty, threatens the democratic community – and that is contrary to its own intentions. In the eyes of liberalism, an effective antidote to the totalitarian tendencies of an all-encompassing state can be found in an increase of conservative elements. That is the reason that Ralf Dahrendorf refers to the civil society as a “source of effective opposition to authoritarian and totalitarian domination” (Dahrendorf 1992: 70). This includes church and subcultural communities in the countries of real socialism in East Europe that developed into the core of the peaceful revolution or – in the West – citizens’ initiatives and NGOs, especially in the areas of ecology and human rights, that initiated an effective form of “bottom up” politics.

The civil society as humus for democracy

The notion that the civil society could be a significant guarantor for a living democracy can be found among philosophers with a liberal approach at an early stage. One impressive example of this is Tocqueville's sociological report of his travels in the United States of America (Tocqueville 1985). Starting in 1831, the French aristocrat spent several years travelling throughout the USA in order to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of the first modern democracy in the history of the world. The savant understood the establishment of democracy as an inevitable tendency of history; meaning that, in his eyes, it would be possible to study the future of Europe based on the example of the USA.

He was particularly fascinated by the public spirit of the pioneers. Tocqueville observed that the Americans thought that building schools, churches, prisons, and hospitals – public concerns – were their own affair and, therefore, did not call on the state authorities for help; it was much more the case that they looked for their own solutions in the form of community associations (Tocqueville 1985: 248ff.). With his eyes on Europe – with its feudalistic influences – he ascertained that communities could only stay alive in the long term if there was active citizen participation. However, if the citizens regressed to uninterested subjects, society also stagnated. Tocqueville noted: “There are European nations where the inhabitants feel that they are a kind of serf who is indifferent to the fate of the place he lives in. The greatest changes in his country occur without his participation; he does not even know what has happened – he only has an inkling; he just heard something about the event. And even more, he is not affected by the fate of his village, order in his street, what is happening in his church and parish; he thinks that these things are none of his business, and that they are the responsibility of a powerful stranger called the

government” (Tocqueville 1985: 71f). This report would seem to indicate that, in the USA, everything was completely different. A highly-developed public spirit and the multifaceted commitment to the community formed the cultural foundation for a form of government that could guarantee individual freedom better than any other – as long as the activities of the state did not get out of hand and stall the activism in the country.

Public spirit has been described as an indicator of the quality of democracy. Recently, Robert Putnam, a sociologist from the USA, once again took up this concept and made it the basis for a powerful diagnosis of society. In his influential book with the striking title of “Bowling Alone”, Putnam diagnoses a threatening tendency towards political and civil passivity in the USA (Putnam 2000). He sees the following as evidence of this: The permanently sinking participation in political life, a decrease in contributing to religious or church life, and parents’ lack of interest in school community events, as well as the declining involvement in service societies (“Lions”) and aid organisations (“Red Cross”). All in all, this leads to a reduction in social interaction that the “bowling metaphor” in Putnam’s diagnosis refers to: Americans still like to go bowling. But, even if they do this in the company of others, they stay alone because they are more interested in the music clips on the numerous TV monitors than the stories of their fellow bowlers.

Putnam feels that the increasing workload (“second job”) and heightened mobility has resulted in a loss of civic spirit. However, he suspects that technology is mainly responsible for this. The powerful inroads into the leisure-time area made by technology (TV, computer games, fitness centres) leads to isolation; the supermarket taking the place of the general store (or today: online shopping replacing the supermarket) prevents personal contacts. Putnam’s social diagnosis is conclusive: He notes a clear loss of

community feeling and willingness to participate. He links this diagnosis to an explicit warning: Political disinterest and lack of participation are not individual, but collective, problems. And they are a danger to democracy.

Conflicts as a guarantee for freedom

According to Ralf Dahrendorf, a living civil society is characterized by the three following core elements (Dahrendorf 1992: 67ff.). First, a variety of institutions and discourses: This should make it possible for people to pursue their own interests without pressure or dogma. In this sense – as Dahrendorf expressly states – a state church contradicts the idea of the civil society, while several churches independent of the state do not. Second, the civil society is characterised by the autonomy of its institutions and organisations, through its independence from the state. Some examples of this kind of autonomy are communal self-administrations and autonomous universities as well as foundations, associations, and societies. Third, the civil society builds on a strongly developed public spirit: For Dahrendorf (similar to Tocqueville and Putnam), the civil virtues of civil courage, personal initiative, and self-organisational capabilities are the sources of individual freedom and a democratic community spirit. Waiting for the state is not one of these virtues.

Although the theoreticians of the civil society underline the importance of civilians' involvement – meaning, the interest in public affairs and concern for the fate of their own community – Ralf Dahrendorf clearly noted that the civil society cannot be equated with harmless conviviality and permanent harmony. Dahrendorf's credo is that a civil society that represents an enlivening element of liberal democracy cannot have the absence of conflicts and com-

petition as its goal. Quite the contrary, it is only through the free competition between opinions, borne by the awareness that there can be no absolute truth, that the chance for a political community, in which the *formal* value of individual freedom occupies the top position, can become reality. Conflicts, contradiction, and dissent achieve an intrinsic value in this scenario: Dahrendorf writes that “Regulated conflict is freedom, seeing that this means that nobody can elevate his position to a dogma.” (Dahrendorf 1992: 39). In other words: Truth and absolute values become guides for politics.

According to Dahrendorf, conflicts are virtually constitutive for a modern, open society; he does not consider conflicts as disruptive incidences that pose a threat to order, but as productive and innovative (Dahrendorf 1961). This position made the conflict theoretician famous in the 1960s. In Dahrendorf’s words, ideas and positions collide with each other in conflicts. This does not mean that the best position (which one would that be?) will automatically assert itself in a fair competition. The fact that it is possible to differentiate between positions that are better or worse is more important. In the end, the main purpose of the conflict is to keep the social development perspective open. This is because any conflict solution will lead to new conflicts in a society of inequalities. From Dahrendorf’s perspective, a state or society in which no conflicts are apparent is problematic. This would have to be interpreted as a standstill in history that could only be justified in the authoritarian control over ultimate truths.

An “end of history”, as proclaimed by Francis Fukuyama (1992) under the influence of the events of 1989, is not a promise, but a threat, for liberalism. This “end” cannot be seen as the realisation of the best of all possible worlds, but only as deadly calm ordered from above. “Our dream of heaven cannot be realised on earth” was the résumé Karl Popper (Popper 2003: 238) made at the end

of his major essay on the open society. However, if this became possible, then – expanding on Popper’s premise – only in a totalitarian form seeing that contradiction would not be legitimate in the real existing paradise. Applied to the day-to-day business of politics, this would mean that the individual levels of freedom would reduce tendentially to null in a society dedicated to the realisation of demanding normative goals (e.g., the creation of social equality). Faced with high-level goals of this kind, dissent actually becomes illegitimate. Efficient achievement of goals takes pride of place and this becomes the exclusive obligation of planning politics. The citizens are called on to relinquish their reason and responsibility and – like children – delegate decision making to others: to the experts, the parties and omniscient state. That path leads to a closed, authoritarian, conflict-free society.

Put briefly, the liberal credo reads: There can be no change without conflicts, and there can be no individual freedom without social change. In short: Liberal democracy is necessarily an open project. It lives from the bustling variety of groups and initiatives, from the involvement of people in their own affairs. It lives – in other words – from a living civil society.

The civil society still finds itself in a difficult position in Austria and Germany (in contrast to the USA and Switzerland). Initially, it had to assert itself against the state’s claims to hegemony and widespread statism. In the USA and Switzerland, on the other hand, the civil society always existed in a fashion; here, the challenge lay more in the constitution of the central state. Dahrendorf always drew attention to the problematic connection between trust in the state and depoliticisation: With its claims on responsibility, which soon became all-encompassing, the social state – the result of the great experiment to create social equality politically – ultimately degraded the citizens to objects of administration and

strengthened civil passivity and political disinterest (Dahrendorf 1992). This means that the powerful state undermines precisely those motivational structures that provided the foundation for its development. In this way, the social state – the result of a democratisation that had to be pushed through against strong opposition itself – threatens to become a source of de-democratisation. Finally – and this is the liberal concern – the citizens would no longer care about who they were governed (or administered) by as long as their wellbeing and security were safeguarded. From this perspective, any form of belief in the state appears to be a threat to democracy, seeing that this belief in the state is ultimately compatible with any form of totalitarian rule.

Criticism of the civil society

Capitalism-critical approaches stand in stark contrast to the liberal interpretation of the civil society. There is a completely different picture of the civil society when it is seen in the light of this Marxist-inspired criticism. Here, the civil society is regarded as an ideological discourse intended to attune the citizens to the economically-enforced practice in self-management flanked by the state. People should be made fit for a life in transition and with a temporary character, for a life without long-term perspectives, without stable identities, and social-state obligations. In short: The new form of flexible capitalism uses an activation ideology (echoes of this can still be heard in the “social society”) to create precisely those subjects that it needs, namely subjects who act independently, proactively, flexibly, competitively, and entrepreneurially (Lessenich 2008).

The prelude to this capitalism-critical discourse was formed by a widely-discussed study on the “new spirit of capitalism” that was

originally published in French in 1999 (Boltanski/Chiapello 2006). The main thesis of the authors is that the current version of capitalism no longer relies on control, standardisation, and routine, but places a much greater emphasis on principles such as flexibility, mobility, and self-organisation. The new ethos encourages individuals to be active, to work on themselves and their relationships, and always to be open to changes, to the unexpected, and to new options. In this way, the new spirit of capitalism creates the new human being. This new human being is the active person, the one-person company (Boltanski/Chiapello 2006: 172), the auto-entrepreneur (Bröckling 2007), the flexible person (Sennett 1998), the Me-Inc, and all of the other labels that exist. In principle, the conviction that although the new form of capitalism takes up the demands of modern people for self-determined meaningful work, it ultimately only puts a subtler – and, therefore, much more effective – control and exploitation relationship into action than the old form. The control regime has just been shifted inward. Exploitation now functions over self-control; the individuals operate as merciless entrepreneurs on their own behalf, and demand things from themselves that no employer would dare.

Today, as Nikolas Rose (2006) stressed, it is a matter of seeing one's own life as a career and leading it like a project. In this sense, we become active in the home and garden, at the district level, in organisations and societies, and work nonstop on our professional and intimate relationships. The bottom line is that, in this way, we develop an activity-oriented lifestyle. Occupational sociology points out that, today, the worker at the conveyor belt who is controlled by routine is no longer in demand but the “whole” person complete with his spontaneity, flexibility, and communicativeness (Moldaschl/Voß 2002). This overcomes the often-criticised separation between the private and professional person; however, this places more pressure on the workers (Kratzer 2003). Of course, not

everybody is up to satisfying the demands of being an active, committed, and creative subject all the time as imposed by new capitalism. In an age when the individuals are required to be permanently initiative and to develop themselves, psychiatric illnesses – first and foremost, depression and burnout syndrome – are dominant (Ehrenberg 2008).

Of course, the active, entrepreneurial subject does not just come out of nowhere, but has to be formed through political initiatives and institutions. Some observers feel that the call to volunteer work, to community involvement, appears to be a kind of “citizen training”, a political initiative to produce reliable members of society who are aware of their responsibility (Dahme/Wohlfahrt 2009). Others consider the social state as a social education agency, which implements the new demands of flexible capitalism at the level of the subject (Lessenich 2008). From the perspective of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Harz IV programme to support the unemployed, the Riester pension, and the bonus programmes of the health insurance schemes are something like tutorials that people are subjected to in the course of the individualisation of care and pension costs. That means that the (newer and leaner) social state creates the (new, active) people needed by modern flexible capitalism. On the sides of the political left, activation here appears to be essentially “doing liberalism” staged by the state and supported by the institutions.

Stabilisation of society

How is social order possible? How can obstinate, highly individualised players be brought together to form a relatively stable structure? These are two of the fundamental questions of sociology, and in the debate about the civil society, a relatively clear

answer emerges with regard to the liberal position: The political community can only be stabilised through cultural ties, which tend to come under pressure in the course of modernisation. These cultural ties become strengthened through the increase in social interactions and the common interest of the citizens in all those things that concern them. “Civil society is always about filling the vacuum between state organisation and atomised individuals with structures that give meaning to human coexistence” (Dahrendorf 1992: 44). These structures, in turn, can only develop on the foundation of the commitment and diverse activities of the citizens.

The virtuous, active citizen as the guarantor of a stable political community based on the high esteem in which individual freedom is held – with this credo, the discourse of the civil society enters the ranks of those classic concepts that have always relied on a normative basis for order formation – whether in the form of a social contract (Rousseau) or consensus-based morality (Durkheim). According to this liberal credo, society and democracy can only be stabilised on the basis of active participation, on many levels, on the part of the citizens and in the form of self-reliant commitment.

As we have seen, the left camp suspects this recipe of being ideological. The allegation is that the call to the citizens to participate more actively in public affairs is made with the goal of subjecting them to an activation programme and ultimately taking over all those responsibilities that the (ailing) social state declares it is not responsible for. The originally progressive claim to self-determination and self-organization is thus realized in deregulated, radicalised capitalism (“neoliberalism”) under conditions that counteract the ideal of autonomy. The ideal of autonomy has become a new weapon of capitalism in the service of intensified relations of exploitation. Autonomy is a particularly refined form

of heteronomy – all the lines of the currently dominant criticism of capitalism converge in this core statement.

From a perspective critical of capitalism, the plea for the common good and civic engagement appears to be the downside of neoliberal politics. At the same time, this criticism speaks of considerable faith in the state's ability to stabilise society. The assumption is that, if it wanted to, the state could see itself again as an omniscient welfare and supply state responsible for everything, something like it was from the 1950s to 1970s, a phase that, from the perspective of this criticism, has become transfigured into the golden age, in which, thanks to a strong state, one was still involved with a “solid” – and actually quite comfortable – form of capitalism. Naturally, a state of this kind would continue to be “a veritable education agency, a training instance for social activity” (Lessenich 202: 56) – but not in the sense of activating the citizens, but in the service of their – how should I put it? – passivation. Whether this is in the sense of left-wing politics is an open question.

The debate about the civil society invites us to think fundamentally once again about the role of the state and the prospects for democracy. This incentive arises from the fact that relatively contrary normative positions collide in this debate, and for that reason, definitive answers are not to be expected. The value of this debate lies precisely in that fact that it is so multifaceted and contradictory. This encourages contradiction and keeps the debate open.

The Civil Society – Cure-All for Democracy or Just a Sweet Dream?

A Plea for a Regulatory Policy for the Commitment Society

Michael Borchard

Summary: The civil society is on everyone's lips; it appears to be a cure-all for some of the malaises of our democracy and our state. It can actually make a contribution to more democracy but has, so far, not developed its full potential. That is due to the terminology itself on the one hand, and, on the other, because the citizens cannot become enthusiastic about being expected to act as stopgaps for the state's deficiencies, and then – additionally – because it is necessary to strengthen civil involvement through a “regulatory policy for the commitment society”.

At first sight, the corona crisis does not really appear applicable to the civil society.¹ The contrary would seem to apply more: There is talk about the “hour of the executive branch”. Demographic findings showing that, in this crisis, the citizens quite clearly give priority to a strong state and personal security before freedom have been put on the table. Surveys revealing that there has been a sharp increase in trust in the actions of the state and government have been receiving attention.

Around the turn of the year 2019/2020, the media were speculating that the federal government in Germany had come to an end and that a new election could not be ruled out, but there has now been a fundamental turnaround. The alarming 19 per cent approval rating that the Allensbach Opinion Poll Institute registered for the

1 Cf. Throughout this contribution: Borchard, Michael: Die Bürgergesellschaft ist tot! Es lebe die Bürgergesellschaft! Ordnungspolitik für Partizipation und Engagement. In: Die Politische Meinung, no. 510, 5/2012, pp. 27–31.

government at the end of 2019 skyrocketed to 49 per cent in May 2020. That is the “highest absolute rating”² that Allensbach has recorded since this question was asked for the first time in 1999.

All of the problems in connection with the increasing alienation between the citizens and the state and the politicians representing that state, which had created a stable sounding board for those calling for more civil society for years and had made their concept an auspicious preparation to combat all kinds of doubts about the health of our democracy, disappeared in a flash.

In contrast to those people who feel that the governments in our countries of Germany and Austria have, generally speaking, done things right and deserve respect, we find the corona sceptics who claim that freedom and civil liberties were in question and that all of this was happening due to a danger that either hardly existed or was grossly exaggerated. Radical and populist right-wing movements that attempted to use the “fire” of opposition to fuel their seething programme of agitation and dream vociferously about different “circumstances” soon joined ranks with seriously concerned citizens.

Thirdly, it becomes immediately clear that the corona crisis and the measures taken against its uncontrolled spread obviously also places pressure on the civil society and threatens to “suffocate” many activities, in the real sense of the word. Almost all civil-society activities are based on personal encounters, on the impulses that arise out of these encounters. If they are missing, so are the impulses.

2 Monath, Hans: Vertrauen in die Regierung erreicht in der Corona-Krise Höchstwert. In: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/rekordwert-in-der-pandemie-vertrauen-in-regierung-erreicht-in-corona-krise-hoehchstwert/25819304.html> (30 November 2020).

But this also does not make the financial situation of the commitment society any easier. In times of crisis – especially those in which the financial effects on the individual cannot be predicted – the willingness to make donations to charitable, civil-society organisations traditionally sinks. This threatens the existence of many initiatives that had to immediately upgrade their technical apparatus in order to be able to continue working digitally in a halfway passable manner. And – at least in Germany – the political measures are not all appropriate for warding off the damages that have occurred. The fact that, precisely in the area of the policy of engagement, many types of assistance are credit-based – meaning that they are only paid out as loans and not as aid – appears questionable and hardly helpful, especially for the less formal approaches of civic engagement.

However, a fourth phenomenon shows that the current crisis might not actually be such a bad basis for the subject of the “civil society”. This is because the crisis has made it more than clear that the common good is not a lost virtue in our countries, Austria and Germany. Without large structures, without any impulses from the state, and – above all – without any state financing, a considerable network of civic commitment developed in the first lockdown in the spring of 2020: People were prepared to go shopping, run errands, and deliver messages for members of the high-risk groups. In the meantime, the public health departments have been inundated with volunteers who want to assist the overburdened authorities in contact tracing – and these are just a couple of examples.

What is the civil society?

But is local aid really what we mean when we speak about an active civil society? There is not enough space here for long drawn-out definitions and discourses about the many interpretations of the term that are on the “market”; however, the question about who belongs in this “framework” of the civil society cannot go unanswered if we also want to know what the civil society needs if it is to be successful. Jürgen Kocka described this in brief as: “The ‘civil society’ encompasses self-organised initiatives, movements, circles, associations, and organisations that neither belong to the state sphere nor can be counted as part of the market, and are also not located in the private sphere. They are initiatives, movements, networks, and organisations between the state, market, and the private sphere. The spectrum that can be observed under the term of ‘civil or civic society’ ranges from neighbourhood help, district initiatives, and peace demonstrations, over associations, foundations and so-called donation parliaments, to the non-governmental organisations, the NGOs (...) and possibly even further.”³

This makes the civil society more than just classical volunteer work. Starting in the 1980s and 1990s, it was possible to observe considerably more informal structures of volunteer commitment, which were much more flexible and had greater strategic options, developing alongside the typical organisations and societies. Stronger than was previously the case, this was linked with the claim of not only bringing people together to perform common activities, but to participate in shaping society in a way that could bring about change, to address grievances, influence, and – in many cases – improve the living environment and community. In the final analysis, this trend indicated that first, engagement on the part of the

3 Kocka, Jürgen: Die Rolle der Stiftungen in der Bürgergesellschaft der Zukunft. In: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ)* 14/2004, pp. 3–7, p. 4.

citizens had become politically and socially more relevant than in earlier times, and second, this kind of commitment removed itself from playing the role of some kind of decorative “accessory” with a “clubby” character to taking on a much more central part that invested it with a certain indispensability. Third, this trend signified that citizen commitment was not a “pure” matter of course but that it could be carried out more selectively, with more individuality, and over a limited time period. This trend encompasses both risks and opportunities to the same degree. Applied to target projects, it can make an even more effective contribution to solving problems or drawing attention to alternatives. At the same time, in recent years, these changes have led to classical organisations, which cannot exist without volunteer support – such as the German Red Cross, the Agency for Technical Relief (THW), lifesavers, volunteer fire brigades, and many other bodies – complaining about a reduction in interest.

The sociologist Ulrich Beck described this accurately as “altruistic individualism ... for the self-organised, project-related, civilian activities aimed at the common good – and not the hierarchical, musty, honorary position – that offers decisive opportunities for testing and realisation.”⁴

The civil society as a therapy against disenchantment with politics?

For decades, politics, science, foundations, and the society have attempted to take advantage of this overall mood to make the concept of a civil society – often, with the attribute of “active” attached

⁴ Beck, Ulrich: Wohin führt der Weg, der mit dem Ende der Vollbeschäftigungsgesellschaft beginnt? In: idem. (ed.): Die Zukunft von Arbeit und Demokratie, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 48 f.

to it – attractive. The aim is to use it as a kind of “multivitamin supplement” capable of curing a number of problems at the same time, problems behind the supposed and genuine alienation between the citizen and the state that had become so widespread before the corona crisis. First of all, there is the dream of providing relief for the overtaxed (social) state and empty public coffers through greater self-responsibility on the part of the citizens. A dream that has become no less acute when faced with the current astronomical expenses needed to overcome the crisis and the massive new debts. And then, there is the hope of more efficiency in dealing with problems through individual activities; the apolitical, passive citizen should become the active, political organiser of the environment he lives in; subsidiarity should be taken seriously as the structural principle of our society; the citizens should also feel that they are taken seriously and their opinions asked for; they should be able to participate in decision making. As the special committee on the “Future of Citizen Engagement” determined in its concluding report almost twenty years ago, considerable potential for democratisation lay hidden in citizen involvement.⁵ This all sounds highly plausible, even extremely hopeful, but also a bit like an all-too-familiar Sunday sermon. Why – in spite of all of the clever speeches and papers, and good ideas in Austria, as well as in Germany – has this concept not experienced the victory as a political and social project that one would actually like to give it?

It possibly begins with the name itself: “Civil Society” is lacking in the power of persuasion. Questioning carried out in “focus groups” confirmed this suspicion: “I am a citizen; I belong to soci-

5 Deutscher Bundestag (ed.): Bericht der Enquete-Kommission “Zukunft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements”. Bürgerschaftliches Engagement: auf dem Weg in eine zukunftsfähige Bürgergesellschaft. 14th legislative period, 3 June 2002, publication 14/8900.

ety – where is the promise?”⁶ The term does not produce much enthusiasm. But it also does not get to the heart of the problem: In Germany, and in Austria, the concept of the “civil society” – when it pertains to political fields of action – has been primarily seen from a somewhat Anglo-Saxon perspective for years, namely as an anti-state concept. The notion is that it is necessary to fight for leeway against the overpowerful state whose influence ultimately needs to be driven back. This is based on the American understanding that “every man is the architect of his own fortune” if it is possible to keep the state out of one’s own affairs to the greatest extent possible. This is in strong contrast to our cultural realities in Austria and Germany. This is shown clearly in the word “Daseinsvorsorge” that was coined by the Professor of Administrative Law Ernst Forsthoff and has become firmly established in the practice of administrative and constitutional law.⁷ According to this understanding, the role of the state and its connection to its citizens goes much further than simply providing them with state services. This word is usually translated into English as “public services” or “services of public interest”, a formulation that is considerably more restrained than the actual meaning of “provision for existence”.

Do state friendliness and constitutional patriotism have an effect?

A mere twenty years after the terror of the National Socialist regime that placed the state above everything else, the prominent political scientist Dolf Sternberger developed an almost daring

6 Cited after: Borchard, Michael: Die Bürgergesellschaft ist tot! Es lebe die Bürgergesellschaft! Ordnungspolitik für Partizipation und Engagement. In: Die Politische Meinung, no. 510, 5/2012, pp. 27–31, p. 28.

7 Forsthoff, Ernst: Die Verwaltung als Leistungsträger. Stuttgart 1938. See also: idem.: Die Daseinsvorsorge und die Kommunen, Stuttgart 1958.

concept that, nevertheless, perfectly described the culture in our countries for many decades: the concept of “state friendliness”.⁸ For Sternberger, this was based on the conviction “that society forms the state, or should and must form it, and that the state is and must become nothing more than the order of society”.⁹ The citizens should realise that we are the state.

Regardless of how deep and quantifiable the previously mentioned alienation phenomena between the citizens and the state and its representatives might have become in recent times, and regardless of the increased support populist parties have received, it is still beyond dispute that something like a fundamental consensus, a fundamental positive estimation of the state and its political representatives, still exists. This even applies when, as empirical research has revealed, concrete projects conflict with the local citizens.

A few years ago, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, faced with the mass protests against major infrastructure projects, conducted a survey questioning how great the desire of the citizens was to isolate themselves from politics and the state.¹⁰ The statement “one should simply take every opportunity to give politics something to think about”¹¹ found no support at the time. More than 60 per cent of those questioned clearly rejected this statement and only 16 per cent fully agreed with it.

8 Cited after: Schmid, Thomas: Staatsfreundschaft, in: ‘Die Welt’-online, <https://schmid.welt.de/2020/11/05/staatsfreundschaft/> (28 November 2020).

9 Ibid.

10 Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (ed.): Umfrage Bürgergesellschaft. In: https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=f04a22a8-4737-2093-9b73-6fb92323b0ad&groupId=252038 (28 November 2020).

11 Ibid.

At the same time, the complexity of political and state activity was recognised. An astonishing 67 per cent agreed that it was becoming increasingly difficult for politics and state authorities to reach decisions benefitting the general public.

However, one should have no illusions when the question is asked about the “lubricant” needed to produce this “state friendliness”, this fundamental consensus. There have been many discussions about whether the idea of “constitutional patriotism”¹² – another one of Dolf Sternberger’s important concepts – is simply an intellectual construct or whether it expresses the citizens’ real feelings: their pride about having a liberal, democratic constitution after the catastrophe of National Socialism.

Until the present time, it has not been possible to provide really convincing empirical proof about whether this constitutional patriotism is actually an indication of pride in the liberal, democratic state and, therefore, a substitute for the patriotism that the exaggerated nationalism of the National Socialists had permanently discredited.¹³ However, there can be no doubt that it was possible to measure something like a “social-state patriotism” when dealing with the pride for national achievements. Especially in Germany, but also in Austria, the social state has always been an important vehicle for linking the citizens to the state.

It is possible to summarise the dominant narrative of the post-war society in Germany and Austria in the postulate that the parent generation wrote in their children’s albums: “You should be better off than we were.” This supposed or real promise of advancement functioned in a certain way until well into the 1990s. However, in

12 Sternberger, Dolf: *Verfassungspatriotismus*. Frankfurt a. M. 1990, pp. 26, 30.

13 Cf. Krölls, Albert: *Das Grundgesetz – ein Grund zum Feiern? Eine Streitschrift gegen den Verfassungspatriotismus*. Hamburg 2009.

the 1990s, it became no longer possible to uphold this promise in a world that was becoming increasingly globalised and where the public was becoming increasingly aware of the national debt. The new narrative now seemed to be: “You should not be worse off than we were! You should be at least as well off as we were!” This fear of losing status, which is particularly noticeable in the middle classes, has influenced the willingness to become involved because it has been accompanied by an increased awareness of one’s own existence and problems.

Decreasing willingness for commitment or new forms?

This does not automatically imply that it is not possible to identify any willingness to become involved. Not only has this not decreased over time, but quite the contrary; there has been a massive increase. In 1997, a total of 2.3 billion hours of honorary and volunteer work was carried out in Germany; this was exactly doubled in 2017 – namely, to 4.6 billion hours.¹⁴ However, what is even more interesting than the actual figures is to notice the changes in the amount of time spent on these activities every week. It is conspicuous that the willingness to invest more than two hours weekly has slightly decreased. It is still extremely high, but somewhat lower than before. On the other hand, willingness to invest less than two hours has increased. This shows that one of the fundamental prerequisites for the success of the civil society is to stimulate and promote projects with an overall limited time-frame and where the amount of time needed each week can be easily calculated.

14 Stiftung Aktive Bürgerschaft (ed.): Statistiken Bürgerengagement. In: <https://www.aktive-buergerschaft.de/buergergesellschaft/statistiken-ueber-buergereengagement/> (30 November 2020).

Where does this change come from? Does it go hand in hand with more individualism? Has idealism turned into egoism that prevents volunteer commitment? The “high priest” of values research, Helmut Klages, counters this thesis and speaks about a value mix that has become established.¹⁵ The so-called 1968 generation focused more on “modern” individual values, such as self-realisation and self-determination, than ever before. Since the 1990s, it has been possible to observe a parallel development in which the “traditional” values, those that affect the community more, are increasing in importance. In concrete terms, this means: In no way has idealism died out, but the great willingness that exists to participate in the community correlates with the need of not losing sight of one’s own personal interests.

And these interests most certainly do not include lessening the state’s burden.¹⁶ This perspective might seem attractive to the institutions of the state. Understood in this way, the involvement of the citizens could take the place of state services in many areas – not least, in the social sphere – and the state would be able to concentrate on its core responsibilities. A nice idea, but, in the short term, not really realistic and another example of the “chicken and the egg problem”: Wide-scale, really effective political and social engagement, active participation that, in the ideal case, could really take the place of state activity, cannot develop without the appropriate

15 Cf. Klages, Helmut: *Werte und Wertewandel*. In: Schäfers, Bernhard/Zapf, Wolfgang (eds.): *Handwörterbuch zur Gesellschaft Deutschlands*. 2nd ed. Opladen 2001, pp. 726–738. As well as: Klages, Helmut: *Wertorientierungen im Wandel. Rückblick, Gegenwartsanalyse, Prognosen*, Frankfurt am Main 1984.

16 On the subject of the social state and civil society in general: Pinl, Claudia: *Ehrenamt statt Sozialstaat? Kritik der Engagementpolitik*. In: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ)*, 14-15/2015, pp. 49–54. However, in no way can her closing comments on the necessary redistribution between the poor and rich be agreed with.

framework. Above all, it is absolutely naïve, and almost criminal, to believe the perspective of saving the state from over-indebtedness could encourage people to become involved for the benefit of the community on a wide scale. They will hardly be motivated if they have the impression that they have to use their personal efforts to compensate for the deficits that the state, with its high debts and overburdening in many areas, is unable to deal with.

Is the civil society a suitable stopgap?

The citizens do not want to be roped into being deficit guarantors or stopgaps. The personal – and absolutely understandable – feeling of people is: I pay taxes, and, in many cases, I only receive mediocre services in return; these are being reduced even further as a result of the empty coffers, and now I'm expected to be responsible for the rest just because the state has lived beyond its means or set false priorities. What's the sense of that? Empirical research shows quite clearly that people primarily act purpose-rationally. They will then use all of their power if they recognise the concrete reason and benefit of a measure or project for themselves or those in their immediate vicinity.

It is therefore not so much a matter of a “society of citizens” making use of their freedom, but a different, a new relationship between the citizens and the state and a different perception of the state. It will not be possible to make anybody enthusiastic about becoming more involved by just referring to the lack of funds, but this could be achieved by indicating that today's problems have become much more complex and that simple solutions are no longer possible or do not take the interests of the people into account. The buzzword “new complexity” (Habermas) describes

how differentiated and segmented our society is today.¹⁷ The single measure capable of providing a solution to all problems no longer exists. Especially where problems are particularly pressing, it is necessary to make people aware that solutions that come from the citizens are considered to be personally sensible and would never have been able to have been reached through the activity of the state alone but require that they inform themselves and become active – in their own interests. In many areas, citizen participation is no longer simply “colourful folklore” but a valuable help in decision making. Citizen participation, which is considered reasonable, not only fosters the “reconnection of political decisions with the interests of the governed”,¹⁸ but simultaneously generates trust in the political decision-making process and, therefore, in the political system as a whole.

Christian-Democratic parties – the CDU and CSU in Germany, and the ÖVP in Austria – would seem to be “premium partners” for a civil society of this kind. The Christian image of humanity provides a genuine pattern for civil commitment, seeing that, from this position, the human is not only an individual, but also a social, being. According to this understanding of freedom, it is not primarily a matter of freedom from constraints, but of freedom to act responsibly.

Superficial paternalism is foreign to the Christian image of mankind. It is much more the case that this concept takes people really seriously, considers them partners, and treats them accordingly.

17 Habermas, Jürgen: Die Neue Unübersichtlichkeit: Die Krise des Wohlfahrtsstaates und die Erschöpfung utopischer Energien. In: Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken 1/1985, pp. 1–14.

18 Vetter, Angelika: Lokale Bürgerbeteiligung: Ein wichtiges Thema mit offenen Fragen, in: idem. (ed.): Erfolgsbedingungen lokaler Bürgerbeteiligung, pp. 9–28.

This corresponds with a liberal state that can never order and institutionalise involvement but must frequently send out the following signal: “I want you to participate, to play a role. I want you to grasp the initiative. Of course, I cannot take on the efforts and risks for you, but I can at least move some of the hurdles, which I – the state – am responsible for, out of the way, and provide you with a reliable framework; I encourage you and, first and foremost, recognise what you are doing.”

Christian-Democratic parties – reliable partners?

However, things are unfortunately different in reality. The Christian-Democratic parties are not universally regarded as natural partners; this possibly has something to do with their membership structure and, especially, with the high average age. The member survey that the Konrad Adenauer Foundation has done on many occasions came to a sobering conclusion – for the CDU at least:¹⁹ It showed that “The members of the Union are still relatively well-represented in societies and organisations – from church groups, to sports clubs and even trade unions – but not even two per cent are represented in civilian initiatives, which form the core of a politically-understood civil society.”

And that is precisely where the Peoples’ parties would have great opportunities. They are still fundamentally “catchall parties”, political groups that claim that their supporters make it possible for them to represent almost all spheres of society. To achieve this, they must draw on their origins as “movements”, in addition to their competence in solving political problems professionally, and

19 Cited after: Borchard, Michael: Die Bürgergesellschaft ist tot! Es lebe die Bürgergesellschaft! Ordnungspolitik für Partizipation und Engagement. In: Die Politische Meinung, no. 510, 5/2012.

listen more than before. This is absolutely possible as an example from the Berlin CDU shows: A few years ago, the party organisation took a completely new path to draw up their election programme. Their programme process “100 Solutions for Berlin” invited individuals, as well as initiatives, to formulate the 100 most important problems and questions affecting their city. As a result, the party provided 100 answers to these questions.²⁰

However, in this connection, a decisive mutual misunderstanding must not be allowed to gain more ground because it can permanently damage our democracy: Precisely those sections of the civil society that emphasise protest, that insist on alternatives, should not be denied their claim on the common good by the Peoples’ Parties with a curt reference to “particular interests”. In addition, they must not be asked to abandon their own positions with the demand to accept responsibility for the general public. German law grants the parties a large share in the decision-making process, but does not see them in a monopolising position.

Nevertheless, a fundamental danger is inherent in groups of this kind: It can neither be denigrated, nor is it detrimental that the common concerns are so identity-forming, so tremendously important, that the supporters of a movement or initiative become absolutely convinced of the universal validity of their convictions.²¹ The damage begins when the legitimacy of the parliament and its representatives is disputed.

20 CDU-Landesverband Berlin (ed.): 100 Lösungen für Berlin. Damit sich was ändert. In: https://www.cduberlin.de/image/inhalte/159_cdu_wahlprogramm_2011.pdf (30 November 2020).

21 Cf. Montag, Tobias: Neue Brückenschläge? Plädoyer für einen ehrlichen Umgang mit Bürgerbeteiligung. In: Die Politische Meinung. In: <https://www.kas.de/de/web/die-politische-meinung/artikel/detail/-/content/neue-brueckenschlaege> (30 November 2020).

In contrast to initiatives and protest movements, the parliament is the only place where the responsibility for the public at large and balancing individual interests must be the binding principle. Anyone who wants to give a topic more prominence by not only mentioning the inactivity of the parliament, its “representation gap”, and the supposed dependence of elected officials on lobby groups, and placing their own legitimacy above that of parliamentary representation, is doing democracy a disservice.

One example of this kind of behaviour is the climate movement “Extinction Rebellion”: There can be no doubt that this movement is fighting for an important concern. However, their antidemocratic tendencies are troubling. One characteristic of democracy is seeing a compromise for differing interests. And it is precisely this characteristic that “Extinction Rebellion” rejects so vehemently. The threatening statement made by Greta Thunberg, the founder of “Fridays for Future” that “if you tell us that it cannot function in this system, maybe we will have to change the system” goes in the same problematic direction.²² The fundamental prerequisites for a functioning civil society is that both sides – the civil society as well as the elected representatives of the people – have respect for each other and recognise the other’s right to exist.

A regulatory policy for the civil society as a model for solution?

However, a new form of collaboration between the citizens and the state does not come about of its own accord. We need a regulatory policy for the civil society if we really want it to become

22 Cited after: Rosbach, Jens: Zwischen Rebellion und Kooperation. In: https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/fridays-for-future-zwischen-rebellion-und-kooperation.724.de.html?dram:article_id=462929

reality. Although the concept of regulatory policy has its roots in the economy, it can also be helpful in the “non-profit sphere” if it is understood as a policy that consciously provides the frame without wanting to completely colour in the picture in the frame. In this way, it provides both the freedom and competition that opens up space for creativity.

A regulatory policy for more involvement understood in this way has to solve at least six problems systematically: First, community politics must be given new significance and a new orientation. Wherever the condition shows a positive development against the trend – for example, in overcoming the consequences of demographic change – we usually find an exemplary collaboration between smart mayors and councillors and intelligent civil engagement. Civil engagement and communal politics must always be associated with each other in our thoughts. Centralist thinking not only does not do justice to the problems, it also prevents the development of a sense of responsibility. In the ideal case, civil-society and communal-political engagement have a stimulating effect on each other.

In a time in which politics is no longer primarily regarded as a provider of ideological orientation, but more as a mechanism for solving problems – if the rubbish is not collected, the responsible city department is not called, but the mayor himself who is also frequently abused and threatened – the expectations placed on communal politicians have become excessive; and these kinds of expectations almost automatically generate dissatisfaction.

A new status for communal politics must, therefore, also mean giving communal politicians more recognition for the services that they perform; it is only a full-time job in the minority of cases and actually nothing more than an especially time-consuming, and

highly responsible, honorary position. An honorary position that – as a result of the previously mentioned exaggerated expectations – has increasingly become the target of violence: This was clearly shown in a survey of around 1000 German mayors of both sexes made by the “Kommunal” magazine.²³ According to this, 40 per cent of those questioned had already been confronted with stalking, insults, and threats. Around 20 per cent had received hate mail and 7.8 per cent stated that they, or other council members, had been physically attacked. There are records of more than 1200 crimes committed against office holders.

Second, above all, regulatory policy for more engagement must do away with bureaucracy. Regardless of how important rules and regulations might be in individual cases, as much as they are intended to protect people, their excess is deadly for any willingness for personal commitment. If more involvement is really desired, hindrances must be removed and free space created. If committed citizens are to have the feeling that they might end up in front of the “beak” for not following rules, their enthusiasm will remain within narrow limits. One descriptive example is provided by the many “initiative kindergartens” developed by concerned parents. More than a few of these projects came to an end because the parents felt overburdened by bureaucratic regulations.

No engagement politics without family politics?

Third, purposeful family and educational policies are the “mothers” of engagement politics. All the studies show, that in no other group of the population is the willingness to become involved more

23 Cf. here and in the following: Erhardt, Christian: Kommunalpolitiker: Bedrohungen sind an der Tagesordnung. In: <https://kommunal.de/kommunalpolitiker-umfrage-2020> (30 November 2020).

pronounced than in families. Whoever creates relief for families – above all, temporal – supports engagement. Empirical studies also reveal that developing a willingness to become involved must begin at an early age. A survey of exemplary *curricula vitae* has shown that the vast majority of committed people became active in the field in their youth or childhood, despite school projects that really deal with civil engagement and lead to concrete missions still being the exception.

Parents, who set an example for their children about what commitment is, must be able to coordinate their activities with family life. For example, that implies the idea of not only giving priority to providing child care for classical professions but also making it available to those parents who perform volunteer work, in addition to their profession and raising children – especially when this volunteer work is in the interest of the local community.

This leads to the observation that a regulatory policy for more engagement must also be a time policy. An opinion poll conducted by the Allensbach Institute revealed that the greatest problem for accepting, as well as continuing, civic engagement was the lack of time of those involved, as well as a lack of interested parties.²⁴ Around one-third of the overall population has already stopped participating for one reason or other – principally, due to time restrictions. Almost a quarter of the “dropouts” did this for family reasons – so much for family politics.

It is important to note that, according to the survey, many of those who stopped participating would be interested in becoming

24 Cf. here and in the following: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (ed.): *Motive des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements. Kerneergebnisse einer bevölkerungsrepräsentativen Befragung durch das Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach im August 2013*, Berlin 2014.

involved once again. Almost one fifth of those who gave up became active again after a short period. Regulatory policies could also make this more attractive, for example, by supporting a “volunteer sabbatical”. Up to 40 per cent would be prepared to take time off, but this fails in more than 70 per cent of the cases for financial reasons.²⁵ Moderate tax relief and other funding instruments could help to cure these headaches.

By the way, approaches of this kind are more purposeful than financial compensation, which is comparatively insignificant for the willingness to become involved. Only 3 per cent of those questioned in the Allensbach survey stated that the fact that money was paid was the main reason for their engagement.²⁶ That played no role at all for 86 per cent. Around 20 per cent of the people questioned had experienced that their involvement actually cost them money but that still did not prevent them from participating. This makes the sometimes-expressed fear about “moneterisation” unfounded and shows that financial incentives are rarely the decisive element of a regulatory policy of this kind.

The fifth component of a regulatory policy for the civil society: Engagement and the willingness to participate require contact points. By that, I don't mean – for heaven's sake – an excessive “Volunteer and Civil Society Authority” that no community, and not even a province, could afford, but, for example, a “communal engagement commissioner” who – as a former civil servant – could share his knowhow, name contact persons, help avoid bureaucratic

25 N.N.: Haben Sie schon einmal über eine Auszeit nachgedacht? In: <https://www.haz.de/Sonntag/Top-Thema/Die-grosse-Freiheit-auf-Zeit-Sabbatical-als-Chance> (30 November 2020).

26 Cf. here and in the following: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (ed.): Motive des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements. Kernergebnisse einer bevölkerungsrepräsentativen Befragung durch das Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach im August 2013, Berlin 2014.

pitfalls, and point out opportunities and risks – perhaps also in a voluntary capacity or with a small allowance for costs occurred. In addition, it is frequently overlooked that, in the rankings of the opinion poll institutes, not only the federal president – under normal circumstances and in normal times – usually takes the top, or close to the top, position but also the city council. Around fifty per cent have faith in the officials and staff in the office just around the corner and the institution they represent.²⁷ That is a tremendously important initial capital for the engagement-oriented communal administration. Wide-ranging effects from engagement and participation require that the actors be linked with each other. Province networks for more engagement, province foundations devoted to the civil society – similar to those already existing in Thuringia and Baden-Württemberg, for example – point in the right direction. Volunteer engagement is voluntary and must remain that way; but it will not be able to develop its full strength without the appropriate infrastructure.

Is the dialogue behaviour of politics, the parties, and the state an obstacle?

Sixth, the dialogue behaviour of politics, the parties, and the state on the one side, and the citizens on the other, has to change. Nothing is more revealing than the not infrequently used concept of the “pre-political sphere” – as if there was an artificial boundary between politics and the people. The inclusion must be honest, wide-ranging, and creative.

27 Drammeh, Njema: Forsa-Umfrage. Wie hoch ist das Vertrauen in den Bürgermeister? In: <https://kommunal.de/forsa-vertrauen-kommunen> (30 November 2020).

Why is it that, in so many cases, open and transparent communication on a major communal project only begins when all of the decisions have long been made? Why are there so few communal idea competitions in which creative approaches are really called for and for which prizes are awarded locally? No matter how low the participation rate might be: Why aren't there regular – self-organised and economical – communal surveys by mail and with replies that depict the problems and approaches to solving them locally, and collect recommendations? These are approaches that have been practised for some time now, but they have yet to make a wide impact.

Not only the dialogue itself, but also the language used is decisive: Incomprehensible announcements do not result in more participation! If the text is not factual and clear, the engaged citizens suspect that there could be a hidden agenda and that they are not being taken seriously.

On no account can dialogues of this kind – even if they are only formal participation procedures, surveys, hearings, or whatever – be one thing: without consequences! Citizens who participate and become engaged but have the impression that their advice and ideas remain ignored and not even considered worth further investigation will withdraw, disappointed, and not invest any more time and effort in such processes.

However, this – definitely incomplete – programme for a regulatory policy for the civil society can only function if the state resists the temptation to take a too-active part on the field. To keep with the football image, in the corona crisis, the state appears to be on the field as a goalkeeper, a defender, and a forward, to the same extent as it takes part as a referee. After the crisis, it will therefore be essential that the willingness to leave the playing field in

connection with fiscal and economic, as well as social, policy if possible and strengthen the free forces of the citizens. If there is no desire to fall back on the core liberal image of the state as a referee, it could take on the role of a coach – at least in the area of engagement policy – who motivates, who trains (in our case, via educational institutions), who calls for fairness, and who gives credit where it is due.

One of the main prerequisites for a successful civil society, particularly in the post-corona period, is to combat any kind of fatalism and show confidence. “Without hope of recovery, any therapy is useless. Anyone who does not believe that a new coexistence between the citizens, the state, and politics can be successful will not be able to inspire and electrify people.”²⁸

28 Borchard, Michael: Die Bürgergesellschaft ist tot! Es lebe die Bürgergesellschaft! Ordnungspolitik für Partizipation und Engagement. In: Die Politische Meinung, no. 510, 5/2012, pp. 27–31.

The Civil Society between the Poles of Security and Freedom

Peter Kampits

“Are the people there for the state, or the state for the people?”

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

“Happy slaves are the most bitter enemies of liberty.”

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach

The tension between political authorities and citizens has become strained in almost all states with a democratic constitution – and not just since the outbreak of the corona epidemic. This is particularly noticeable in the citizens’ declining commitment to standard social and political organisations, such as parties, trade unions, and churches. On the other hand, the willingness to become involved in civil-society organisations or citizens’ initiatives with a regional – and even national or international – focus has increased.

This growing interest in the so-called civil society community is also an expression of dwindling trust, going as far as scepticism, in politics and the state. In general, it can be said that a culture of reciprocal trust has developed into one of mistrust.

It is difficult to completely grasp the multifaceted concept of the civil society. The philosopher Jürgen Habermas feels that the civil society characterises that section of the public that is not determined by a political centre, professional media, or lobbyism, but that it is a form of autochthonal public that the citizen finds it easier to identify with than political authorities. Habermas also understands this as including volunteer organisations, and those

that could quite easily include a form of non-violent protest and civil disobedience.

The concept of a civil society therefore embraces both citizens' initiatives and groups advocating civil rights that have been neglected or abused by state authorities as well as associations and aid organisations, such as volunteer fire brigades, the Red Cross, Caritas, and those with other purposes such as we find in sports and folklore clubs that appear to be politically neutral.

In them, various levels of personal initiative and self-responsibility are championed and, in this way, the relationship of the individual to the community redefined. This gives rise to a polarity between strongly stressing a sense of community and, just as powerful, the accentuation of the individual and his civic virtues within civil societies. In any case, the claim on the civil society is normative and, therefore, ethically and morally charged.

In democratic-constitutional systems, social commitment on the regional or international level – as it exists in a number of NGOs (from *Greenpeace*, over *Doctors without Borders*, to *#metoo*) naturally has other goals than in totalitarian or fundamentalist states.

Precisely this moral and ethical dimension is especially important in civil societies that oppose totalitarian forms of state. For example, the Czechoslovak *Charta 77* group stressed both solidarity and self-responsibility. Vaclav Havel's "Parallel Society" sketched a life in harmony with oneself that also included a responsibility for the whole issue. Havel did not draw back from speaking about a "moral reconstruction" of society as well as demanding a rehabilitation of values such as trust, openness, responsibility, solidarity, and love.¹

1 Havel, Vaclav: *Versuch in der Wahrheit leben*. Reinbeck 1990, p. 73ff.

This clearly refers back to the optimistic belief in a society characterised by reason and morality, which also included a general reciprocity of the recognition of rights of the Enlightenment. However, this dream of the Enlightenment, which also implied the universalisation of moral values, was hardly successful in the long run. Immanuel Kant's famous categorical imperative, with its demand for a universal validity of moral law, formally made its way into the diverse Declaration of Human Rights, but its concretisation seems to have largely failed to materialise.

The universalisation of moral principles conflicts with ethical and cultural relativism that encompasses a great variety of value concepts and ethical principles in the postmodern age. In a period of diverging value concepts, it is hard to find a consensual and binding answer to the question of possibly general ethical guidelines. Postmodern concepts of arbitrariness, particular interests, and national interests frequently make respecting human rights and their appeal to the dignity of man seem questionable. The very concept of dignity in particular has been brought up time and time again in relevant discussions ranging from forbidding torture to the question of the end of human life, but it is not exactly consistent. It fluctuates between a certain metaphysical interpretation identical with human nature, a human ability based on reason and autonomy, and a mandate that is not given from the outset but only becomes visible in the coexistence of humans.

The extent to which the much-vaunted change in values – which is really a change in attitudes to values – has also contributed to a certain lack of orientation and is only mentioned in passing. The palette of the individual value preferences ranges from traditional values – the so-called Con-values of conformity, belief in authority, virtue, family bonds, freedom of movement, and consistency – to so-called I-Con values including self-realisation, emancipation,

liberality, and arbitrariness that are high up on the priority list of a fun society. This is where the tension between liberty and security becomes particularly apparent. In connection with the Declaration of Human Rights, the state is expected to not only guarantee participation rights, but also the so-called rights of defence aimed against the restriction of freedom, and guaranteeing the security that, not least, protects the citizens from unjust interference and permits them to develop their possibilities freely. Particularly in the modern tradition, the problem of freedom as central has been repeatedly investigated and discussed from various angles. Liberty as a fundamental right has a political dimension that is decisive in our context. The fact that, in the philosophical tradition, freedom is primarily interpreted as autonomy, as self-determination and, consequently, as independence from outside influence, naturally implies the differentiation between the freedom of will and the freedom to act, as well as the discussion about determination and liberty that particularly affects brain research and genetics and has become virulent in recent times.

If humans are to be understood as free beings, this does not indicate absolute arbitrariness but – as already inherent in the concept of autonomy – the ability of self-determination and self-legislation. Becoming active when the fundamental right to liberty is violated is one of the most significant obligations of the civil society.

This also makes it possible to answer the question of whether there can be something like a moral obligation to become involved in the web of politics and economy in one's own interest or the interest of the community. If, in a democratic system, we do not help shape politics, we run the risk of politics being made over our heads, or against us. Plato already advocated this principle. This has been a continuous thought throughout the modern era up to the present day.

On the other hand, there has been a tradition since antiquity, which has its origins in Epicurus and his motto “live your life without attracting attention”, that regards freedom as keeping free from political involvement and freedom as abstaining from making decisions. It is not necessary to draw any special attention to how much this abstention can lead to abuse by the state going as far as tyranny and barbarism. It is always necessary to find a balance between boundless liberalism, on the one hand, and boundless regulation by the state, on the other.

The tension between freedom and security becomes especially precarious in times of a pandemic. On the one hand, Benjamin Franklin’s famous saying that “Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety” is still valid today, as is the German adage “Security is the main reason for misfortune”. On the other hand, limiting freedom can be legitimate in specific situations if it is to the benefit of the individual as well as the community. The omnipresence of the surveillance state today not only poses a threat to freedom, but also a threat to security from security. Notably, the developments in the field of digitalisation have opened up technological possibilities that not only degrade the citizen to the status of a transparent person, a provider of data that the state and the global economy can use to exploit him, but also make it possible to manipulate his cognitive state in an unprecedented way. These manipulatory possibilities, which the economy was the first to take advantage of, have now also been used in politics for several years.

Using surveillance cameras, eavesdropping on confidential conversations, and hacking E-mail accounts have since developed into old-fashioned technological applications. The last three presidential elections in the USA made the extent to which the future of manipulation lies in customisation clear: algorithms filter

out highly efficient clusters that can be fed with the appropriate information with the help of psychology, exclusively at the service of political calculation, that have absolutely nothing to do with enabling the formation of a free opinion.

Seen in this light, the damage caused by digitalisation, algorithms, AI, and robotics far outweighs the advantages. In Odo Marquard's words, we are the first Laocoons not being strangled by snakes, but by cables.

In addition, one could note that the relief provided by IT is only an illusion, seeing that our electronic communication with banks, airline companies, hotels, etc. do not provide relief but burden us. We have developed from clients who were served to self-administrators and unpaid staff members.

The threat facing the private sphere, the place where we can withdraw from the public eye, has been driven back to the advantage of the public space. Hannah Arendt, who was greatly in favour of involvement in political activity and considered it a significant component of her "Vita active", expressed this in the following way: "No part of the world we share is needed so urgently and crucially as the small piece of the world that belongs to us, for our use and consumption."² Richard Rorty put it in a nutshell when he said: "The greatest possible approximation to a unification of the two endeavours is reached when we see the goal of a fair, free society, that allows its citizens to be as privatising, "irrational", and aestheticised as they desire, as long as they do it in the time that belongs to them, and as long as they do not harm others by doing it, achieved."³

2 Arendt, Hannah: *Vita activa*. Munich 1996, p. 27.

3 Rorty, Richard: *Kontingenz, Ironie und Solidarität*. Frankfurt 1989, p. 13.

Ilja Trojanow formulated this – and not only this – much more polemically when he warned about subjecting oneself to the general motto of “I have nothing to hide”. It is even good to have something to hide, to have secrets, which only belong to us and where we are the only ones who can decide about revealing them.⁴ The fact that the home office has made a contribution to transferring surveillance into the private sphere is one of the negative consequences of the current situation resulting from the corona epidemic.

This is also important within the civil society and its orientation on community. The other, with whom I follow a common goal within the civil society, is an individual for me – as I am for him – and naturally represents a limit to my liberty. The trivial sentence “my liberty finds its limit in the liberty of others” can be turned around: “The liberty of the other finds its limit in my liberty.”

Both lead to an autonomy studded with morality and ethics. If one wants to impose limits on the arbitrariness of the individual and that of the state, there is no option but to recognise a universally valid, fundamental approach based on ethics. It is interesting that Thomas Paine, one of the founding fathers of the forerunner of the American Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, expressed the conviction that “the more perfect morals are, the less they need government, because one would be able to organise one’s own affairs more effectively and govern oneself.”

It seems banal to state that freedom cannot be had without responsibility; but especially in the days of a pandemic, appeals made on the self-responsibility of the citizens by the government are as necessary as they are problematic. No sanctions can be

4 Cf., Trojanow, Ilja/Zeh, Juli: *Angriff auf die Freiheit*. Munich 2009, p. 137.

derived from ethics. There are many areas where ethics and law overlap, as well as many gaps.

The universities, as civil society institutions, would be exceptionally important with regard to the aforementioned ethical dimension, as well as in connection with liberty. At the moment, the universities have to struggle to defend their own position between the poles of state and economic dictation. The self-image of the university as an *avant-garde* of change and social development stands and falls with its orientation on education and research. One should not forget that the social changes of 1969 and in East Europe were decisively borne by the universities and their students. Seeing that the double task of educating and training was transacted unilaterally in favour of training, not least through the pan-European academic reform, the influences coming from the civil society in connection with questions of the environment, immigration, and social change would be just as important as the impact of university education on the civil society. The danger of tumbling from being regulated by the state to falling into the hands of the economy is great. Here, it is necessary for the universities to insist on free space that – taking all aspects of advances in the individual sciences into consideration – still makes it possible to keep the whole picture in view. Universities are not enterprises, not least because they serve to educate critical, independent citizens that do not want to be subjects but contributors to democratic processes. Therefore, with all due respect to training in the natural sciences and information technology, it is necessary that more stress be placed on the humanities and cultural sciences, as well as on ethics. The fact that Austria has so far neglected the opportunity to introduce ethics education for all in its schools must be regarded as an unfortunate delay. Training to critical-reflective questioning cannot only take place in the lecture halls of the university, and the same applies to the differentiation of a moral consciousness. It is

just as necessary to train how to consider ethical matters as it is to learn simple multiplication tables.

Finally, it should be noted that becoming involved in civil-society activities can free us from our lethargy, and the feeling of being powerless against “them up there”, but it demands an increased sense of responsibility for ourselves and others on our part, for tolerance and for our finite freedom.

Missing: Bridge Builders – Considerations on the Polarisation of Western Societies and How This Can Be Overcome

Benjamin Hasselhorn

Summary: Growing polarisation can be observed in democratic societies – especially in those of the “Western” world. This contribution discusses the reasons for this polarisation and introduces approaches for overcoming it. The principal thesis is that the skill of the social bridge builder is essential for the functioning of a free, democratic, pluralistic society.

1. Different moral worlds

As a young man, Jonathan Haidt was convinced: Anybody who votes Republican must be either stupid or evil, and probably both at the same time. There were only Democrats in his academically-trained, affluent environment in the USA and how anybody could vote Republican was completely inconceivable for him.

A three-month research sojourn in Orissa, India, caused Haidt to reconsider his opinion. That is where he experienced a society that was built around completely different moral principles and whose value concepts were even more disturbing than anything he had found disgusting with the Republicans. In Orissa, he was invited to dinner in houses where the women cooked for the men and then withdrew, in silence, from the dining room. He was provided with a personal servant and people looked askance at him if he thanked his attendant for his work. He observed rituals in which people bathed in obviously polluted water because it was believed to be holy. But Haidt found it too simple and inappropriate to think of his Indian hosts as stupid, let alone evil. It was

much more the case that he found them intelligent, reflective, and extremely hospitable people. They only had completely different moral convictions than he did.¹

If it is not – or at least not always – stupidity or evil that makes people have different moral and political convictions than ours, what is it then? The social and moral-psychological research carried out by Haidt, who has taught at the Stern School of Business at New York University since 2011, would seem to suggest that people live in various moral worlds that are so different that it is often difficult to understand, let alone evaluate positively, the motives for their actions. In addition to individual differences – the studies carried out by the culture psychologist Richard Shweder in the 1980s already indicated this – the cultural background is a definitive factor in the development of a moral value system.² For example, morals based mainly on individual rights and rational principles, which aim at the autonomy of the individual, is widespread in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic) societies. In contrast, in most of the other societies of the world, the individual and his autonomy are not core matters as much as the community and its wellbeing. From this perspective, Western conservatives, like the Republicans in the USA, are closer to the “rest of the world” in their moral feelings than those on the left and liberals. In keeping with the “Moral Foundations Theory” developed by Haidt, Western conservatives and members of community-oriented societies share a high regard for loyalty and authority, as well as the conviction that certain things are regarded

1 Haidt, Jonathan: *The Righteous Mind. Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, London 2013, pp. 118–124.

2 Shweder, Richard Allan / Mahaptara, Manamohan / Miller, Joan: *Culture and Moral Development*. In: Kagan, J. / Lamb, S. (eds.): *The Emergence of Morality in Young Children*, Chicago 1987, pp. 1–83, and elsewhere. Cf., Haidt, Jonathan: *The Righteous Mind. Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, London 2013, pp. 16–27.

as “sacred” – meaning invulnerable. Those on the political left and liberals, on the other hand, think of the values of loyalty, authority, and holiness as hypocritical and ingratiating to the authorities. Instead, they consider care for the weak, fairness, and questioning authority decisive and respectable moral values.³

2. More in common

This social and moral-psychological finding could provide an explanation for the phenomenon that is usually discussed under the concept of “split” or “polarisation” of society and which effects almost all democratic cultures.⁴ Regardless of whether it is the growing animosity between the Democrats and Republicans in the USA, the split between the “Brexiters” and “Remainers” in British society, the rupture within the EU in connection with refugee and migration policies, or the confrontation between the “populists” and “left-liberals” in France, Italy, and Germany, it appears as if the Western world is about to split into two irreconcilable camps; reciprocal understanding seems to be impossible.

However, there are also sociological studies that question – or at least differentiate – this scenario. They include “Hidden Tribes: A Study of Americas Polarized Landscape”⁵ that was published in 2018 and is the product of a quantitative survey of 8000, as well as qualitative interviews with 90, Americans. Based on their data, the authors of the study came to the conclusion that there is actu-

3 Haidt, Jonathan: *The Righteous Mind. Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, London 2013, pp. 131–146, 199–216.

4 Cf. Carothers, Thomas / O'Donohue, Andrew (eds.): *Democracies Divided. The Global Challenge of Political Polarization*, Washington, D.C. 2019.

5 Hawkins, Stephen / Yudkin, Daniel / Juan-Torres Míriam / Dixon, Tim: *Hidden Tribes: A Study of America's Polarized Landscape*, New York 2018: https://hiddentribes.us/pdf/hidden_tribes_report.pdf (23.10.2020).

ally a decidedly left (“progressive activists”), as well as a decidedly right (“devoted conservatives”), wing. Nevertheless, both groups together only account for 14 per cent of the society in the USA. Even if the “traditional conservatives” (10 per cent of the total society) are added to the decided “right”, this means that only around 33 per cent confront each other in this more-or-less irreconcilable split. It fits in with these findings that 77 of those questioned agreed that the political and ideological divergences were not so great that they could not be overcome.

The authors therefore paid especially close attention to the other 67 per cent of the US society that they describe as the “exhausted majority”. This group is exhausted by the increasing polarity and is interested in a more constructive, and more inclusive, political culture. This “exhausted majority” is made up of the “traditional liberals” – the classical left or left-liberal (11 per cent) – the “passive liberals” (15 per cent), the “politically disengaged” (26 per cent), and the “moderates” – the bourgeois centre – with 15 per cent. The authors’ conclusion was that strengthening this majority and stressing the things Americans have in common could effectively counteract polarisation.⁶

Corresponding studies on the French and German societies come to similar results.⁷ In Germany, a similar percentage (35%) is part of the socio-political polarisation – these people are categorised either as “open” (16 per cent) or “angry” (19 per cent).

6 Ibid., p. 125.

7 Demoures, François-Xavier / Monges, Lucie / Piola, Maider / Parfait, Anaïz / Lefevre, Mathieu: *La France en quête. Réconcilier une nation divisée*, Paris 2020: <https://www.lafranceenquete.fr/media/sdlnqqtj/la-france-en-que-ter-rapport.pdf> (23.10.2020); Krause, Laura-Kristine / Gagné, Jérémie: *Die andere deutsche Teilung: Zustand und Zukunftsfähigkeit unserer Gesellschaft*, Berlin 2019: https://www.dieandereteilung.de/media/nthptlnv/moreincommon_dieandereteilung_studie_v1-0-2.pdf (23.10.2020).

According to the authors, they are countered by the 34 per cent of the “social stabilisers” (divided equally at 17 per cent each into more-or-less left “involved”, and rather conservative “established”), and the “invisible third” in public political culture made up of the “pragmatics” (16 per cent), and “disappointed” (14 per cent).⁸

The three studies mentioned above were carried out by “More in Common”. The organisation, which was founded in 2017, has the aim of building bridges to overcome polarisation and to make the societies threatened by it “more united, resilient and inclusive.”⁹ On the one hand, research is performed to understand the polarisations and their causes and, on the other, to provide support to concrete initiatives that are intended to have an integrative effect.

3. Us versus them

“More in Common” and Jonathan Haidt are linked in this goal. Together with Greg Lukianoff, the president of the “Foundation for Individual Rights in Education”, Haidt published the book “The Coddling of the American Mind” in 2018.¹⁰ In it, Haidt and Lukianoff look for explanations for the restrictions on freedom of speech that could be observed at universities in the USA in recent years. One of the most significant reasons for the growth of mutual hostility was the spreading of “Untruth: Us versus Them”, the notion

8 Krause, Laura-Kristine / Gagné, Jérémie: Die andere deutsche Teilung: Zustand und Zukunftsfähigkeit unserer Gesellschaft, Berlin 2019: https://www.dieandereteilung.de/media/nthptlnv/moreincommon_dieandereteilung_studie_v1-0-2.pdf (23.10.2020), p. 13.

9 More in Common: What We Do. In: <https://www.moreincommon.com/our-work/what-we-do/> (23.10.2020).

10 Lukianoff, Greg / Haidt, Jonathan: The Coddling of the American Mind. How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas are Setting up a Generation for Failure, New York 2018.

that life is a struggle between good and evil people.¹¹ In combination with a series of other factors, our evolutionarily developed community spirit has led to a form of tribalism – especially at the opposite ends of the political spectrum – that rigorously divides people into “good” and “evil” and, as a result, only sees enemies in political and ideological opposites with whom communication is impossible, and not even desirable.

However, this belief that the political camps within a society are polarised in a relationship of hostility conflicts with the idea of a pluralistic, liberal democracy. This lives much more from the notion that the political camps have a common goal, namely, of achieving the best for the political community and, in doing so, standing in productive competition with each other. On the other hand, this concept can only be convincing if all the players grant each other a principal right to exist, meaning that they do not see the competitor as the personification of “evil” but, first of all, as a fellow citizen.

In contrast, identity politics, which draws its cohesion from the common enemy that needs to be eradicated, undermines pluralistic democracy. Haidt and Lukianoff call this kind of identity politics “common-enemy identity politics”.¹² They propose a “common-humanity identity politics”, such as they saw represented in the American civil rights movement in the 1960s and elsewhere, to counter this.¹³ For example, instead of fighting the white majority culture of the USA as an enemy, Martin Luther King appealed to the common values and convictions of all Americans and made it clear that the social and political discrimination of minorities was incompatible with these values. Haidt and Lukianoff referred to an

11 Cf. for the following, *ibid.*, pp. 53–77.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

occurrence in September 2017 to demonstrate that an appeal to common values of this kind could still be effective and productive today. Black Lives Matter supporters staged a counterprotest at a rally of Trump followers in Washington, D.C. In the hope of being able to defuse the potentially dangerous situation, the organiser of the pro-Trump event granted the counterdemonstrators two minutes to speak from his podium. Hawk Newsome, the leader of the BLM demonstration, then held a speech in which he made a case for the concerns of “Black Lives Matter”: “We don’t want anything that is yours. We want our God-given right to freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”¹⁴ Somebody from the ranks of Trump supporters then cried out “All lives matter” – a slogan that is usually considered a confrontative counter to “black lives matter”. Newsome’s answer was: “You’re right, my brother, you’re right. You are so right. All lives matter, right? But when a black life is lost, we get no justice. That is why we say ‘black lives matter’. ... If we really want to make America great, we do it together.”¹⁵

The speech did not do away with the ideological conflicts between the two groups, but it made it clear that, going beyond their differences, people had many things in common that could make mutual understanding possible if they were stressed.

4. Building bridges – but how?

Those with an interest in preserving Western societies instead of destroying them should make an effort not to deepen the splits and divisions in the societies but overcome them. Stressing commonalities in the sense of “common-humanity identity politics” is

14 Ibid., p. 75.

15 Ibid., p. 76.

an important, decisive step in this direction. But just how is it possible to discover the common ground in the different camps? We will now discuss three prerequisites for successful bridge building: awareness of narratives (one's own and those of the other); awareness of confirmation bias (one's own and that of the other); advocacy of an open and fair debate culture.

4.1 The significance of narratives

On its website, the “More in Common” organisation, which was mentioned previously, stresses the significance of narratives for the identity and cohesion of a society: “Stories and narratives can unite or divide us, and we believe in the power of stories of a ‘bigger us’ to counter the appeal of efforts to divide societies into ‘us-versus-them.’”¹⁶ And, from a socio-psychological perspective, Jonathan Haidt also speaks in favour of taking stories seriously: “The human mind is a story processor, not a logic processor.”¹⁷

This corresponds with a renaissance of the “narrative” and “mythic” that has been observed in politics for several years. In 2013, the European Parliament and European Commission introduced the “New Narrative” project that was intended to provide Europe with a new, common story and, in this way, strengthen the European identity.¹⁸ The Egyptologist Jan Assmann expressly

16 More in Common: What We Do. In: <https://www.moreincommon.com/our-work/what-we-do/> (25.10.2020).

17 Haidt, Jonathan: *The Righteous Mind. Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, London 2013, p. 328.

18 European Commission: *12 Ideas for the Future of Europe. New Narrative for Europe Communications Campaign*, Luxembourg 2017: <https://learn-eu.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/12-ideas-for-the-future-of-Europe.pdf> (25.10.2020).

urged the creation of a “European myth”,¹⁹ intended to expand and create a link between the myths and identities of the European nations, in the year 2019. One year previously, in 2018, the Director of the Swiss National Museum Andreas Spillmann defended their constructive – even humanitarian – character: “Along with cultural, economic, and social similarities, the ‘national identity’ is founded on something completely different: a common story, a collective concept of belonging, a story that is told time and time again, rewritten, reinterpreted, and told anew.”²⁰ The long period of the trendy “deconstruction” of “narratives” of this kind was virtually irrelevant for the community. What is relevant is that these stories create a collective image and leave a mark on the community.” Spillmann added an “anti-nationalist” thrust to the concept of the significant political relevance of social myths that had already been developed by the French syndicalist Georges Sorel in 1906.²¹ “Understanding the national identity in this way is absolutely humanistic. The feeling of belonging is not linked to anything that is hard and fast. Belonging to a nation is not determined by origin, religion or ethnicity, but by stories – by stories that can be internalised independent of any ethnic attributes.”

If this conclusion is accurate, increasing social polarisation could also be connected with the increasingly polarising and contradic-

19 Assmann, Jan: Das gemeinsame Bewusstsein schwindet. Wir brauchen ein europäisches “Wir”. In: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 18 October 2019: <https://www.nzz.ch/meinung/das-gemeinsame-bewusstsein-schwindet-wir-brauchen-ein-europaeisches-wir-ld.1512280?reduced=true> (15.10.2020).

20 Spillmann, Andreas: Was die Schweizer von Norwegern, Griechen oder Franzosen unterscheidet. In: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 30 July 2018: <https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/nationale-identitaet-an-ihren-geschichten-sollt-ih-sie-erkennen-ld.1405104> (25.10.2020).

21 Sorel, Georges: Über die Gewalt [1906]. Übersetzt von Ludwig Oppenheimer (1928). Mit einem Nachwort von George Lichtheim, Frankfurt a. M. 1981, p. 30 and pp. 138–145.

tory “narratives” and lack of integrative stories. Corresponding analyses have already been made for the USA where the “culture wars”²² that have been observed since the 1960s have led to the development of diametrically conflicting political “narratives” on the left and right sides of the political spectrum. According to the “liberal progressive narrative”²³ spread by the left, recent American history is a continuous struggle for liberation from the suppression of the traditional society with its firmly established inequalities. For that reason, political involvement should mainly concentrate on eradicating those inequalities and fighting against discrimination. This is in contrast to the conservative-libertarian “Reagan narrative”, according to which America’s prosperity and liberty is permanently under attack by those on the left with their demands that threaten to constrain the free market, lever out traditional family values, and contribute to crime.²⁴ Political occurrences are judged completely differently depending on which one of these narratives one follows. If one considers that one’s own story represents reality, there is great danger that one will feel that those who do not share this narrative, and consequently come to different conclusions, are either ignorant or downright “evil”.

It is obvious that overcoming political differences within a society can only be possible if one understands the stories told by the other side. It is not necessary to share the points of view of the other, but

22 Hunter, James Davison: *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, New York 1992.

23 Smith, Christian: *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, Oxford 2003, p. 82. Cf. Haidt, Jonathan: *The Righteous Mind. Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, London 2013, pp. 330–331.

24 Westen, Drew: *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*, New York 2007, pp. 157–158. Cf. Haidt, Jonathan: *The Righteous Mind. Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, London 2013, pp. 332–333.

one must at least be prepared to relate to them and understand the positive values they are based on. Only then, when one has created a link to these kinds of positive values, will it be possible to have a chance to create integrated stories in any way at all.

4.2 Confirmation bias

A healthy dose of mistrust about one's own motives, together with the attempt to acknowledge those of the counterparty, is a sensible thing. If it is true that our mind does not solely – and possibly not even primarily – function following rational principles, it might also be true that our own moral and political convictions are not more reasonable *per se* than those of others.

Jonathan Haidt is of the opinion that our convictions are not primarily based on reason but on intuitions that have developed evolutionarily and been formed by our individual experience of life.²⁵ If our own convictions seem to be sensible, and those of others not, that is far from being proof that ours are actually more reasonable. Our mind tends to use “reason” relatively unscrupulously as a means for justifying previously reached moral and political decisions in retrospect. The mind does not work – as some rationalists believe – like a researcher who uses his sensory perceptions and consideration to understand the world. Following Haidt's analysis, it works more like a lawyer or press spokesman – like somebody who transports and justifies decisions that have already been made by somebody else to the outside world. In the case of our mind, this “somebody else” is the prerational, preconscious, inherited, and learned positions that Haidt merges under the concept of intuitions.

25 Haidt, Jonathan: *The Righteous Mind. Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, London 2013, pp. 84–107.

This phenomenon is known as “confirmation bias” in psychology.²⁶ We tend to perceive and interpret new information in a way that is compatible with our convictions. We absorb information that corresponds with our convictions with a feeling of reinforcement but, on the other hand, we choose to ignore or reinterpret information that goes against our convictions to reflect our own views. Instead of looking at a question from all sides, collecting all of the facts available, and considering all arguments, we are usually satisfied to substantiate our firmly held conviction with the first argument that comes along – and to think that the matter has therefore been settled. In contrast, a single counterargument is enough to make us think of a position that goes against our view of things as proven to be false.

This shows that, as a rule, we do not attempt to look for the truth; it is much more the case that we believe that we have already figured out the situation and are only looking for arguments that make it possible for us to defend our opinion disguised as the truth. That does not necessarily have anything to do with hypocrisy or dishonesty; we usually do it in good conscience and with the honest conviction that we are being objective, realistic, and rational. Confirmation bias is not a mechanism we use to deceive others – we use it, first and foremost, to deceive ourselves.

Happily, there is an antidote to confirmation bias: It is possible to surround ourselves with people who have different opinions. In this way, we will even be able to take advantage of our confirmation bias to avoid undesired consequences: We use our strength to find arguments in favour of our position and support our opinions to be able to present them to these people with a different point of view. The others then provide us with those counterarguments

26 Cf. Evans, Jonathan St. B. T.: *Bias in Human Reasoning. Causes and Consequences*, New Jersey 1990.

that we would never have discovered on our own because we had no incentive to do so.

Ideological diversity is therefore of decisive importance whenever it is a matter of finding out the truth about something – regardless of whether it is in a university study, journalistic research, or a parliamentary debate. On the other hand, the tendency to withdraw into an ideologically homogeneous “filter bubble” might be comfortable and understandable, but it helps neither in the quest for knowledge, nor in the attempt to hold a society in the process of becoming polarised together.

4.3 For an open and fair debate culture

It seems likely that a polarisation of the society into clearly-definable politico-ideological camps could provide excellent pre-conditions for an open, democratic culture of debate. However, there is much to suggest that the opposite is true. In any case, complaints about the loss of democratic conflict culture have increased in recent times. In a survey carried out for the Federal Republic of Germany by the Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research in 2019, 63 per cent of the interviewees agreed with the statement that, today, “one has to be very careful about the subjects one expresses an opinion about. There are many unwritten laws about those opinions that are acceptable and appropriate, and those that are more or less taboo.”²⁷ Only about 18 per cent of those questioned stated that it was possible to express one’s opinion on all

27 Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach: Grenzen der Freiheit Eine Dokumentation des Beitrags von Prof. Dr. Renate Köcher in der Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung no. 119, 23 May 2019. In: https://www.ifd-allensbach.de/fileadmin/user_upload/FAZ_Mai2019_Meinungsfreiheit.pdf (25.10.2020), diagram 1.

matters, openly, in the public sphere.²⁸ In the same year, the German Association of University Professors and Lecturers issued a resolution warning that “Tolerance towards other opinions is sinking. This is also affecting the debate culture at the universities [...]. The search for truth and knowledge lives from passionate, intense, and controversial disputes over theses, facts, arguments, and evidence. That is the reason that every student and every scientist should be able to present their theses and viewpoints for discussion without fear [...]. Contradictory opinions must be respected and tolerated. The differences to those with other opinions must be solved in argumentative debate – not by boycotting, bashing, or mobbing – and, on some accounts, by violence.”²⁹

What can be observed here for the universities in a special way also applies to the public social debate in general. Strengthening an open, fair, and democratic debate culture is necessary if the ultimate goal is to achieve a functioning, liberal, and democratic order. That makes it essential to agree on common rules and virtues not only for social coexistence, but also for debating with each other. It is pleasing to note that an increasing number of people are up to this challenge. For example, the German-American political scientist Yasch Mounk founded the online platform “Persuasion” that regularly publishes constructive suggestions for a fair debate culture in 2020.

One of the tips given on “Persuasion” was to outlaw ad-hominem attacks. These refer to arguments that bypass the discussed facts and target the person who represents a counter-position. The posi-

28 Ibid., diagram 3.

29 Zur Verteidigung der freien Debattenkultur an Universitäten. Resolution des 69. DHV-Tages 2019 in Berlin, 9 April 2019. In: https://www.hochschulverband.de/uploads/media/Resolution_Verteidigung_der_Debattenkultur-final.pdf (25.10.2020).

tion itself is not attacked, but the person expressing it is – by raising doubts about his motives or questioning his moral integrity. Sometimes, it is sufficient to construct a “contact guilt”. The fact that person X, who represents position Y, also has contacts with person Z – who is thought to be morally or politically objectionable – also makes person X morally objectionable, and therefore position Y is disproved. Quite apart from the fact that an action of this kind is itself morally objectionable, it is also inconsistent from a logical perspective: In no way does the question of whether position Y holds true or not depend on the moral integrity of the person expressing it. Ad-hominem arguments therefore have two decisive flaws: They aggravate social polarisation and hinder an open exchange of arguments without which complex problem solutions are not possible.³⁰

A further helpful suggestion for a fair debate culture is the virtue of “hermeneutic goodwill”³¹ that the social-philosopher Arnd Pollmann recommends: Instead of interpreting the statement of the counterpart in the worst possible way, and falsifying or making fun of it, one should make an attempt to understand and interpret the counter-position in the best possible way. This recommendation also provides a moral and pragmatic advantage by levering out our tendency towards “us versus them” tribalism and offering us the chance to genuinely perceive a potentially valid counterargument and take it into account when we form our own opinion.

30 Lutz, Matt: Rhetorical Calvinball, 15 July 2020. In: <https://www.persuasion.community/p/rhetorical-calvinball> (25.10.2020).

31 Pollmann, Arnd: Der Wille zum Missverständnis, 30. August 2020. In: https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/verrohte-gespraechskultur-der-wille-zum-missverstaendnis.2162.de.html?dram:article_id=483182 (25.10.2020).

As the historian Timothy Garton Ash stressed several years ago, this art will become ever more important as the society becomes more diverse, more pluralistic, and more polarised. “In a world of increasing – and increasingly familiar – diversity, it is essential that people not be encouraged to be oversensitive but somewhat more thick-skinned to enable them to live and cope with these differences.”³² Ash therefore recommends practicing the virtue of “robust civility”: It opens my ears for ideas and arguments that I am not yet aware of. Completely independent of whether I reject or accept them, they strengthen my mind and make it more acute. As the statistician and finance mathematician Nassim Nicholas Taleb showed so convincingly, it is in no way so fragile that it needs to be protected from disagreeable influences so as not to break. It is quite the opposite: Our mind is anything but fragile; it is more “anti-fragile”. Similar to a muscle, it grows through resistance and shrivels when it meets no opposing forces.³³

32 Garton Ash, Timothy: Redefreiheit. Prinzipien für eine vernetzte Welt, Bonn 2016, p. 340.

33 Taleb, Nassim Nicholas: Antifragile: Things that gain from disorder, New York 2012.

Participation, Codetermination, Moralisation: How Social Movements Have Changed

Christian Moser-Sollman

Summary: Taking advantage of the situation: recognising the kairos, seeking majorities for the polis, and negotiating the best for the community. Starting from the people, to address new themes (fine particles, climate change, bicycle paths, a ban on slatted flooring in barns, eco-labels, etc.), to then load them emotionally with “wish and warn” scenarios and use a sophisticated media spin to weave them into the regulatory-political course of legislation and administration. With swarm intelligence and peer-to-peer computer techniques, the digital grandchildren of the flower-power generation have found new channels and spaces (social media) for the presentation and depiction of political campaigns. The active citizen and consumer dominates our political conceptual world: Greta saves the climate together with us, Carola Rackete helps refugees and economic migrants on the high seas, animal protectors fight against factory farming, people with an obvious migration background document systemic discrimination, and all of us – as active consumers – play a role in deciding the scope we concede to the producers and distributors of goods and political decisions.

All contemporary citizens' groups, grassroots initiatives, and activists are united in an emotional approach to the field of politics. As citizen, activist, association, or social movement, one wants to offer and introduce an emotional alternative, which one believes to have so far been systemically ignored or insufficiently considered by the legislators, to one-dimensional technocratic thought by making the hitherto unseen visible in the first step and then introducing it into the political debate to change this sustainably and over the long term – and then anchor it in the hearts and living

environment of the citizens. The peace movement, anti-nuclear movement, environmental movement, and the women's movement that is currently developing all work in this way. Today, it has become natural for us to separate our rubbish and buy products that have been produced sustainably. Things were much different fifty years ago. The new social movements reinvented themselves as relevant players on the political field and also cultivated a new habitus: that of never appearing to be a supplicant. To not be conformist. To be vociferous in presenting their demands. To be present on the streets and in the media and create pressure in the pre-political sphere. To actively intervene in political public policy development to determine the agenda over the long term and, in this way, play a role in deciding how budgetary means are allocated. The attention economy has colonised politics.

Rereading Marcuse

The American scientist and civil-rights activist Angela Davis also considers these tectonic shifts as the pivotal point for understanding the present. With his book "One-Dimensional Man", Herbert Marcuse became one of the first intellectuals to evaluate the changes taking place at the time as a departure from established routines. Marcuse entrusted the population with being able to help shape political policies in an emancipatory fashion. In contrast to other members of the Frankfurt School, who limited themselves solely to the sphere of theory, Marcuse also outlined the possibilities for political activity and actionism.¹ In spite of his great historical and intellectual importance – Marcuse is often described as the father of the new (cultural) left and modern social movements – this American political scientist of German-Jewish origin is not

1 Cf: Davis, Angela: Marcuse's Legacies, p. 43.

read very widely in German-speaking countries, unlike other representatives of the Frankfurt School such as Theodor W. Adorno. This, although his work forms a fascinating introduction to the way contemporary mass democracies function. Marcuse investigated German fascism as a scientist for the Secret Service of the USA and used his expertise in his analysis of the totalitarian tendencies that had infiltrated post-war America. Angela Davis regards Marcuse's work as providing the intellectual foundation for political activism and non-parliamentary opposition. Today, the actionism that Marcuse legitimised theoretically has – along with parliaments, lobbyists, and media and data enterprises – left its mark on the political debate in Western democracies. Marcuse elaborated on the possibility of a utopia – even if the truth cannot be directly realised in the prevailing political order (by officialdom, and the government), the citizen, the civil society, and the opposition can still address, thematise, process, and codetermine themes in the pre-political sphere. It is precisely this insistence on hope and the possibility of a better future that makes the new social movements so attractive for the citizens. Even though there is actually no opposition to the system, as Marcuse pessimistically stated, he recognised sufficient space and practical possibilities for how and where a more just society could become reality. It is cross-generational thought in small steps. Although revolutions and utopias have no chance of being implemented, as Marcuse noted, there are system-immanent possibilities that arise out of the technical and technological centres of gravity of each post-industrial knowledge-based society. Marcuse looked for new forms of opposition, which had hitherto been impossible due to technological development, and ways for the paralysis of criticism to be overcome. A society that is unable to think of alternatives would be tantamount to one that thinks inhumanly. Thinking in alternatives always results in concrete options for activity.

Expansion of the political arena

Marcuse felt that society's hold over the individual on the part of politics was greater than it had ever been before in humanity – and that was 50 years before big data, tracking, and transaction and data retention. His perception was that the concentrated power of the technological-industrial complex should be analysed and, in a second step, overcome or at least partially improved. Marcuse wanted to implement the used and unused capacities of technology and science for the improvement of the human situation of all, and not for the expansion of profits. Marcuse welcomed the social revolutions that were in their infancy at the time and the qualitative further development of Western democracies. He considered the civil rights, anti-nuclear, and peace movements, and student and employee participation, as well as the women's movement and the fight for sexual minorities, as a sign of a new sensitivity. He believed that the new generation would be able to give priority to new subjects (ecology) once the mind and soul had been sensitised. In Marcuse's words, the possibilities for emancipatory action – you yourself should be the change in this world that you desire – are possible in any political system at any time. Marcuse also encouraged previously unheard groups (minorities, "blacks") to actively intervene. The tender shoots of the counterculture and extra-parliamentary opposition were still quantitatively sparse in the 1960s. There were still no creative classes, no mass universities, and no critical intellectuals. Only 8 per cent of the population had a university degree. The situation in Austria was similar; until the 1960s, there was also not a single mass university or post-secondary education for 40 per cent of any particular age group. Marcuse provided this youth and civil rights movement, which was in the process of forming itself, an intellectual roadmap and its own sound. His persona was the prototype of the critical intellectual who intervened in the public sphere and left a mark on the

active discourse with his activity and made a contribution to the decision-making process – the scientist as somebody wanting to improve the world, an activist and fighter for the good. In his books, Marcuse takes a position, shows his attitude, and does not withdraw to the position of the objective scientist. Marcuse saw himself as a critical intellectual who wanted to change social reality and legitimacy. As an activist, he recognised specific possibilities for the improvement of human life in any given society and that there were effective means and methods for achieving this. “The established society has available an ascertainable quantity and quality of intellectual and material resources. How can these resources be used for the optimal development and satisfaction of individual needs and faculties with a minimum of toil and misery?”² The lowest common denominator of this thought is simple: How can social wealth achieved through technical development be distributed in such a way that the greatest number of people profit from it? Marcuse speaks in favour of the cautious handling of resources, the minimalisation of destructive social conflicts, and the expansion of the realm of freedom. This also implies a break with some old traditions (the father as head of the family, unquestionable authority, etc.) and a radical change in values. Hope, the power of skilful negotiations, and a new sensitivity should bridge the difference between illusion and reality. Improvements for target groups are always possible. This good news has its foundation in a positive image of mankind that can express itself based on the following questions: Do all people live in freedom in a free country, or are there groups and issues that are systemically discriminated against by the elected representative of the people and institutional elites?

2 Marcuse, Herbert: *Der eindimensionale Mensch*, p. 13.

Change is possible

Marcuse believed in change within societies and in the value of transcendence. Marcuse understood transcendence as the possibility of the individual and society to be able to look beyond the established universe of speaking and acting towards its social alternatives and to claim these alternatives as real possibilities. Associations, civil rights campaigners, activists, and charitable organisations are all united in their aspirations to help shape real-life society. All citizens have the right to express themselves and participate. Marcuse assumed that a free society could no longer be described using the traditional concepts of economic and political language.

Marcuse risked the break with established values and saw a new kind of man – as an actor in the civil society characterised by the following traits – at the end of this process of liberation: pacifist, not aggressive, altruistic instead of egoistic, and inspired by the idea of creating a better world. The study, “One-Dimensional Man” describes the noticeable change in how citizens, politicians, and scientists perceive themselves and their significance. The qualitative change Marcuse demanded would be a break with the trusted political routine. The liberated conscious would stimulate emancipatory technology and science. Marcuse considered the status quo of post-war democracy to be repressive. Freedom had been transformed into a powerful hegemony under the control of this system. Marcuse criticised the language of the political elite as a “universe of discourse populated by self-validating hypotheses which, incessantly and monopolistically repeated, become hypnotic definitions or dictations.”³ Those citizens who were not in agreement with this system could, after the theoretical analysis of

3 Marcuse, Herbert: *Der eindimensionale Mensch*, p. 34.

the society, introduce and enforce a practical change. In this way, the religious and ethical ideal of a better world ultimately leads to the practical goal of a humanity struggling for emancipation. At the beginning of the protest stands the great refusal as “an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it as a rigged game.”⁴ Angela Davis sees this as finally realising the emancipatory promise of the German philosophical tradition. Marcuse shares the conviction that the world needs to be changed and not interpreted with Marx and Jesus. Marcuse argues in favour of overcoming the separation between theory and practice, seeing that this separation results in the harmlessness of all thought and eventually leads to the principle of non-intervention. Marcuse exchanged not becoming involved, retreating into the private sphere, non-engagement, and the abandonment of wanting to actively help shape reality outside of thought for the primate of action: In a first step, philosophical concepts are translated into materialistic and qualifiable categories and, in a second, serve as a guide for social and political practice. Everybody needs to rethink when reality appears on the scene in the form of new dangers (the climate crisis, pandemics, migration). A practical and theoretical concept of reason of this kind places the citizen in the position of being able to change and improves the given circumstances. In those days, the mindset was characterised by a “get up and go” feeling, the triumphant advance of progressive micropolitics in the area of social policies, and the freedom, anti-nuclear, environment, and animal protection movements changed the consciousness of the citizens and political system alike.

4 Marcuse, Herbert: *Der eindimensionale Mensch*, p. 267.
English version: <https://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/64onedim/odmintr.html> (accessed 11 November 2020).

Society as a patchwork

The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard described the strategies of these newly-forming micropolitics in his book “The Patchwork of the Minorities”. Lyotard discovered that sexual, ethnic, and religious minorities had appeared on the scene as new, socially-relevant actors that limited and reduced the power of the centralised administration when they became visible to the public. Lyotard felt that the emergence of groups that had been previously excluded – for example, the politicisation of the homosexual movement, the struggles of “black” people and other ethnic minorities for equal rights – was emancipatory, seeing that these minorities did not believe “that the LAW and central power were identical or fused”, but “they say yes to another space that consists of a patchwork of laws and customs (today, we would say cultures) without a centre.”⁵ At the time, the concept of the minority developed into a perspective, into a song of praise to the strengths of the weak, to the socially necessary other.

This kind of monothematic or “difference” politics understood itself as an opponent to the mainstream. Today, these erstwhile minority policies have become established in the centre of the political, scientific, and bureaucratic realm where they have become firmly anchored through study courses and bureaucratic procedures: Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Ministry of the Environment, and antidiscrimination are now mainstays of constitutional democracies. The institutionalisation of diversity and minorities, as well as combatting climate change, is uncontested supra-nationally and a feature that determines all areas of European politics in the 2020s. Today, governments even enter into an earnest exchange with citizens’ groups and non-governmental organisations during

5 Lyotard, Jean-François: “Das Patchwork der Minderheiten”, p. 8.

and before the legislation process in order to actively integrate the interests of the civil society into the decision-making process.

Moralisation of politics

Identity-political and ecological questions form a low-threshold entrance into politics for citizens who are not involved in classical political structures (parties, trade unions, interest groups, professional associations): Many citizens and young people prefer short-term, project-related involvement in informal citizen's movements, such as Fridays for Future or the animal protection movement without being tied down by any membership. Political communication in the media, as well as the way politics is staged, has also changed. It has become more a matter of appealing to the emotions of the citizens than providing facts and content: Concern, the impulse of wanting to save the earth, and the belief of being able to actively shape and influence the course of the world have made political speeches more personal, and easier to understand, as well as more polarising. It is polarising, because the debates now take place on the basis of Manichean differentiations (good versus evil; the elite versus the man in the street) and not the difference between factually true and factually false. The protagonists often claim to act in the service of a self-proclaimed moral and to stand on the right side of history. This language of concern, which positions itself as being trustworthy, stresses that it is fighting for the beautiful, true, and good. However, this claim leads to two questions: First, how have these speakers been legitimised? In the case of citizens' initiatives, and in contrast to parties, it has not been in elections. Citizens' groups speak for themselves as activists, as persons, as members of an association, as people with inalienable rights, as advocates of humanity. They give themselves the mandate to speak or assume it in the name of their donors, sympathizers,

supporters, and members. In addition to the lack of democratic legitimisation, there is a second Achilles tendon of civil-society language: Are moral patterns of argumentation actually suitable for clarifying political questions in any way? The answer to this has to be “no”, seeing that the question of the moral is different from the question of the political.⁶ Politics passes laws and not moral values. In a democracy, judges – not politicians – dispense justice. Moral argumentation is unsuitable for political debates because the amalgamation of morals and politics is itself extremely immoral and favours arbitrary and opinion-driven decisions. However, moralisation is particularly appropriate in the agitation culture of the data-driven attention economy as an instrument of blackmail and, in addition to moral returns and a good conscience, promises attention returns to satisfy the media’s craving for scandal. Entertainment becomes entangled with information and the winner is the one who creates the most excitement and reaches the largest audience – and he is also the one who will be heard. Only the person who represents his political position visually and perceptibly will become a political subject. Here, it is necessary to briefly note that, in the history of European philosophy, classical morality was a self-commitment for the citizen and individual and not a tool for the assertion of partial interests. Classical morality in the tradition of natural law places demands on oneself and not on others. As a practical philosophy, it provides rules of conduct for personal and systemic crises that threaten the individual. A person who moralises politics and politicises morality blurs these borders and declares his partial interests the foundation of the body politic. Although making individual interests absolute is a democratically legitimate technique in the decision-making process, it should not form a foundation for arriving at legislative decisions with obligations for the common good.

6 See also Robert Zimmer: *Weltklugheit. Die Tradition der europäischen Moralistik*, Basel 2020.

Beyond partisan mentality

The moralisation of politics has asserted itself across the board – beyond the ideological differences between the right and the left. Citizens’ initiatives can no longer be positioned based on the classical left-right scheme. According to Lawrence Grossberg, left and right parties alike have appropriated and rearticulated a number of counterculture strategies today.⁷ Critics frequently accuse newer types of civil rights movements, such as Fridays for Future, Black Lives Matter, Pegida, and the Tea Party, with false consciousness or populism while ignoring the fact that these movements pick their supporters up where they are and that it is not a legitimate argument to hide and ignore socially widespread hopes and fears. Formats like Fridays for Future and Black Lives Matter appeal to a “sense of immediacy and frustration” that argues personally and historically and from a “feeling of the experienced impossibility of the current circumstances”. The movements use cultural concepts (peak oil, climate tipping point) to speak about popular things in a popular manner, and this is precisely how they develop their great impact potential. Communicating politics on the everyday level creates a feeling of closeness; an attempt is undertaken to transform the “affective disgruntlements and expectations, hopes, and dreams people have concerning the state of society into new forms of political practice and capacities to act.”⁸

The Internet plays a decisive role in these activistic expressions of will. Instead of the customary top-down structure, the modern mass protest acts like a grassroots movement from the street and the common folk, although it is usually planned by professional campaigners. Petitions, citizens’ protests, fundraising campaigns,

7 Grossberg, Lawrence: *Linke und rechte Gegenkulturen*, p. 23 f.

8 Grossberg, Lawrence: *Linke und rechte Gegenkulturen*, p. 21.

blockades, flash mobs, and long lines of demonstrators carrying lights are usually first announced on the internet and then cleverly spread through viral marketing. Grossberg evaluates the function of the new civil movements positively as populist movements without a leader. He criticises that the functional elite accuse these activists of false consciousness but overlook that these movements pick up people where they are. Citizens' movements stage their political will "more through cultural forms than through traditional and obvious political tactics"⁹ and "appeal to emotions of immediacy and frustration" that argue personally and historically, and from a feeling of the experienced impossibility of the current circumstances"¹⁰ Similar to their historic predecessors from the 1960s, the social movements of the 2020s develop their great impact potential in this way. The diffuse "emotional structure" of the new civil movements "is characterised by an increasing feeling of anxiety and insecurity (principally caused by state liberalisations that increase the economic risk for the individual citizen), over the sacralisation of the markets as something that defines both liberty and morals, by a sense of national decline with a fast paranoid feeling of superiority or minority, and by an increase in partisanship and the refusal to compromise with – and respect – the other side."¹¹ Protest cultures transform disgruntlement and expectations, and social hopes and dreams, into political practice and argue with emotions – not reason. Consumers and citizens with this mindset are frequently receptive to the messages transmitted by these civil society frontmen.

9 Grossberg, Lawrence: *Linke und rechte Gegenkulturen*, p. 24.

10 Grossberg, Lawrence: *Linke und rechte Gegenkulturen*, p. 24.

11 Grossberg, Lawrence: *Linke und rechte Gegenkulturen*, p. 21.

Living opinion market

Citizens' initiatives have changed culture as a whole, have taken a place in the heart of society, and are no longer merely the unheard outcry of the marginalised and those systemically discriminated against. The historical service of citizens' initiatives is obvious: Giving a voice to people and concerns that formerly had none. The instruments used for this have become increasingly differentiated in recent years: Appeals to cut consumption, fashion shame, flying shame, boycotting consumption, a ban on disliked behaviour (cancel culture), cleaning up films that are no longer in keeping with the time (Monty Python, *Gone with the Wind*), the fabrication of new consumption and security standards (ecological footprint, eco-labelling, indication of farming methods), the expansion and further development of established economic indexes such as the GDP to include subsequential social and ecological costs, etc., etc. Today, these initiatives and instruments to support the good and just – which have now become rather heterogeneous – are recognised by the majority of enterprises as instruments for promoting sales. Today, consumers expect voluntary self-commitment and an active ethical strategy from profit-oriented companies; if not, the firms and products are boycotted or sent to the virtual pillory in shitstorms and, in this way, forced to rethink their position.

As a result of their decades of success and having their tactics and strategies taken over by profit-oriented companies (greenwashing/pinkwashing), civil initiatives are being increasingly pressured to explain themselves: Questions about Greta Thunberg's sources of finance, criticism over the improper use of donations (Greenpeace), and a general oversaturation with threatening, horror, and doomsday scenarios have somewhat relativised the expectations and hope for salvation placed in the civil initiatives and new social movements that, historically, Marcuse probably exaggerated.

Being a partner in the democratic decision-making process also implies making the activities and aims, as well as finances and possible conflicts of interest, transparent – as is the case with all other political actors – and not barring one's own position hermetically from any form of criticism.

The Sensitive “I”

Thoughts on an Insecure Society between Digitalisation and Hyper-Individualisation

Johannes Domsich

Summary: How did contemporary society become so sensitive; why do people feel so ill at ease; to what extent are the social media to blame for this? Culturally pessimistic positions are confronted with explanatory models from the fields of sociology and psychology. Individualisation, digitalisation, anxiety, hatred, and rage serve as examples of how seemingly unrelated aspects have an effect on the global, social condition.

When discussing digitalisation, the opinion of most experts, as well as journalists and laypeople, is unanimous. Digitalisation has a negative effect on the individual and society. It is argued that jobs are destroyed, that there is a loss of aura and materiality, that search machines have terrifying power – the transparent person – and an overall view has been lost; all of this is combined with a decrease in reality and truth. The diagnosis states that humans are losing themselves in reflections of themselves and the world they live in, exactly as the postmodern threatened would happen. However, there is a counter-position of enthusiasm and even euphoria that Asian cultures, in particular, feel for technology, digitalisation, and artificial intelligence.

How can one extract oneself from arguments of this kind that are so convincing, when, most probably, the largest portion of the diagnoses is accurate and those in favour also offer sound approaches? With regard to the first, it is possible to not only accept the diagnoses more-or-less as irrevocable “pathologies”, but also ask questions about the “medical history” of their career.

What are the basic prerequisites, what are the elements in life, in society, that have led to such decisive changes in partnerships? Or could it be that the citizen of the 21st century is only a hypochondriac, the cultural malaise (Freud) only a malaise in digitality? I can recognise three dispositions. First: a radical, and irreversible, change in technologies that took place during the last century. Second: a completely different, individualised ego (Giddens/Beck) that cannot be compared with the concepts of Freud and Adler, not an indivisible total, but a participant in the event society. And third: a lifeworld that leaves us behind – vulnerable and powerless, and singularised (Reckwitz).

If the tools change, so do the products and, with them, the producer, his needs, his view of the world, his feelings, goals, and desires. It is therefore a matter of inexorable technologisation, which has changed the rhythm of society with enormous speed and through the omnipresence of consumption and mediality; the much-vaunted technical reproducibility (Benjamin) that invests man, as a homo faber, with the comforting feeling of omnipotence and ultimate superiority. Countless texts have been written about this, usually with the result of unreflecting cultural pessimism and laments without showing any solutions or alternatives. There can be no question that they are also right, seeing that, to a large degree, we have outsourced our activities to machines, signed them over to them, and programmed them. We now find ourselves in a dystopian situation of overwhelming search machines, a supposedly total transparency, permanent accessibility and – at the same time – irrelevance and complexity. What is the use of the answer if we do not know the question? Everything is constant, everywhere and – above all – always the same, confusable, new international style without any facets or any difference, dull and dreary globality.

However, as long as one belongs to the First World, it is possible to come to an arrangement with this and, if need be, complain a bit. However, digitality has many striking qualities: enormous speed, parallelism, and multidimensional networking. If one does not know how to deal with this, one can narcotise oneself with online consumption and play life in its duplication, on social media, which offers appearance instead of being, without reference or traceability. The new imperative is “you are what you experience” as long as you are prepared to share it with the entire world. Of course, you miss contact through the analogue, the genuine, the aura. But that can be compensated for in romantic hedonism. You collect the analogue, have personal experiences, or develop a new kind of sensibility – you are touched, no longer moved – that is actually only an effect of a disturbed sensitivity. It is now necessary to ask the question about the origin of this disturbance, the discomfort, the malaise. Is it the abandonment of effort, moderation, solidarity? Is it only our impatience, the lust to only be what we experience? Or could it be caused by the economic crises, and religious conflicts, or terror and the resulting existential worries. But why is that actually the case? Have we forgotten how to come to grips with the challenges confronting us, with fate, with catastrophes, and being able to master them? Have we, the products of the economic miracle, become lethargic? Are we suffering from collective, learned helplessness (Seligmann)? Without a doubt, the sensation of not being able to change anything, not even ourselves, but only to be changed, and forced to adapt, is disappointing. “If you don’t keep up with the times, you will go over time” – sounds stupid and cynical, and ultimately depressing.

The crux of this matter is all too easily overlooked, seeing that it is humiliating for an advanced civilisation: delegation. The strongest motives for technological speed were not power and controllability, but indolence and the unbridled enthusiasm for the

doable. The aim was to hand over the greatest amount of effort, labour, and responsibility possible to technology. Although this is a piece of graffiti wisdom, it is still absolutely valid: “Security instead of freedom”. Interpretations and decisions are delegated to machines and, naturally, authoritarian bodies like politics. This makes the primary conflict obvious: What can be done if everything that makes up life is no longer in your own hands? “Friends” on social media tell me how I feel, and my smartwatch lets me know if I am healthy or not. “I” am merely the product of technically recorded parameters. As stated before, it is an easy matter to find distraction, to lose your way in the digital jungle, if only the concept works. However, in the catastrophes and crises that are becoming increasingly frequent, formerly reliable authorities (for example, journalists) are becoming less significant or, quite simply, no longer fulfil their purpose.

In keeping with the postmodern doctrine, one is left to one’s own devices, alone with oneself. That is another unmistakable symptom of a society of diminishing solidarity. A free-for-all, seeing that one’s own destiny and the corresponding feelings are indivisible, lonely, and incomprehensible to others. In the figurative sense, the Snickers slogan “You’re not you when you’re hungry” means that you have lost yourself in your own desires because you no longer dare to wish what others are longing for. Individuality is the top priority, and that is indisputable. You have to get out of step with society because fashion and trends do not work anymore. While parents and grandparents were still forced into line (dictatorship, and then the consumer society), we are now solitary and distinctive, but still transparent.

If nothing remains of what once made up a personality, a character, features such as one’s role (partner, mother, father), function, or profession, everything will only revolve around oneself. The

person becomes the purpose of life. “I” am the final message that it is necessary to formulate in the social networks at ever shorter intervals, and in the greatest variety of roles possible. This condition is described noncommittally as “hyper-individualisation”. This is not inaccurate seeing that an “I”, which is more than it is, and more than it can ever be, is in demand. The thumbscrew of the present is the unspoken command to appear to be more than you are and – above all – to be unmistakable, like nobody else, absolutely unique. Idols, icons, and role models, like parents, have become obsolete and been replaced by the aesthetic codes and life models of their children. One finds oneself trapped by the compulsion to permanently present oneself; this is a fate that, at best, formerly only tormented top artists and Hollywood stars. One is forced to exhibit a kind of breathlessness that would have been too much for even the most famous jetsetter.

Permanent approval and attention, in the form of likes, shares, and followers is vied for in a way that the media, marketing, and advertising used to do. And that is precisely where the path is leading. People are becoming multiplication slaves, YouTubers, influencers, bloggers – paid too little or not at all. Realistic coverage is just as obsolete as the erstwhile journalistic virtues of research, or simply the truth. This is also an indication of the condition of culture: Truth is always only absolute truth (Lakoff/Johnson), fluctuation unthinkable, nuances impossible, objectivity given the highest priority. But that cannot be achieved and so fake news and fake “I” shake hands. Social reality is shifting from the mass media to the individual media and into the sphere of a new kind of privacy – in reality one of loneliness; this is decisive for the following argument. Collective values are evaporating, and politics also hardly tries to convey them anymore. At best, you target the “little guy” or the “high achievers”. Satisfaction that previous generations could still draw from labour, craftsmanship, success, or

epic failure, now results from the possibility of buying attention on social media – followers – or, as an alternative, making a fool of yourself and getting no thanks for it.

It is tragic that this disturbed, disoriented society has revealed itself particularly clearly in the pandemic that is currently dominating everything, in terror, and world events that are getting out of hand. All of a sudden, security has turned into insecurity. Confidence in democracy, technology, and, especially, science has been damaged. Terror is undermining our social structure that we believed to be secure. A trivial virus has revealed the limits of medicine and pharmacology – this is an insult, a humiliation. The collective condition has been just as shattered as that of the individual – allowed to do everything, unable to do anything. The lockdown has once again increased the feeling of being left to one's own devices. It forces one to reflect on one's most intimate social structures, on security and unanswered questions, and – most adversely – on oneself. Loneliness is no longer a choice one can make – it is an obligation; however, distance does not lead to a review but only much deeper into the dilemma. What one wants or not no longer plays a role. The “I” is forced to take a break and, in it, the conditions mentioned earlier become even more apparent. Everyday routines take on more importance than the results they produce. It is only possible to engage in leisure-time activities and social interaction to a limited extent. The structure gets lost; chaos develops out of the standstill.

This makes it necessary to deal with concepts that have not been questioned and discussed for a long time, in order to re-evaluate and recombine them. First and foremost, “state of mind”, a term that, in spite of being thoroughly processed in science and philosophy, is used sloppily in colloquial language and comes close to suggesting self-pity and oversensitivity. People like to refer to

the “state of mind” to make fun of bored or overtaxed bobos, and hipsters suffering from their own precarity. Although this is not wrong, it does not get to the core of the problem. Primarily, the state of mind is a perception of one’s own condition, a self-diagnosis, in the positive and negative sense, although the latter has become most widely used. The condition and the findings do not have to correspond with each other. It is possible to feel ill without actually being ill, and feel healthy without being healthy. Happiness flies away like a bird, but unhappiness is a faithful, tenacious companion. One is repeatedly asked how one is feeling. It is something of a social ritual. One answers more or less politely with a standard phrase, with a counterquestion, or – as a well-integrated Viennese – honestly with “bad” or “like the others want me to feel.” However, what is felt to be bad is the instability of the condition in which one finds oneself, the lack of balance. This, in turn, leads to angst and pessimism because one has learned that if anything can go wrong, it will.

“Finding yourself”, today’s most popular parlour game, is a process that demands a great deal of creativity. However, stress, strain, and a lack of orientation produce the opposite result. You get lost. Frustration and everyday grievances make it impossible for us to find the balance necessary to be able to find peace in ourselves. The collective prevailing mood has become faded and dull. Everybody is afraid of tomorrow, it upsets the cultural balance, and – in a matter of speaking – has an impact on public opinion. This makes it possible to recognise a phenomenon of the digital age more clearly. Negative feelings are infectious; they can become epidemic in a manner that resembles stupidity. External circumstances are primarily perceived as being “bad”, as stressful, while the sunny side of life has to be taken care of and staged on social media. However, it is different in the forums where the injured and affected are browbeaten.

It is therefore possible to derive two diagnoses from this. Dysphoric feelings not only affect individuals but entire community groups, going as far as complete societies. We are aware of binding collective upsets of this kind occurring historically around the turn of the century. This is the feeling that Austrian playwright Nestroy expressed so incisively: “The world will not last much longer”. Going even further, it now appears that a condition of this kind has become chronic. Putting it simply, the world is in a bad state and anti-depressants are in short supply. This unpleasant condition is the result of excessive demands and grievances, an overheated pace, and an overabundance of information that can no longer be filtered and interpreted. The natural reaction to this would be resentment, anger, and even hate or withdrawal from the world and hedonism. Disenchantment with politics, online hatred, angry citizens, and all kinds of addictions are often listed as evidence of this. The feeling of not being able to change anything is binding, what disturbs cannot be overcome and becomes part of the personality. Irreversible hurts are nurtured and carried through life.

Once again, the internet provides the perfect observation point where this all precipitates as a manifestation like a snapshot of society. One is permanently online, continuously finding triggers for one’s annoyance or disgust, so one is almost forced to these kinds of reactions. A cooling-off phase is hardly possible anymore. Punctual sensations, people who cater to prejudices, and information that cements opinions are overhastily accepted. Stimuli that legitimise the basic negative feeling are shared and multiplied. Hate is the logical result that should also trigger euphoria. The only good news is bad news. Profound anger is felt to be justified and countless new reasons for outrage are processed reflexively – you cannot come down from this “trip” in a manner of speaking. In addition, these outbreaks hardly ever result in consequences or sanctions, implying that the reaction is considered to be reason-

able. The condition is reminiscent of Virilio's "speeding standstill". As soon as one topic has been ticked off, another pops up; it is impossible for some to rest. "Be outraged!" is taken deadly seriously.

It is now time to take a closer look at those terms used to describe the phenomena mentioned that have become established in the field of sensationalist journalism. Are the diagnoses correct; have we found the right names for what we have observed? Being overtaxed is not the same as frustration. Aggravation is not anger. Anger is not hate, and hate is not rage. There is no doubt that our world has become confusing, but it can normally be coped with. Frustration rears its head when one of the pillars of life – the private sphere, work, health – starts to sway, when dreams turn into illusions and are shattered. The person felt to be responsible is hated; it is particularly bad if that person is yourself. You are annoyed if something does not turn out to be successful; but where does rage come from? Rage is something completely different; it is archaic and epic, like something out of an ancient tragedy. The problem with rage is that – unlike anger and hate – in cannot be localised, it is impossible to predict where it will explode and who it will hit. If we have not learned to deal with it, rage accompanies us throughout our life. Annoyance and hate usually do not grow historically, and they are not necessarily part of a curriculum. They ignite on everyday affairs, flame up, and then vanish after sufficient time has passed, depending on the intensity. That does not apply to internet hatred, to its permanence and collectivity. It is not a matter of a shitstorm that one has to survive before sailing over peaceful waters once again. Things are always stormy on the internet.

My assumption is that hate has been confused with anger, that the two, which are different, have been equated with each other. From early childhood, we experience anger, and we either have to

undergo a continuous process to deal with it or it will cause our downfall. If we are not able to overcome it, we are threatened with depression and addiction as consequences. Rejection is usually the root of rage, an affront coupled with the feeling of impotence. One is helpless, cannot find a way out, is “blind with rage”. Rage bears a cultural stigma: it is generally believed that it is evil, a destructive force. What we therefore learn is not to live our rage and apply it creatively, but to suppress it. We also learn not to let our rage cool down, but to derive hatred from it. In other words, rage that is not successful produces fear and, in turn, that rage erupts into hatred – and that is frightening.

Rage is the result of our fears, a primeval instinct that develops in the evolutionary early areas of our brain. Rage warns us that something is wrong; it is a kind of alarm. What is bad about rage is that – because it is largely uncontrolled – our sense of reason is only able to regain the upper hand very slowly. It is difficult to keep it under control and hardly possible to predict when it will explode. This also provides an explanation for the exhaustion that can be felt because keeping rage in check is an extremely strenuous undertaking.

Therapists use a catchy example to describe this: Keeping rage permanently under control is like trying to keep a ball under water and prevent its buoyancy from forcing it up to the surface. We have a tool that we can use to work on our fears, rage. Rage, however, that does not want to blow over has not been effective or productive. Anger only becomes chronic when it is not possible to get rid of it. Perhaps the only problem is that we do not attempt to remove fears and anger from the real world, but from its reflection, social media, and the web.

What is missing is the creative implementation of the negative feeling. That cannot happen in the collective of the internet, in a world of make-believe. The amalgamation of information, entertainment, and social aspects is too dense to enable the development of a real life, a plan. It is possible that the longing for the analogue could provide a way out of this predicament. What was really lost as a result of digitalisation? Social interaction in direct dialogues, facial expressions, gestures, the flow of time in a conversation. As we said, if the tools change, so does the product. For example, a text written by hand or a drawing are important gestures, something like “thinking with a pencil”, as Kokoschka put it. It is very difficult to achieve this if you are connected with computers and smartphones. There is also the matter that the conception of networking is actually not productive a priori. The internet does not create any products, but only an archive of information and duplicates of already existing analogue products. It is a depository, the logical antipode of delegation. Harking back to Plato, what has been written and filed can easily be forgotten.

I suspect that what is lacking is knowledge resulting from our own experience, security, a sense of peace in understanding the context. In order to be able to develop an “I” in its self-determination and its own will, it is essential to be in this situation. My conclusion is the following: With its criticism of digitality, cultural pessimism suggests that there is no turning back. That is exactly what is wrong. In the euphoria over being able to digitise anything and everything, even oneself, it has been forgotten that the internet, as well as technology in general, should be looked at for what it is – a tool – and used accordingly. The internet is an image of the world we live in. So, it doesn’t make sense to use technology; it has to be the other way around again. How can this be done? *Ceterum censeo*, through education.

The State and the Civil Society – or the Citizen Society?

Casting a Glance at Light and Shade

Till Kinzel

Summary: The question of the role of the civil society is highly topical. However, it is necessary to make a precise differentiation. Valuable impulses can be found in the history of the “civil society”, such as “civility”, that should flow into a positive understanding of a conservative or citizens’ society. The concept of a “civil society”, with its strong leftist overtones that have a strained relationship with the fundamentals of a liberal statehood, must be seen more critically. It is necessary to stress the objectivity of politics against tendencies of importing ideological struggles into politics by way of the “civil society”. The urge towards moralisation and emotionalisation of the political is contrasted with an apologia for the citizen: The citizen society – and not the civil society – assures the common freedom liberty of one’s fellows.

1. Civil society is ambivalent

There is no question. Whoever says “civil society” today usually means it as positive; the concept sounds good, and anybody who asks for “more commitment” from the civil society can expect approval, as well as financial support, from the reallocating state, which is not – and cannot be – a civil society. But are things really all that simple? The notion of the civil society possesses a “problematic ambivalence” as stated in a relevant handbook.¹ This has to be taken into account if one wants to obtain clarity about what

1 Jean L. Cohen: “Zivilgesellschaft”. In: Stefan Gosepath, Wilfried Hinsch and Beate Rössler (eds.): *Handbuch der Politischen Philosophie und Sozialphilosophie*. Vol. 2: N-Z. Berlin 2008, pp. 1515–1521, here p. 1519.

is really being talked about when the appeal for a so-called “civil society” takes hold in the political sphere. A person who does not consider the ambivalence of the conceptual field runs the risk of reading his possibly different associations into what others connect with other intentions.

2. Civility

On the one hand, the civil society can also be understood against the historical background of the development of the conservative society with a glance at the English philosopher John Locke in a way that would be compatible beyond its current problematic development (more about that further below). Here, civility, as a specific aspect of conservative culture, has the original meaning of politeness or good manners – and a civil society in the sense of a developed culture of civility would be one in which, especially when dealing with diverging fundamental ideological attitudes and intense difference of opinion, people would encounter each other in a way that their actions would be characterised by a (not legal) claim to politeness. The important point to note here is not that this must, and should be, based on an ethical unity of the citizens – Locke felt that it was almost a matter of course for individuals not to like each other and approve of their respective opinions.

One’s own impulses of wanting to dominate others and force one’s own opinion on these others must be kept under control if human coexistence is going to be rewarding. That is the reason that this aspect is met with great esteem in the civil society. However, at the same time, the anthropological scepticism that forms the basis of Locke’s social theory – following in the footsteps of Thomas Hobbes – teaches us that interpersonal civility is not natural but has to be learnt in a process that takes many years

and can require considerable effort.² Education is the appropriate and legitimate place for this. That also means that education in civility, which is aware that it is always more than merely teaching “good manners” and makes an essential contribution to sustaining a healthy order of coexistence, is quasi a pre-moral basis for all conservative societies.³

However, a drawback of the conservative lifestyle’s dependence on successful civility socialisation is that if it does not exist in adulthood, it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to be compensated for. By the way, that is also at the core of the famous Böckenförde dilemma, according to which the “modern liberal state lives by prerequisites that it cannot guarantee itself without calling its own liberality into question.”⁴

Therefore, whenever one talks about a civil society, one of the most essential aspects to be considered would be the reciprocal willingness for respectful, non-defamatory behaviour. In keeping with the philosophy of the Spanish-American George Santayana, the imperative not to cover political opponents with invective follows from the recognition of a certain “animality” or irrationality in human life based on anthropological insight, which cannot be completely eliminated. However, a self-critical distancing from utopian efforts is required on the part of those who tend to use invectives to eradicate any form of “intolerance.”⁵ A goal of this kind

2 Dirk Schuck: *Die Verinnerlichung der sozialen Natur. Zum Verhältnis von Freiheit und Einfühlung in der Sozialpsychologie des frühen Liberalismus bei Locke, Shaftesbury, Hume und Smith*. Hamburg 2019.

3 This is illustrated by striking examples in Digby Anderson (ed.): *Gentility Recalled. Mere Manners and the Making of Social Order*. London 1996.

4 Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde: *Der Staat als sittlicher Staat*. Berlin 1978, p. 37.

5 Till Kinzel: Santayana, Self-Knowledge and the Limits of Politics. In: Charles Padrón and Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński (eds.): *The Life of Reason in an Age of Terrorism*. Leiden/Boston 2018, pp. 93-102, here p. 98.

can only be achieved by taking the paradoxical path of increased intolerance and therefore does not really lead to a reduction of that fanaticism that is the other of a civil society (this can be observed in the current manifestations of so-called “cancel culture” in some Western countries). It is a difficult matter to communicate about other aspects of the theory of the state, such as political principles and fundamental values, if the lived virtue of civility can no longer be taken for granted.

3. Liberal state and civil religion

Leo Strauss saw the obligation of politics in facilitating an order that was not intended to oppress, with a freedom that was not licentious.⁶ A civil society will only be able to develop in such a way within such a framework, because here the state holds itself back from the temptation to use its power licentiously. It is therefore an important matter to understand the state as a – to use a word that sounds somewhat old-fashioned – moral state, as an institution with a moral character per se, and one that has preserved a specific form of morality as a guardian in its actions communicated by the individuals in the organisations.

But what is the “superfunctional unifying element” of the state that a civil society in particular has to be aware of? Faced with dissolving state sentiments in the 1970s, the German sociologist Helmut Schelsky lamented – he even called himself an “anti-sociologist” – “that our state lacks the support of an undisputed belief of the citizens. Before all rationality, belief is the unifying foundation of the political order.”⁷

6 Leo Strauss: *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Chicago/London 1988, p. 37.

7 Böckenförde: *Der Staat als sittlicher Staat*, pp. 24-25, Helmut Schelsky: “Ein Staat, an den niemand glaubt”. In: *Deutsche Zeitung*, 23 December 1977, p. 3.

There are probably quite a few people who agree with Schelsky's diagnosis, especially when they would like to invest the state with a religious foundation or consider this to be necessary in one form or other. However, in his contradiction of Schelsky, Böckenförde put his finger on the sore spot of this analysis, which Schelsky himself should have also recognised. Böckenförde sees the sociologist Schelsky's endeavour to turn towards a theory of the state and, in doing so, come out in favour of a civil religion à la Rousseau, as a tendentially totalitarian development: "An undisputed belief as the foundation of the state means, in practice, nothing other than an ideology administered and cultivated by the state, a secularised form of the polis religion of ancient times, through which politics can find access to the attitudes of the individual." In this way, the state obtains its foundation in the "uniformity of the political conviction", not as a community in law, in the recognition and release of individuality, the connection of the different to unity, and the basic sense of order that everyone has."⁸

Böckenförde is completely right when he points out that the state, as a moral state, is the "moment of externality" in itself, which can be spelled out like this and should also be quoted here, since what is taken for granted is no longer self-evident today, and therefore needs to be revived in a completely new manner: The state, according to Böckenförde, "pursues purposes of common life, not of individual life, and it pursues these purposes only in a legal manner, i.e. as far as it is possible through external institutions and enforceable commandments, which are based on the behaviour of the individual, and do not take hold of their convictions." Böckenförde emphasizes that it is not, "without internal reason", the case that "totalitarian regimes ... who propagate the political unity of opinion as their own foundation, indoctrinate

8 Böckenförde: *Der Staat als sittlicher Staat*. Berlin 1978, p. 25.

them in their education, and finally raise them to the legal obligation and condition of political citizenship.”⁹

However, in his book, *Die Arbeit tun die anderen* (The Others Do the Work), Schelsky acknowledges that the orientation on the values of the Enlightenment, as claimed by the contemporary state, actually represents the gateway for a tyranny of sentiments that becomes even more lasting and dangerous when it invokes the Enlightenment but actually means its factual disavowal.¹⁰ The Enlightenment would be betrayed if a “guardian state” was established that only understood the citizen as its ward.¹¹ In order to prevent a “guardian state” of this kind, the citizen has the obligation to be civil.

4. Civil society versus consumer society in the mass democracy

There are established community standards in today’s consumer society; however, even though this sounds good, they also serve to regulate unpopular expressions of opinion outside of punishable offences such as insults and libel. Although the last mentioned example would be almost self-evident in a society that pays attention to civility, it is these restrictions, which go beyond the necessary level, that stand in blatant contradiction to a liberal practice. “Community”, as an ominous normative instance, is intended to legitimise that the individual is no longer able to express himself “off the cuff”. In this circumstance, “values” become an instrument

9 Böckenförde: *Der Staat als sittlicher Staat*. Berlin 1978, pp. 25–26.

10 Helmut Schelsky: *Die Arbeit tun die Anderen. Klassenkampf und Priesterherrschaft der Intellektuellen*. Opladen 1975, pp. 183–184.

11 Cf. Rolf Henrich: *Der vormundschaftliche Staat. Vom Versagen des real existierenden Sozialismus*. Reinbek 1989.

used for social regulation for which those who have access to mass media provide the valid definition. This is actually nothing more than a new form of illiberal collectivism that must be rejected in the sense of a conservative culture founded on a strengthened self-responsibility.

Today, many questions are being asked about the extent to which it is possible to talk easily about a “civil society” in regard to European societies, seeing that we are now living under the conditions of what is known as mass democracy. This mass democracy simply exerts the greatest normative force through the imperative of a society of this kind that Arnold Gehlen put in a nutshell: “The provision of increasing populations, with increasing demands, with increasing quantities of goods, must be desired.”¹² This establishes the actual priority of social life: Guaranteeing consumption before civil liberty and civic virtue.

The legal scholar Johann Braun has now revealed those revaluations and ruptures that accompany the tendential transformation of the civil society, which formerly served as a guideline, to a consumer society. This change from the model of the citizen to that of the consumer is of extreme importance for explaining the orientation of our time, as it goes hand in hand with an internal change in the self-perception of the state and, as a consequence, also of the “civil society”. According to Braun, the civil society “evokes the ideals of an age that, from the perspective of civil law, no longer exists.” But the self-deciding citizen (understood as a *citoyen*) is only a façade today – with a consumer hiding behind it. “The image of the consumer corresponds to a completely different state, a state that no longer has the citizen as its foundation but one that has

12 Arnold Gehlen: *Die Seele im technischen Zeitalter. Sozialpsychologische Probleme der industriellen Gesellschaft*. Reinbek 1957, p. 79ff.

automatically emancipated itself from him.”¹³ The change in the state’s model from citizen to consumer is therefore so fundamental and alarming because it throws open the doors to numerous forms of paternalism, and educational ambitions on the part of the state and organisations sponsored it. While the citizen implies the assumption that, here – from the start – we have a person capable of responsible actions and thoughts (although, this is, of course, an ideal), the responsibility of the consumer is considerably more restricted. And, seeing that politics often feels the same about this, we are aware that – in all seriousness – it is deemed necessary for the state to influence the dietary habits of the citizens in their capacity as consumers.

5. The state and the much-vaunted “civil society”

The state often finds itself skating on thin ice – or, at least, going down the wrong track – when it provides financial support for “civil society” initiatives that, as a result, can no longer be considered as such – namely, free, civil commitment on the basis of personal means, and taking civility, in the broader sense, into consideration – but have become more-or-less official. This occurs when the state provides all of the funding for initiatives that follow particular political agendas. However, civil-society activities are not part of the same sphere attributed to the state for its endeavours. This is of more than marginal significance, seeing that supporting specific political interests, in this sense, is likely to undermine confidence in the impartiality of the state. The following therefore applies: “The state actually is only authorised to make decisions of the kind that do not undermine, but strengthen, the trust of the

13 Jürgen Braun: *Bürger und Verbraucher. Über den Wandel des Menschenbildes im Bereich des Politischen* (Schriftenreihe der Förderstiftung Konservative Bildung und Forschung Heft 5), Munich 2005.

population; trust towards each other, as well as the state.”¹⁴

For this reason alone, a politically-activist civil society, which is sponsored by the state, cannot fulfil an important function that a social commitment supported by the citizens themselves in non-state institutions, at least potentially, could – namely, the possibility of developing, and preserving, a form of countervailing power to tendencies of state overcontrol.

However, now there is no neutral perspective from where one can determine exactly what civil society is. This is because all of those who are interested in this subject in any way at all are just that – interested! They take part in the life of the society themselves and, by doing so, shape the world they live in – regardless of whether this is through participation or non-participation. This also means that it is always necessary to take the following into account: The committed propagation of the special interests of “civil society” groups – within the context of so-called refugee politics, for example – cannot be seen as having a greater justification simply because minorities with time and money were able to create a public awareness going beyond the reach of those citizens with different value priorities.

What exactly the “evocation of the civil society” actually means depends to a great deal on the kind of more-or-less theoretically articulated image of society associated with it. The philosopher Karl-Heinz Nusser explained this taking the American concept of so-called communitarism as an example: Charles Taylor, for one, has a normatively inflated conception of the public, through which society should be enabled “to arrive at a common view through a discourse of reason outside of the authorities without

14 Norbert Campagna: *Staatliche Macht und menschliche Freiheit. Das Staatsdenken Bertrand de Jouvenels*. Stuttgart 2020, p. 125.

the mediation of politics (...).” A strategy for establishing a “critical civil society” by creating a public sphere is associated with this idea; however, according to Nusser, it represents an exaggerated expectation, a free public equal to nothing less than a “discourse of reason”. This cannot be the case because the public and discourse cannot be separated from political (and other) interests and are not only controlled by an orientation on the common good – regardless of how this is determined. “Civil society” can also develop into a “moral super-subject” if one believes that the harmonisation and homogenisation – even of morally and politically conflicting interests – would be possible within its framework. In that case, civil society could easily mean the same as “socialism through the back door” – at least when, in the civil society’s interpretation of the bigger picture, it was no longer recognised or desired that a mutual relationship between the community spirit and economic striving for profit is necessary to preserve and develop a genuinely modern society in a modern state.¹⁵

But, even on a smaller scale, it is also possible to identify tendencies that invest the term “civil society” with a negative connotation. For example, Uwe Tellkamp, the man from Dresden who wrote the great novel of the GDR and the change in the political system *Der Turm* (The Tower), made comments on the subject of the civil society that should not be cast to the winds. Tellkamp observed tendencies towards political correctness in many areas. He was very concerned that this was causing the “opinion corridor” to become increasingly narrow. He also noted the difference to previous forms of social organisation. According to Tellkamp, we should be more afraid of the civil society than the state today. That’s a harsh allegation, but, when you bear in mind that so-called

15 Here, I follow several thoughts by Karl-Heinz Nusser: Die Beschwörung der Zivilgesellschaft. Analysen zu Charles Taylor und Michael Walzer. In: *Die neue Ordnung* no. 4 (August 2003), pp. 266–274, here especially pp. 270–274.

civil society players are the ones who not only regularly defame disliked “conservative citizens” as “Nazis” or “fascists”, but also frequently attack them physically, it does provide you with food for thought.¹⁶

6. Social society and democracy within their limits

In a concrete sense, a civil society can only be a society with a concrete location. This is a fundamental difference to the concept of a “global civil society” that nourishes itself from utopian energy, such as the notion of a “coming democracy”, intended to transcend any form of “homogeneity and particularity” launched by Jacques Derrida.¹⁷ In his study of this utopian vision, Heinrich Meier arrived at the sober conclusion that no democratic community could emerge from the obligation of democracy to delimit itself as propagated by Derrida.¹⁸ The reason for this is obviously that conservative culture can only develop where the citizen is actually, and not just potentially, a citizen: in his own country. If the citizen is to be interpreted in a politically relevant manner, he cannot be a global citizen. He can have a cosmopolitan mindset, but the concept of the “citizen” is only included in the concept of the “global citizen” in an improper sense.

The citizen and his rights have a close relationship to the nation as an area governed by law.¹⁹ Therefore, a global social society is

16 See also Ingo von Münch: *Meinungsfreiheit gegen Political Correctness*. Berlin 2017.

17 Heinrich Meier: Epilog. In: Friedrich Wilhelm Graf/Heinrich Meier (eds.): *Die Zukunft der Demokratie*. Kritik und Plädoyer. Munich 2018, p. 350.

18 Meier: Epilog, p. 351.

19 See Roger Scruton: *The West and the Rest. Globalization and the Terrorist Threat*. London 2002, pp. 60–61.

inconceivable, seeing that, for normative as well as factual reasons, a delimitation of the concept of the citizen cannot be differentiated from its abolition through its weakening and dedifferentiation. This is not a merely theoretical danger. Especially in the context of so-called post-Marxist theory, which takes credit for its close ties to political activism and, therefore, remains committed to radical left-wing political intentions, delimitation strategies of this kind are being aggressively developed. For example, the “creation of a civil society from below” has already been announced that would invest migrants with the status that was once granted to proletarians in communist theory. The conservative culture of the citizen who identifies with his community would be explicitly undermined: “A community of citizens means a community of all those who are present and active in a social space.” This was also linked to a proclamation “that all, who are here, also come ‘from here.’”²⁰

A simple accumulation of people who have nothing in common with each other except that they all happen to “be here” is not a civil society: “Being conservative has a fundamental sense going beyond party interests connected to politics.” Harald Seubert took up one of Manfred Riedel’s ideas and explained that, in this way, “conservative” is invested with a meta-political meaning and, last but not least, also means that “the principle of law allows a freedom that gives the political sphere its leeway, but simultaneously prevents it encroaching on all spheres of human existence.”²¹ In this way, civility also includes the notions of borders and limitations that are indispensable for the self-constitution of a civil society

20 As an exemplary exposition on Etienne Balibar’s position – Cornelia Bruell/Monika Mokre: *Postmarxistisches Staatsverständnis*. Baden-Baden 2018, p. 210.

21 Harald Seubert: Nachwort. In: Manfred Riedel: *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft. Eine Kategorie der klassischen Politik und des modernen Naturrechts*. Harald Seubert (ed.). Stuttgart 2011, p. 357.

characterised by politeness and must be relearned if necessary.²²

7. Apologia for a conservative culture

It can be seen that there is an acute danger that the form of the civil society will become linked to a form of political activism that does not really focus on the common good and aim at achieving it, but sees specific interests as absolute, does not respect the natural law of reciprocal non-defamation, and undermines the affirmation of a genuine form of conservatism. This is another reason to take Nusser's warning to heart: "Seeing that the concept of the 'civil society' is usually used in connection with Western democracies (...) in the misunderstandable context of an implied third path, or also as a purely self-regulating economic dynamic, it seems advisable to avoid using the term 'civil society' and replace it with the formerly common 'conservative society'."²³

Those texts that follow the Anglo-Saxon theoreticians (or the translations of their writings) – the works of the British sociologist and cultural historian Ernest Gellner, for instance – and write "civil society" but really mean "conservative society" should also be interpreted in this way. Gellner expressly brings the resurgence of the "civil society" into play against the background of the rejection of communist societies in East Europe and Marxism. The American social scientist Michael Walzer also believes that the "dissident movements in Central and East Europe", which were responsible for the revitalisation of the idea of a civil society, flourished "within

22 On the various dimensions of borders, see Frank Furedi: *Why Borders Matter. Why Humanity Must Relearn the Art of Drawing Boundaries*. Milton Park 2020; as well as Alexander Demandt: *Grenzen. Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Berlin 2020.

23 Nusser: Die Beschwörung der Zivilgesellschaft, p. 274.

a severely limited version of the civil society”²⁴ – which would suggest that a reconstruction of this kind could also take place under unfavourable conditions. Gellner even felt that “the concept of the civil society has become the keyword behind the demolition of the Marxist society”, as the fundamental hypothesis of Marxism could be compressed into the statement that “the civil society is a hoax”. However, “the supposed Marxist conquest of the idea of the civil society (in the sense of “conservative society”) ultimately turned out to be the real fraud.”²⁵

A conservative or civil society of this kind is one for which Odo Marquard’s well-known “*Apologie der Bürgerlichkeit*” (In Defence of the Conservative) can be used and updated. Although Marquard connects his approval of the conservative lifestyle and refusal to reject it with a world – and also expressed it in a world – that was “more non-crisis than crisis”, the core of his objective remains valid.²⁶ But, precisely in a world that, for various reasons, can be described as a world of crisis, Marquard’s pragmatic scepticism is also a significant component of the courage to be conservative that is usually called *civil courage*: scepticism about a “claim to perfection in things in the world”. This is because the “nonsensical claims to perfection”²⁷ that justify the mode of total criticism of the present world actually represent a danger from the sceptical point of view.

24 Michael Walzer: *Zivile Gesellschaft und amerikanische Demokratie*. Frankfurt/M. 1996, pp. 64–65.

25 Ernest Gellner: *Bedingungen der Freiheit. Die Zivilgesellschaft und ihre Rivalen*. Stuttgart 1995, p. 62.

26 Odo Marquard: Apologie der Bürgerlichkeit. In: *Philosophie des Stattdessen. Studien*. Stuttgart 2002, p. 101.

27 Marquard: Apologie der Bürgerlichkeit, p. 104.

8. Civil society versus depoliticisation and moralisation

This danger has two faces: depoliticisation and moralisation. These are compatible with a civil society driven by left – and sometimes radical left – concepts, but not with a citizens' society.²⁸ Norbert Bolz is correct when he draws attention to this connection: "When it is a matter of the 'good cause,' even neutrality is treated as being inhuman. This politicisation of all circumstances of life takes place precisely as depoliticisation, namely the moralisation of the discourse. It is therefore possible to see protest as a pre-emptive defence against the excessive demands of moral responsibility for the affairs of the world."²⁹ However, this moralisation not only has an effect on the discourse, but also on the activity of the state itself that threatens to leave the path towards an objectivisation of its dealings through the pressure it is subjected to by the media and organisations of the so-called civil society.

Due to its commitment to particular special interests, partially connected to a two-faced apocalyptic-utopian vision of the future, this not unproblematic "civil society" is very susceptible to the "triumph of conviction over the power of judgement".³⁰ That has potentially illiberal implications, seeing that those who value their convictions higher than their powers of judgement, which can only be acquired through a certain intellectual effort, tend to fanaticism and an inability to enter into a dialogue. This is something that the philosopher Karl Jaspers already recognised with great perception. His considerations are of fundamental importance for the current

28 See also Christian Sebastian Moser: Tafelsilber für die Wagschaale. In: Christian Sebastian Moser (ed.): *Konservative Korrekturen*. Wien 2011, pp. 70–71.

29 Norbert Bolz: *Die Avantgarde der Angst*. Berlin 2020, p. 139.

30 See Hermann Lübbe: *Politischer Moralismus. Der Triumph der Gesinnung über die Urteilskraft*. Berlin 1987.

problems of determining the functions of the state and civil society because the philosopher was steadfastly oriented on the recognition and attainment of liberty. Seeing that politics should make the greatest liberty possible through the order it is intended to shape, it is necessary to limit the “legal framework to what is crucial for existence”. However, this also results in the “*separation of politics and ideology*” that is of fundamental importance. It is necessary to maintain this separation in the interest of liberty because politics is the area that is concerned with “what is common to all... with the interests of existence independent from the content of a belief.” People can understand each other in connection with these interests and give each other space on this basis – “through order, law, and contract”. However, the human compulsion “to consider one’s own lifestyle the only one that is valid, and perceive any existence that is not similar to his own as a kind of reproach” and, correspondingly, attempt to form the entire world in keeping with one’s personal concepts is problematic.³¹ Jaspers is therefore appropriately sceptical about ideological beliefs that have been increasingly forcing their way into the political area in recent times: “Ideological belief movements in politics are illiberal, because it is not possible to argue with religious fighters.”³² The ongoing significance of this lapidary evaluation cannot be stressed too strongly. In principle, it fundamentally reveals what makes any form of realistic politics, which still adheres to the separation from politics and ideology, impossible. This is contrary to the gnostic hopes of salvation implanted in politics and social life that know neither measure nor middle.³³ In the light of Jaspers’ ideas, the quintessence of a

31 Karl Jaspers: *Zum Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*. Kurt Salamun (ed.). Basel 2017, pp. 154–155.

32 Jaspers: *Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, p. 155.

33 See Norbert Bolz: Weder Maß noch Mitte. Wiederkehrende religiöse Hysterie. Wie die geistige Pandemie unserer Zeit den Weg in die Gnosisrepublik ebnet. In: *CATO* Nr. 6 (2020), pp. 32–36.

“conservative society” would be an “*ethos of communal life*”, which must always be kept in mind, without which freedom cannot be preserved and which bears the hallmark of the previously mentioned forms of civility and good manners in a broader sense: “A sense for forms and laws, natural humane manners, consideration and willingness to help, the constant observance of the rights of others, unfailing willingness to make compromises in questions of existence, no abuse of minorities.”³⁴

The moralisation of the discourse is also connected to an emotionalisation, especially in the sense of a sentimentalisation, that has developed a strong effect in modern society.³⁵ In contrast, it would be necessary to increase the responsibility of the state for being the objective guardian of formal morality while rejecting (in its representatives and authorities) playing a role in the spiral of moralisation and emotionalisation. Then, the state would also be able to make an essential contribution to a vigorous civil society in which, *fortiter in re*, as well as *suaviter in modo* – powerful in matter, pleasant and humane in manner – those matters that affect the lives of everyone in the state are dealt with. In the case of this state – insofar as it is meant to be the state of its citizens – it can only be one whose order is not oppressive and whose liberty is not licentious.

34 Jaspers: *Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, p. 156.

35 As in the impressive analysis in Digby Anderson/Peter Mullen (eds.): *Faking It. The Sentimentalisation of Modern Society*. London 1998.

A Community of Free and Responsible People

Bettina Rausch

The bourgeois revolutions of the 18th and 19th century provided the stimulus for a far-reaching new order of the understanding of state communities and the relationships between people and the state. Until that time, cohabitation had been defined by clear classifications of superiority and subordination. The elite – fundamentally, the aristocracy – formed the authority and determined the rules for cohabitation. The idea of the equality of all members of a political system was genuinely revolutionary. The ancient concept of the citizen was elitist – the famous claim of “civis romanum sum” (“I am a citizen of Rome”), with which one could insist on one’s rights, was reserved for a small minority of the people living in the Roman Empire.

Economic and social changes made the call for political change become increasingly louder. The intellectual inspiration was provided by the European philosophy of the Enlightenment. The fundamental concept was really revolutionary: The equality of all of the people in the state, independent of their rank or ancestry, combined with personal, political, and economic liberties that were valid for all. At the same time, stress was placed on the responsibility of each and every individual for a functioning state: The idea of a community of free and responsible people became established.

Why a civil society is necessary

A wide-ranging reflection and discussion on the fundamentals of the civil society in all its possible manifestations formed a central key subject at the Political Academy in the years 2020 and 2021. More than 230 years after the French Revolution, it seems

desirable to classify those ideas, which were revolutionary in their day and – as history shows – also successful, can be understood and lived in the present time. The Political Academy held discussions¹ and did fundamental research into the matter. The results are being presented in this volume and elsewhere.

As a people's party with liberal, conservative, and Christian-social roots, we are convinced that the widespread participation of all citizens is necessary for the stability and further development of a prospering national community. The current challenges – climate change, migration, and digitalisation – are a problem for society as a whole that will only be able to be solved if all those involved accept their joint responsibility.

Our Christian-humanistic concept of man serves as the point of departure for our investigation and analysis of the civil society. This has its origin in the concept that God created man in His own image and that all human beings are equal before God. This results in the human dignity that people – in contrast to things – enjoy. In the modern and constitutional sense, this is understood as meaning that all people have the same value, independent of their origin or other characteristics such as gender or age, seeing that they are all distinguished by a characteristic that is only given to humans: their dignity. The dignity of each individual person can neither be granted nor taken away by one's fellow beings or politics. It is an inherent characteristic of all citizens from the beginning to the end of their lives.

1 Cf. the transcripts of the highlights of the series of discussions on "Gesellschaftsvertrag im Wandel" (Social Contract in a Changing World) "Neue Bürgergesellschaft. Ein Staat, der die Bürger atmen lässt" (New Civil Society. A State that Allows its Citizens to Breathe) in this publication.

However, human dignity has long ceased to be a solely Christian concept. The philosophy of the Age of Enlightenment also pursued this idea; for example, Immanuel Kant used the term “human dignity” and defined it as “respect for the other and the principal equality of all humans”. Since 1948, the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” has stated that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” in Article I.

A modern concept of humanity of this kind conceives and thinks of citizens and the state on equal terms and assumes a relationship based on partnership. The sum of all citizens is greater than their individual components. In order to develop the individual and their talents optimally, a civil society recognises civil rights and civil responsibilities to the same extent.² Individual competences and intrinsically motivated involvement for the fellow human being and society are what makes a society that is vibrant and open feasible. In order to support the involvement of all citizens to the greatest extent possible, the state has the major responsibility of supporting associations, civil initiatives, and charitable organisations wherever it is necessary and whenever proactive civil involvement needs the helping hand of the state. Conservative politics, therefore, believes in societal free spaces for groups and individuals, and in the contribution of each and every citizen for a functioning society, while social-democratic parties mainly define themselves over a strong, paternalistic state that plans, organises, and monitors all areas of the citizens’ lives.

2 On the complicated relationship between rights and obligations, compare the recent book by the German publicist Richard David Precht: *Von der Pflicht. Eine Betrachtung*, Munich 2021. In it, Precht gives a vivid description of how the state needs solidary citizens and not egoistic consumers if it is to function well.

Christian-democratic and conservative parties understand the civil society as a community of free and responsible people living together in solidarity and subsidiarity on all levels. In societies of this kind, the individuals feel responsible for their fellow human beings and community. This demands a specific view of the world: Wherever it is possible for individuals, small groups, associations, or organisations to find solutions, they should do so. The institutions of the state consider themselves partners and guides and become active when a superordinate solution is better. In our view, this Christian-democratic self-conception guarantees a high level of personal and individual freedom, and that responsibility is not delegated to the state alone. Active citizens and an understanding of society provide the fundamental foundation, as well as a reliable framework, for these concepts.

Free and responsible

Philosophical and political enlightenment played a key role in shaping the fundamental modern perception of the free citizenry. From the time of the French Revolution to the present day, the achievements of the Enlightenment have continued to develop in Western democracies: Freedom of thought, speech, association, and religion; the right to education; the freedom to choose a profession, and the right to entrepreneurial freedom; the equality of men and women, as well as a ban on discriminating on the basis of ethnicity or sexual orientation, and many other factors have contributed to the modern understanding of the self in which the individual is able to live a life in freedom within the constitution of the state and achieve this through a variety of individual life plans. Naturally, this kind of life is not always without conflict, but equality before the law and the responsibility of the state to care for all people within society – and, if necessary, resolve disputes –

are considered to be the real strengths of the democratic constitutional state when compared with authoritarian systems.

It is difficult to pin down the limits of this modern concept of freedom in everyday life exactly. Where does my freedom end? Where does the freedom of others begin? And how is it possible to combine both in a way that encourages social cohesion and does not instigate – or even fuel – conflict or disunion? Kant the enlightener also wrote something illuminating about that: “The right is therefore the embodiment of the conditions under which the will of the one can be united with the will of the other according to a general law of freedom.”³ Broken down to the status of a familiar saying, this complicated quotation is usually translated in the following way: “One person’s freedom ends where another person’s freedom begins.” In order to locate, negotiate, and define these freedoms in a binding manner, state law is required. However, the state and society are more than just a common legal space that every form of social coexistence needs. As formulated by the renowned constitutional lawyer and judge Ernst-Wolfram Böckenförde, the liberal state of law lives from conditions that it cannot guarantee itself. Therefore, a political community and a functioning polity not only need a legal system, but also an individual’s awareness that each citizen is also a productive and necessary part of the state. The individual has to feel responsible for Austria and, in this way, develop active citizenship. In the history of political thought – as realised in several contributions to this compendium⁴ – many politicians and theoreticians have always recognised this aspect as being essential if democracy is to function. Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States of

3 Kant, Immanuel: *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*. Erster Teil, Einleitung in die Rechtslehre, § B Was ist Recht?, pp. 229-230.

4 Compare, in particular, the contributions by Simon Varga, Peter Kampitz, Alexander Bogner and Ernst Bruckmüller in this publication.

America, advocated the following: “Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people.”⁵ It is undisputed that a democracy – a government by the people – cannot function without active citizenship. Lincoln’s perspective is also inconceivable without the concept of responsibility. Freedom also always includes consideration for fellow human beings; without that, we would not be talking about freedom, but despotism and egoism. Today’s civil society is, according to Christopher Gohl, “not a space free of traditionally-understood civil activities and discourse about responsibility.” Gohl, who carries out research on the development and effect of values at the Global Ethics Institute of the Tübingen University, adds “that the execution of responsibility is a fundamental human need”⁶ In keeping with this approach, civil freedom is, of necessity, always connected with a double responsibility: towards oneself and one’s fellow human beings.

Subsidiarity and Solidarity as Cornerstones

“Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” These timeless words from the inauguration address of John F. Kennedy, the 35th president of the USA, cover the nature of the Christian-democratic understanding of politics. In one’s immediate surroundings, in the family, in the school, at work, in the association, in the neighbourhood, in the village, the district, in the city – in short, wherever it is necessary to pitch in voluntarily – lived subsidiarity benefits the community. The rather fuzzy concept of subsidiarity becomes understandable in concrete activity. Developing out of this mentality of “pitching in”, we also

5 Cf. Abraham Lincoln, The Gettysburg Address (Nov. 19, 1863), in: William E. Gienapp: *This Fiery Trial*, New York 2002.

6 Gohl, Christopher, *Bürgergesellschaft als politische Zielperspektive*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B6-7 / 2001, p. 9.

understand democracy as a form of government in which the legislators do not consider themselves the self-proclaimed “nannies” of the majority of the population. A conservative people’s party feels a responsibility for all levels and milieus. Whether it is the rural population or those existing in a Twitter bubble, a people’s party has to attract and address all groups of society living in different environments in an equal way. A party acting nationwide must also feel a responsibility for those people that the English political scientist David Goodhard refers to so felicitously as the “somewheres” (people tied to a location) and “anywheres” (the polyglot citizens of the world with changing places of residence). As a people’s party, our politics addresses all age groups and lifestyles – we do not exclude anyone. This also means that those social groups that influence the discourse, while ignoring the majority of the population but still aim at educating it, do not correspond with our concept of the free citizen. The “woke” movement, which is currently the subject of much discussion, is diametrically opposed to the value of individual responsibility. In this respect, we trust each citizen with being able to think independently, without subjecting themselves to the “guardians of public morals”.

Action instead of Words

In the Christian-democratic sense, solidarity always incorporates a position and concrete action and is not restricted to rhetorical declarations of intentions. Solidarity as a political device and comfortable position exhausts itself in “declaring itself solidary”. Seeing that this statement is not followed by any action, it remains theoretical. Something else that is just as comfortable and popular in the political discourse is to demand solidarity – from others or from the state. However, this misses the point of the term – solidarity cannot be ordered by the state but must be the result of

inner motivation.

What we experienced at the beginning of the corona crisis was solidarity – throughout the population – as concrete action stemming from an inner motivation. Any number of everyday activities – shopping for the neighbours, helping in the community, and many other things – were taken care of out of free will. The German sociologist Heinz Bude paraphrased this with the following questions: “What do you need?” and “What am I prepared to give so that we can lead a better life together?” Solidary behaviour is not born out of a moral obligation or guilty conscience, but out of its added value: Solidarity enriches the individual. People as social beings or political animals – to use Aristotle’s description – are dependent on their fellow beings.

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, solidarity manifested itself in concrete activities: Many of the federal government’s measures were followed even before they had been cast in legislation. A pandemic can be overcome through voluntariness and personal initiative, and not through bans and a subservient mentality. The paradox of the pandemic is that the simple slogan “Stay at home. Keep distance” stimulated a sense of community. Each individual contributed what he or she could – in keeping with one’s own possibilities and needs. The crisis also revealed that a preparedness for mutual assistance lies deep inside all of us. Correctly understood solidarity – and that should be one of the first lessons learned from this crisis – can help us overcome the eternal dilemma between freedom and security. Where people act in solidarity, they also act in freedom and promote security.

Humanity, personality, the principle of the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity all form the sustainable cornerstones of our understanding of society. These fundamental values also form

a practice-proven instrument for a functioning civil society in the field of conflict between freedom and responsibility. In our most recent, widely-discussed policy publication “Christlich-soziale Signaturen. Grundlagen einer politischen Debatte” (Christian-social Signatures. Bases for a Political Debate), we drew attention to the enduring relevance of Christian-social principles for politics and society and discussed the subject in a comprehensive, interdisciplinary manner. One perspective that remained constant was the central thesis that “Christian-social politics focuses on helping people help themselves – the combination of social solidarity with personal responsibility. Helping people help themselves demands affection and confidence.”⁷ Confidence in all citizens – in the sense of challenging and encouraging them – is, and remains, the central element of Christian-social politics. And this also includes freedom with regard to life – as a kind of twin sister.⁸

Holistic Concept of Work

A civil society has a broad understanding of the concept of work. On the one hand, the purpose of paid work should not only be to provide the economic security of one’s livelihood, but also as making a sensible and meaningful contribution to society. On the other hand, taking care of members of the family, bringing up children, doing voluntary work in associations, and accepting an honorary position, as well as everyday engagement in the community and personal environment, must also be recognised as making a sensible and meaningful contribution.

7 Rausch, Bettina: Grundlagen einer christlich-sozialen Politik in Rausch/Varga: Christlich-soziale Signaturen. Grundlagen einer politischen Debatte, p. 26.

8 Cf. *ibid.* p. 27.

All spheres of care work have something in common in the year 2021. A major part of these activities are still carried out by women and this structural inequality is not compatible with a modern understanding of equality. For us as a people's party, the value of partnership acts as the guiding principle in this area. In particular, the participation of fathers in the family is currently an important concern.

It is not possible to make an exact quantisation of the value of all these non-monetizable activities; and that is a good thing. Not every human activity can be measured and expressed in its monetary value. Much work of this kind is unpaid and has a bad reputation. This applies to housework, as one example, but activities of this kind are essential if a society is to function as it should and that is the reason that the role they play is so significant for the civil society. The voluntary and unpaid work in the family, in associations, and in the neighbourhood is mainly based on two valuable resources – trust and time.

Trust as a Key Category

Confidence and trust are key categories for (conservative) politics. And trust stands at the beginning of any political activity. The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann made the word “trust” seminal for the civil society debate. One needs trust for the reduction of a future of a more-or-less unknown complexity. Confidence in a party, a state, or an organisation is a prerequisite for both trust and mistrust. Any kind of engagement presupposes trust. A person who champions a particular philosophy, an association, or a good cause must, first of all, believe in it. Civil society involvement is particularly able to promote trust in institutions and the identification with the community. A functioning understanding of the state

that is founded on trust is dependent on participation: There can be no representatives, no political leaders, and no political structure if the citizens do not participate in elections.

A civil society in the modern sense lives from the participation of the citizens in the community as a whole. Active political participation and social engagement, gainful employment and work in the family, culture and sport, security and welfare – we all share the responsibility for these – and many more – things. Embracing these makes it possible for us to experience those freedoms that we consider a matter of course today. That is exactly what I understand as a community of free and responsible people.

The Civil Society and Artificial Intelligence – Trends and Challenges for Dealing with AI in the European Union

Julia Juen / Verena Ringler

Summary: Artificial intelligence (AI) is being increasingly used by the public institutions of democratic states to evaluate the performance of welfare services. Systems of this kind can organise administrative processes more efficiently; however, this goes hand in hand with risks, such as a lack of transparency and unequal treatment. First and foremost, the European civil society, as well as the EU as a supranational player, is challenged with calling for and creating the framework for the regulation of AI systems in order to be able to protect fundamental rights and civil liberties in the digital space in a consistent manner. For example, European AI activists and experts are demanding a public Automated Decision Making (ADM) register and comprehensive algorithm impact assessment to counter the problem of the lack of transparency in AI applications that are frequent today. There should be a compulsory educational programme for civil servants and politicians to enable the political decision makers and officials in the public sector to be able to assess the complete legal and social extent of AI applications. There is also a need for a wide range of educational offers to make it possible for the digital-political civil society to make a critical evaluation of AI applications. In practice, independent state and civic supervisory bodies could be set up to test and evaluate the development and implementation process of AI systems and serve as points of contact for the citizens.

1. Introduction

Today, artificial intelligence (AI), in the form of algorithms (formulas), machine learning, and the implementation of automated decision making (ADM), is omnipresent. These applications have a massive influence on all of us, as well as on our social coexistence. This is because, for many years now, the digital transformation has not been limited to the private sector. Public institutions are also resorting to ADM applications more frequently to evaluate the performances of welfare services. The implementation of systems of this kind can make administrative processes more efficient. However, this is accompanied by new risks, such as a lack of transparency and the possible limitation of social participation. This becomes particularly problematic when the citizens are unable to evade these kinds of decisions – and when they are also lacking the fundamental knowledge of the uses of AI.

What are the ethical demands that society as a whole places on the use of AI technologies? Which social goals are we following with these applications, and what are the purposes behind them? It is essential that these questions be thoroughly investigated and answered in the 21st century, and the European civil society is playing a fundamental role as a driving force behind the public discussion around this subject.¹

What are the effects that the implementation of AI systems will have on the protection of fundamental and civil rights in practice? Particularly in the states of the global North, AI systems, ADM products, and big data are being increasingly used to predict the behaviour of, identify, monitor, distinguish, and punish citizens,

1 Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on digital welfare states. A/74/48037, 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/2Es6y90> (21.09.2020).

as well as to determine targets. E-government tools, anticipatory police work, digital justice and immigration systems are increasingly becoming the norm and the digital social state is already reality in many countries.

Automated applications are justified with the argument that they increase the citizens' security and improve the provision of welfare. However, at the same time, the use of these technologies gives rise to ethical conflicts.²

The decisions of automated systems become critical, especially when the evaluation of an individual case deviates from the typical pattern. And it is precisely this aspect that is doubly problematic in the benefit system of the welfare state, seeing that it is often precisely these deviating individual cases that are most urgently in need of social support.³ Three concrete case examples from Austria, the Netherlands, and Great Britain make the chances and risks of these applications apparent.

2. Example Cases

2.1. Austria's AMS Algorithm

In 2019, it became known in Austria that, for financial reasons, the Austrian Public Employment Service – Arbeitsmarktservice (AMS) – intended to introduce an ADM product to categorise the unemployed, evaluate their chances on the labour market, and

2 Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on digital welfare states. A/74/48037, 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/2Es6y90> (21.09.2020).

3 Zweig, Katharina. A: Wo Maschinen irren können, Gütersloh 2018. In: <https://doi.org/10.11586/2018006> (21.09.2020).

decide on their entitlement to training measures on this basis.⁴ The decision was reached by an algorithm that integrated data such as gender, citizenship, occupational career, education, place of residence, health condition, and caregiving responsibilities.

Critical voices met the announcement with scepticism: The ADM product discriminated against women.⁵ The Austrian Ombud for Equal Treatment dealt with the case and the AMS subsequently justified the use of the ADM application.⁶ Within the framework of a study, the Technical University of Vienna declared that an assessment of the AMS algorithm was only partly possible due to a lack of transparency. This was because not all of the details of the planned AI application had been made public. However, it was clear that the variables that were to be used to illustrate the situation on the labour market were insufficient. At the same time, the Austrian basic regulation for data protection (DSGVO) would not be in effect, seeing that the application was an assistance system and not a fully automated decision-making instrument.⁷

In official examination proceedings, the Austrian data protection authorities prohibited the planned ADM application effective as of 2021. The legal basis for the implementation of the algorithm was missing. The matter has still not been settled: As of

4 Allhutter, D./ Cech, F./ Fischer, F./ Grill, G./ Mager, A.: Algorithmic Profiling of Job Seekers in Austria: How Austerity Politics Are Made Effective. *Frontiers in Big Data*, 2020, vol. 3, article 5. In: <https://bit.ly/3hRdiuM> (21.09.2020).

5 Szigetvari, András: Arbeitsmarktservice gibt grünes Licht für Algorithmus, 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/2HdRKf1> (21.09.2020).

6 Buchinger, Herbert: Answer to correspondence from the Ombud for Equal Treatment, dated 11.03.2019, Vienna 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/3mQVdRI> (21.09.2020).

7 Allhutter, D./ Cech, F./ Fischer, F./ Grill, G./ Mager, A.: Algorithmic Profiling of Job Seekers in Austria: How Austerity Politics Are Made Effective. *Frontiers in Big Data*, 2020, Vol 3, Article 5. In: <https://bit.ly/3hRdiuM> (21.09.2020).

autumn 2020, the AMS planned to file a complaint with the Federal Administrative Court.⁸

2.2. “SyRI” in the Netherlands

In 2014, a law was passed allowing the introduction of the big data analysis software “SyRI” (System Risk Analysis) in the Netherlands. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid) used the software to uncover possible benefit fraud, such as tax evasion or the unjustified receipt of housing assistance. This was made possible through the amalgamation of data records from various ministries. For example, tax data was compared with information on those who had received social support from the state, or details of place of residence compared with data from the naturalisation authorities. In addition, other data, such as the level of personal debts as well as information on the status of health insurance, were also included in the calculation. Based on this information, the software provided the risk profile of individuals. The system sounded an alarm if the person received assistance for an apartment in which he or she was not registered. The case was then checked, and the authority sent a controller to the suspected person. If benefit fraud was detected, the state assistance had to be refunded.⁹

Information about how the authorities used the data to help their decision making, and how accurately the algorithm worked, was never supplied. The justification for this lack of transparency

8 András, Szigetvari: Datenschutzbehörde kippt umstrittenen AMS-Algorithmus, 2020. In: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000119486931/datenschutzbehoerde-kiptt-umstrittenen-ams-algorithmus> (22.09.2020).

9 Braun, Ilja: Risikobürger. AlgorithmWatch 2018. In: <https://bit.ly/2ROuq9R> (21.09.2020).

was that information on how the software functioned could lead to further benefit fraud. There was the danger that people could use it to “outsmart” the system, which would have further increased the problem and hindered the containment of social fraud.¹⁰

In 2018, several civic organizations and two private individuals instituted legal proceedings against the Netherlands and the use of “SyRI”. The claimants were of the opinion that the use of the system abused human rights, especially the right to privacy (European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) Art. 8). In addition, suspects were not able to exercise their right to object seeing that they were not aware of the application of the system and the process of decision making was completely lacking in transparency.¹¹

The UN Special Rapporteur for Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Philip Alston, also became aware of the matter. In an amicus brief that the court in The Hague (Rechtbank Den Haag) considered in its judgement of the case, Alston expressed his concern over the use of “SyRI” and the abuses of human rights associated with it. The amalgamation of data from various authorities was highly problematic in connection with the right to privacy (ECHR, Art. 8) – especially considering the fact that the software used made the processes involved and decision making completely opaque. After “SyRI” had been introduced in the year 2014, it was used exclusively in low-income areas where the majority of the population were people with a migration background or from ethnic minorities. The implementation of “SyRI” had a stigmatising and discriminating effect on all those who lived in areas that

10 Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment: Reply, dated 08.03.2017, to the question on the freedom of information by the Bij voorbaat verdacht organisation.

11 Court in Den Haag. Judgement of 05.02.2020. C-09-550982-HA ZA 18-388. In: <https://bit.ly/35Tedb1> (21.09.2020).

were generally thought of as problem regions and poor neighbourhoods. The problem was aggravated by the fact that, although the use of the programme was founded on a legislative basis, there had never been a corresponding debate in parliament and the media. On 5 February 2020, the judgement handed down by the court in The Hague forbade the continued use of “SyRI”. The use of the software was clearly in breach of human rights. A balance between combatting fraud in the interest of economic wellbeing and the preservation and protection of privacy was not given; the implementation of the software was therefore not proportionate, and the legislation on “SyRI” was declared unlawful and non-binding.¹²

2.3. School Marks in Great Britain

ADM applications are also being increasingly used in the school and university sector.¹³ The most recent example of this comes from Great Britain. Due to the corona crisis, British pupils were not able to take their GSCE and A-level exams in the summer of 2020. The responsible authority, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), decided to make use of an algorithm for giving marks. The goal was to prevent an “inflation” of best marks. An estimated mark given by the responsible teacher, as well as the average marks of the specific school from the previous years, was used as the basis for the calculation.

The result: The algorithm downgraded around 40 per cent of the marks when compared with those given by the teachers. This

12 Court in Den Haag. Judgement of 05.02.2020. C-09-550982-HA ZA 18-388. In: <https://bit.ly/35Tedb1> (21.09.2020).

13 Special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights: Report of the Special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on digital welfare states. A/74/48037, 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/2Es6y90> (21.09.2020).

led to a number of students losing their chance of getting a place at university.

The uproar among the pupils and teachers' representatives followed soon thereafter. Some demanded the resignation of the Conservative Education Minister Gavin Williamson. However, he defended the system and stated that Ofqual had held extensive consultations with the schools and colleges before its introduction. In addition, the authority was accused of using an algorithmic noting system that favoured students from state schools less than those from private schools.¹⁴

The government finally backpedalled in mid-August. The results of the A-levels were altered to correspond with the teachers' evaluations. However, the new "problem" was that the tendentially better marks could lead to a run on university places. This is now presenting British universities with great challenges in connection with personnel and capacities.¹⁵

3. European and national institutions between market efficiency and human rights

This shows that the use of ADM products in the public sector can be problematic and possibly have a negative effect on the social participation of individuals and groups of people. In Western democracies, this makes a debate among society as a whole

14 Mari, Eccles / Cristina, Gallardo: UK government faces elitism row after algorithm downgrades pupils, 2020. In: <https://www.politico.eu/article/uk-government-faces-elitism-row-after-algorithm-downgrades-final-year-pupils/> (25.09.2020).

15 BBC News: A-levels and GCSEs: How did the exam algorithm work?, 2020. In: <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53807730> (25.09.2020).

necessary in order to come to grips with this new – and highly volatile – field at an early stage and in a manner that is both transparent and inclusive. It is also essential that the question of the ethical requirements that need to be placed on the development, implementation, and use of ADM systems for the future use of this technology be answered. To make this discourse possible, the protagonists in the civil society – who are much further advanced than countries and enterprises in many aspects of this matter – must provide a sketch of those framework conditions that could subsequently be developed by the EU and national governments.

Why does the EU play such a central role in the field of AI? As a supranational player, it can create norms and parameters in the internal, as well as global, sphere. The regulation of AI on the EU level is absolutely essential because only the harmonisation of the relevant areas will make fair intra-European competition possible and prevent the potential division of the single market.¹⁶ At the same time, the EU must ensure that all kinds of digitalisation serve democracy and the rule of law, and that the fundamental rights and freedoms are also consistently guaranteed and observed in the digital sphere.

At the very latest, the EU – and especially the European Commission (EC) – became aware of its international power in setting norms and standards when the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which has played a global role as an exemplary model, came into effect.¹⁷ In order to organise the AI regulation discourse in a people-centred way over the long term, the EC established a “High Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence”

16 Bradford, Anu: *The Brussels Effect. How the European Union Rules the World*. New York 2020.

17 Schwartz, Paul M.: *Global data privacy: The EU way*. *New York University Law Review*, 2019, 94, pp. 771–818.

(HLEG AI) in 2018. 52 authorities from the spheres of industry, science and the civil society were named experts and given the responsibility of formulating recommendations that the HLEG AI then summarised in the document “The Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence”¹⁸ in 2018.

The EC released an AI white paper showing a possible regulatory framework in 2020. It was intended to follow a risk-based approach. For example, the EC considered the application of AI in the areas of medicine, staff recruitment, police, and traffic to be high-risk, seeing that typical activities in these fields could lead to considerable legal consequences and/or disadvantages for individuals and enterprises. Systems which fell into this category would have to be transparent and placed under human supervision. Voluntary labelling, along with the valid legal regulations, could provide a possible regulatory framework for other applications. Enterprises could oblige themselves to adhere to the criteria that distinguish “trustworthy” AI with a seal of approval. Furthermore, the regulation of AI should be in accordance with the regulations compiled by the HLEG AI, meaning that sets of data that were used to train algorithmic systems should be sufficiently varied to avoid discriminatory results. Finally, systems that were not developed in Europe should be re-recorded and “trained” with European data before being introduced into, and used in, the EU. The EC is now having a series of private and civil feedback sessions flow into the white paper in preparation for a legislative proposal for the regulation of AI; this was still ongoing at the end of 2020.¹⁹

18 European Commission: High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, 2019. In: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/high-level-expert-group-artificial-intelligence> (26.09.2020).

19 European Commission: WHITE PAPER On Artificial Intelligence – A European approach to excellence and trust. COM(2020) 65 final, 2020. In: <https://bit.ly/2RLCY18> (21.09.2020).

4. List of demands from the digital-political civil society and universities

Seen from the perspective of the active civil society, what are the demands that need to be placed on this process— especially in connection with policy recommendations – as well as concrete measures in the specialist, as well as broader, area in the EU and national states?

Recommendations for legislative and educational policy measures will be dealt with in the following section. The basis for this is formed by personal statements by experts, as well as dozens of reports by leading specialists and civic actors in the field of digital policy. This leads to a broad catalogue of demands for the regulation of ADM in the public sector.

Measure 1: Algorithmic Impact Assessment (AIA)

In the eyes of the digital-political civil society, it is important that these systems are made verifiable before being implemented, seeing that the decisions made by automated systems in public institutions have long- and short-term impacts on the lives of individuals and society in general. Algorithmic Impact Assessment (AIA) provides one possibility for doing this.²⁰

At the beginning of an impact assessment, it is necessary to ask the question about what the exact duties and decision-making

²⁰ accessnow: Human rights in the age of Artificial Intelligence, 2018. In: <https://bit.ly/33P4fFz> (21.09.2020); AI Now: AI Now 2019 Report, New York 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/32Q3tZJ> (21.09.2020); Council of Europe: Draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on human rights impacts of algorithmic systems, 2018. In: <https://bit.ly/33Nkgfj> (21.09.2020).

functions of AI systems are. It is important that the civil society participate in this process to reflect social values and understand public opinion.²¹ Once these areas have been precisely defined, the responsible institution should provide an exact description and definition of the planned AI system as the next step. Then, an internal impact assessment would be performed, followed by the rapid publication of information and preliminary results. These should at least include the purpose, scope, guidelines for use, and potential effects on society as a whole, as well as on individual people. In practice, it is often the case that the results of impact assessments only reflect the effects on the dominant group in a society and that minorities are overlooked. However, if the process is completely transparent and understandable, endangered social groups can become proactive and involved in finding fair solutions.²²

The evaluation of the system by independent experts is another central component of an AIA. Should the internal evaluation be insufficient, external audits can be resorted to for the identification of possible faults and risks. It is important to include the civil society, but it would not be sensible to assume that everybody has the necessary expertise. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that the public has the possibility to come into contact and exchange ideas with external auditors.²³

21 Floridi, L./ Cowl, J./ Beltrametti, M./ Chatila, R./ Chazerand, P./ Dignum, V./ Luetge, C./ ... Vayena, E.: AI4People—An Ethical Framework for a Good AI Society: Opportunities, Risks, Principles, and Recommendations. *Minds & Machines*, 2018, 28, pp. 689–707.

22 Datenethikkommission der Bundesregierung. Gutachten der Datenethikkommission der Bundesregierung, Berlin 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/3kEYH7r> (21.09.2020).

23 European Parliamentary Research Service: A governance framework for algorithmic accountability and transparency, Brussels 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/32Stjwd> (21.09.2020).

The implementation of AIAs would make it possible for ethical concerns, such as transparency, fairness, and accountability, to be honoured and anchored in a legally binding process. The concept of an evaluation of potential damage through a risk-based regulatory approach as recommended by the EC in the AI white paper and German Commission on Data Ethics could also be implemented through AIAs.²⁴

Measure 2: A Public European ADM Register

In order to proactively inform the civil society of those areas in which ADM products are implemented, there should be a publicly accessible ADM register on the EU level including – at least – the following information:

- The purpose for which the system will be employed (information on those decisions that will be automated)
- Where the system was developed (internally or externally)
- The data used in decision making
- Technical data and software (the decision-making model used and the logic it follows)

Transparency is important, but it must also be ensured that the processing operations and information be comprehensible for lay-people. Only in this way can civil-society participation, autonomy,

²⁴ European Commission: WHITE PAPER On Artificial Intelligence – A European approach to excellence and trust. COM(2020) 65 final, 2020. In: <https://bit.ly/2RLCY18> (21.09.2019).

and accountability be guaranteed.²⁵ The accessibility to information is also essential for the work of those civil-society organisations that deal with the implementation and impact of AI and ADM products. The free access to information allows watchdog organisations to uncover potential defects and support citizens to make use of their right to object.²⁶

Measure 3: State and Civil-Society Supervision

AIAs and public registers can make transparency and civil-society participation possible. However, the best AIA will fail to fulfil its purpose if there are no independent supervisory and testing bodies to oversee the development, implementation, and application of AI systems. It is important that this supervision not only take place on the EU and/or national level, but also on the civil-society (through NGOs) and individual level. The governmental supervision of ADM systems is usually organised sector wide. For example, there are supervisory bodies for the finance sector, banking sector (credit scoring), and traffic sector (autonomous driving). This context-related appraisal is important; however, an overseeing body with the competence to evaluate and understand the complete impact of ADM applications is also necessary.²⁷ The testing of AIAs for the rejection or approval of proposed ADM applications would also fall within the area of responsibility of

25 AlgorithmWatch: Automating Society – Taking stock of automated decision-making in the EU, 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/3cokkFX> (21.09.2020); Spielkamp, Matthias: Sitzung der Enquete-Kommission für Künstliche Intelligenz. Wie algorithmische Entscheidungssysteme reguliert werden können, 2020. In: <https://bit.ly/2FU3Dq6> (21.09.2020).

26 Krüger, Julia / Lischka Konrad: Damit Maschinen den Menschen dienen, Gütersloh 2018. In: <https://bit.ly/3mJGS96> (21.09.2020).

27 AlgorithmWatch: Automating Society – Taking stock of automated decision-making in the EU, 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/3cokkFX> (21.09.2020).

the supervisory body, as would the investigation of any suspicion of legal infringements. A state supervisory body should act as an interface between the state and civil society where it would be possible for the citizens to present their grievances and make use of their right to object.²⁸ Civil-society supervision is just as important as governmental. On the one hand, civil-society organisations make interaction among the state, economy, and private individuals possible, and on the other, they act as important points of contact for citizens. They fulfil a function as participation platforms and, in this way, guarantee the preservation of democratic values and social justice.²⁹ Civil-society advisory committees for state authorities are one method for representing the interests of the civil society appropriately recommended by the Data Ethics Commission.³⁰ If civil-society supervision is to become possible, it is necessary that NGOs be given the necessary financial and legal power to act as watchdog organisations.³¹ It is through their work that problems and wrongdoing are frequently discovered. It is therefore important for NGOs to be proactively integrated into policy processes.³²

28 Council of Europe: Draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on human rights impacts of algorithmic systems, 2018. In: <https://bit.ly/33Nkgfj> (21.09.2020); European Parliamentary Research Service: A governance framework for algorithmic accountability and transparency, Brussels 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/32Stjwd> (21.09.2020).

29 Meyer, Michael / Simsa, Ruth: NPOs: Abgrenzung, Definitionen, Forschungszugänge. In: Badelt, Christoph / Meyer, Michael / Simsa, Ruth. (eds.) Handbuch der Nonprofit-Organisation. Strukturen und Management, 2013, pp. 3–14.

30 Datenethikkommission der Bundesregierung. Gutachten der Datenethikkommission der Bundesregierung, Berlin 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/3KEYH7r> (21.09.2020).

31 Beining, Leonie: Wie Algorithmen verständlich werden, Berlin 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/3i1Ckrf> (21.09.2020).

32 Krüger, Julia / Lischka Konrad: Damit Maschinen den Menschen dienen, Gütersloh 2018. In: <https://bit.ly/3mJGS96> (21.09.2020).

Measure 4: Capacity Building – Training for Politics and the Civil Service

We also need a number of concrete measures in the area of capacity building in the multidisciplinary field of AI. In order for political decision makers, employees in the public sector, and diplomats to understand the total impact of algorithmic decisions, it is necessary to provide training measures to foster digital competences and a fundamental understanding for dealing responsibly with AI and ADM applications. The staff working in ministries and public institutions must understand the role that the daily decisions made by automated systems play in the personal, social, and economic life of citizens. Educational offers, which not only convey technical and digital competence, but simultaneously enable them to apply the social, legal, and ethical dimensions of ADM to their own work context and evaluate ADM systems critically, are also needed.³³

33 AlgorithmWatch: Automating Society – Taking stock of automated decision-making in the EU, 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/3cokkFX> (21.09.2020); European Parliamentary Research Service: A governance framework for algorithmic accountability and transparency, Brussels 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/32Stjwd> (21.09.2020); Floridi, L./ Cowls, J./ Beltrametti, M./ Chatila, R./ Chazerand, P./ Dignum, V./ Luetge, C./ ... Vayena, E.: AI4People—An Ethical Framework for a Good AI Society: Opportunities, Risks, Principles, and Recommendations. *Minds & Machines*, 2018, 28, pp. 689–707; Franke, Ulrike: Harnessing Artificial Intelligence. Berlin: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/3mJbOGE> (21.09.2020); HLEG AI: Policy and investment recommendations for trustworthy AI, Brussels 2019. In <https://bit.ly/300f6vh> (21.09.2020); Đorđe Krivokapić / Michael Oghia: Die digitale Welt als Verbündete der Demokratie. In: ERSTE Foundation (ed.), *The ERSTE Foundation Tipping Point Talks. Possibility I Audacity*, Vienna 2020. pp. 4-74. In: <https://bit.ly/3cm7iZD> (21.09.2020); Ringler, Verena: Transkript der Pressekonferenz Digitale Technologien regulieren: EU als Vorreiter oder Nachzügler?. *Presseclub Concordia*, Vienna 2019.

Measure 5: Basic Digital Education in Schools

Digital competences that make it possible for citizens to also enjoy their fundamental rights in the digital world are required in the digital age. Digital competence is especially important when people are not able to avoid ADM decisions, such as those made to calculate welfare payments or in the case of exercising public authority through anticipatory police work. A lack of digital competence can massively limit the capacity to act and participate in the public dialogue through the use of systems of this kind and therefore represents a threat to democratic values. In the ideal case, digital education would be a fixed component of all curricula; it would not be limited to the technical/scientific field, but also thematise ethical and human-centred activity in connection with the use of technology.³⁴ While basic digital education is being increasingly offered as an optional course in Austria, the subject is still not dealt with satisfactorily in the regular curriculum.

34 AI Now: The AI Now 2016 Report, New York 2016. In: <https://bit.ly/2RQZXrQ> (21.09.2020); AlgorithmWatch: Automating Society – Taking stock of automated decision-making in the EU, 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/3cokkFX> (21.09.2020); AlgorithmWatch: Atlas der Automatisierung. Automatisierte Entscheidungen und Teilhabe in Deutschland. Berlin, 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/2ROuKW7> (21.09.2020); Beining, Leonie: Wie Algorithmen verständlich werden, Berlin 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/3i1Ckrf> (21.09.2020); Council of Europe: Draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on human rights impacts of algorithmic systems, 2018. In: <https://bit.ly/33Nkgfj> (21.09.2020); DIGITALEUROPE: Recommendations on AI Policy. Towards a sustainable & innovation-friendly approach, Brussels 2018. In: <https://bit.ly/3iYAR68> (21.09.2020); European Parliamentary Research Service: A governance framework for algorithmic accountability and transparency, Brussels 2019. In: <https://bit.ly/32Stjwd> (21.09.2020); European Commission: WHITE PAPER On Artificial Intelligence – A European approach to excellence and trust. COM(2020) 65 final, 2020. In: <https://bit.ly/2RLCY18> (21.09.2020).

Measure 6: Basic Digital Education in Adult Education

The increase in digitalisation has led to the danger of the social gaps existing between the young and older generations becoming even wider. This potential problem can be addressed with informal and non-formal educational programmes so that all generations can learn the necessary skills needed to confront the challenges of the digital world.³⁵

Finland provides a model example: The Finnish government is of the opinion that all citizens should have a basic understanding of AI. In 2018, the University of Finland – in collaboration with the Reaktor technology enterprise – introduced the “Elements of AI” educational programme. The goal is to familiarise as many people as possible with the fundamental concept, types of application, and effects of AI. So far, 400,000 participants from 170 countries have registered for the free course. The course has been offered in Germany since 2019 and should soon be made available in all the languages of the EU.³⁶

Educational offers are the key to allowing the population to keep up with the digital transformation taking place. Competence in the area of education is principally in the hands of the member states and not the EU itself. However, it is still important that the EU become involved in the discussion, support activities on the national level, and make transnational communication possible.³⁷ With this in mind, the EC compiled the “Digital Education Action

35 Ibid.

36 Elements of AI: Webpage of Elements of AI. Education project of the University of Helsinki and Reaktor, 2020. In <https://www.elementsofai.com/> (21.09.2020).

37 HLEG AI: Policy and investment recommendations for trustworthy AI, Brussels 2019. In <https://bit.ly/300f6vh> (21.09.2020).

Plan” that comprises eleven actions on the development of digital competences in the area of education.³⁸

5. Conclusion

The digital world is not restricted by national borders, and therefore, transnational groups from the civil society, as well as the EU as a supranational player, are called on to set priorities and propel actions for the regulation of ADM in the public sector.

Recently, the EU has placed a stronger focus on the regulation of artificial intelligence. Although the behaviour of the EU in the field of digital politics still does not make a historically relevant classification possible, three trends can be observed:

- 1 The EU is now paying attention to its influence and taking it seriously.
- 2 Today, the EU recognises the sphere of conflict between fundamental rights and freedoms on the one hand, and the interests of the single market on the other.
- 3 However, the EU continues to see its role as a policy actor mainly as a representative of the single market, while fundamental rights and socio-political aspects are treated as subordinate fields of interest.

Legislative and educational measures are required to come to grips with the risks and problems that accompany ADM applications. The problem of a lack of transparency can be addressed

³⁸ Europäische Kommission: Aktionsplan für digitale Bildung, 2018. In: <https://bit.ly/33fTBG> (21.09.2020).

through an openly-accessible ADM register. To guarantee social participation in the development and implementation process, evaluations in the form of algorithmic impact assessments are required. In the ideal case, these assessments will be evaluated by independent supervisory bodies both on the state and civil-society level. The digital transformation of our society demands digital competence. Citizens' councils offer a possibility to guarantee that the civil society has a say. NGOs must be financially supported if they are to fulfil their function as watchdog organisations. Educational programmes are required to ensure that political decision makers and employees in the public sector understand the complete ethical, social, and economic scope of algorithmic decisions. When preparing draft legislation, people from various professions should collaborate to define the system-wide effects, as well as the possibilities and limitations, of technical feasibility.

Independent of age and level of education, programmes for the entire society are essential to enable citizens to understand algorithmic decisions and critically question them. Digital competences are required to enable an active citizenry and participation.

To summarise, it is necessary to bear in mind that the development of any kind of AI application is connected to the massive consumption of raw materials. Therefore, the subordinate goal must be a holistic regulatory approach that focuses on the protection of our ecosystem, our fundamental rights and freedoms, and our democratic values. This is both a mission and a responsibility for the digital-political and cross-border active civil society – especially within the EU.



Civil virtues – case studies

Civil Society: Key Activities of the Political Academy

In May 2020, the Political Academy of the People’s Party held a series of discussions on the theoretical understanding of a modern civil society. The experts taking part presented their thoughts on the concepts of the state, citizen, society, individual responsibility, freedom, and solidarity in a number of interviews and two online discussions. The impulses they provided were then compiled to answer the question: How can the state, as well as society, strengthen the civil society?

To open the campaign month, the freedom researcher Ulrike Ackermann discussed the fundamental division of roles between the state and society with the political scientist Michael Borchard, and the jurist Andreas Janko, under the title “Social Contracts in a Changing World”. The experts consider the freedom of the individual to be the most important foundation for independent action. The philosophy of the Enlightenment, Europe’s Christian tradition and the resulting emancipation of the individual, resulted in a permanent struggle between the political and economic liberty of the individual and the state and the common good. As a result, fundamental rights and freedoms were established, as well as a diversified political system that can make rapid, autonomous activity difficult. The experts saw potentials for strengthening civil commitment in the areas of communal and family policies, a reduction of bureaucracy, and in the education system.

The second discussion, entitled “The New Civil Society”, was intended to provide ideas for how a flourishing civil society might look in the future. The discussion was held between the manager of the Austrian Fundraising Association Günther Lutschinger, and

the political scientist Werner Patzelt. The point of departure for their dialogue was given by John F. Kennedy's famous statement: "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country".

Lutschinger sees a tradition of separation between the citizen and state in Austrian history. On the one hand, the state is regarded as a service centre while, on the other, civil participation is considered to be a private matter. A change in perspective is necessary. Patzelt considers understanding the common good as one's own responsibility as a prerequisite for independent, solidary action – he identifies this characteristic as patriotism. Solidarity and personal responsibility should emanate from the individual and not be prescribed by the state.

The two events were moderated by Martina Tiwald and transcripts of sections from the discussion are printed on the following pages. Additional material can be found under: <https://politische-akademie.at/de/aktuelles/buergergesellschaft-landingpage>

The Social Contract in Change

Michael Borchard / Ulrike Ackermann / Andreas Janko

Summary: On 5 May 2020, Ulrike Ackermann, Head of the John Stuart Mill Institute for Freedom Research; Michael Borchard, Head of Scientific Services at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation; and Andreas Janko, Deputy Institute Head at the Johannes Kepler University in Linz, held an online discussion on the topicality of the social contract as the first event in an information series on “Impulses on the Civil Society” organised by the Political Academy in Vienna. The following provides a summary of some of the most interesting passages.

Question: Is it still possible for us to fully comprehend the idea of the social contract today, or would you say: “The concept is outdated; we have to start somewhere else.”?

Michael Borchard: It’s always nice to be able to start off with a personal anecdote. I have one about Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As a young man, I visited the GDR quite often; I was in East Berlin and what did you do with the money you had? You invested it in books or records. And I went to a bookshop in East Berlin – it was on Alexanderplatz – and bought a book: Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s “The Social Contract”. That wasn’t such a bad idea, but the problem was the long, drawn-out introduction by a professor of Marxist-Leninism, whose name I have since forgotten, who explained why Jean-Jacques Rousseau was – and had remained – so important for the GDR. Since I was initially caught off-guard, I had mixed feelings for a long time and had really great difficulties with the negative effects, the criticism, the sharp criticism, Jean-Jacques Rousseau made of property – or should we say, exaggerated property; “luxury” was the word he used.

But there can be no doubt that it is to his great credit that he coined the concept of the “sovereignty of the people”. Even though he himself took a critical stance on the representative democracy of the Anglo-Saxon variety, it is naturally also the prerequisite for what we all hold in such high esteem; and that is quite simply this representative democracy. And there is one passage that I especially admire him for. There is one subject that we always see in the *Social Contract*, but it is even more pronounced in “*Émile*”, his treatise on education. I believe it would be a good idea to once again take a look at what Jean-Jacques Rousseau had to say about schooling and education.

For me, this creates something of a bridge to the subject of the civil society that we will talk about later on. He provided a very convincing answer to the question of how a person can be “free for good”: Education is a prerequisite if one is to obtain this enlightened insight of what is publicly offered – and here, this is “education for a sense of community feeling”, as he called it; education to social order through the formation of a social conscience. I don’t think that anyone would seriously say that that is not an outstanding, an important, characteristic; and that applies to the social contract as well. I would like to cling closely to that, to education. I feel that that is a genuinely important matter.

Coming back to his express objection on the matter of property – I believe that was something that he basically misunderstood: He also had a negative and rather critical opinion of the Industrial Revolution that was implied there. I find that much too pessimistic; I truly believe that prosperity can have an effect that increases freedom as long as – maybe in the sense of the social market economy – you are able to prevent the excesses. In that respect, I could imagine bringing Jean-Jacques Rousseau together with Walter Eucken and Müller-Armack, and some others for a

virtual, theoretical conversation where they would be able to discuss the idea of the social market economy. And then, I imagine that that could lead to something. I find a quotation that he made himself quite wonderful; you see that he often contradicted himself in his studies. Later he said: “When we talk about the Social Contract, those who claim that they understand it completely are smarter than I am. That is a book that needs to be written again, but I neither have the strength nor the time.”

Question: How do you understand Rousseau’s thoughts on the social contract, with his plan of the *contrat social*, to what extent is there a connection, and what can no longer be used to an advantage today?

Ulrike Ackermann: What I find extremely problematic is that all of the citizens were expected to submit themselves to the *volonté générale*. Rousseau had an idea of the ideal state and wanted virtuous citizens, brought up to be virtuous, who would integrate voluntarily, but (and this is something Mr Borchard has already mentioned) would practice a form of direct popular government, so to say. That means that there would be no principle of representation, and no protection for minorities, but forced unity, forced standardisation, and – of course – that goes against all of the liberal principles imaginable.

It is no coincidence that Robespierre – during the French Revolution – expressly referred to Rousseau in the course of Jacobin rule. Naturally, the French Revolution helped us all and made great progress – the constitution, etcetera, etcetera, the Declaration of Human Rights, we are all aware of those things. Political freedom was victorious, but the Revolution ultimately turned into a moral crusade and reign of terror, always in connection with direct popular rule and virtue.

It is also no coincidence that, later, modern dictators – including Stalin and the Russian revolutionaries – also referred to Rousseau. Mr Borchard, that is naturally the reason that you immediately found that book in a shop in the GDR. That is a legacy that we should recall in an extremely critical fashion. It was a step, a step in the history of ideas. I do not want to call some of Rousseau's ideas that were important for the history of freedom into question, but his concept of the *volonté générale* that all would be subjected to is profoundly illiberal and overlooks individual freedom, while making political freedom absolute, and that is also illiberal.

Question: In retrospect, what is it necessary to know today from the history of ideas to enable us to introduce the concept of freedom into a debate in a serious manner?

Ulrike Ackermann: Possibly the most important thing is that, when we speak about freedom, we are dealing with political freedom, with economic freedom, and with individual freedom. We have the Greeks, the polis, to thank for political freedom; there was the “first citizen” and the very beginning of the constitutional state in which political affairs were dealt with collectively, and all citizens were equal before the law. That was a very significant starting point and actually the birth of political freedom. This was followed by the Romans who further developed civil law. We possibly remember Cicero; he introduced the concept of the “persona”, an important element for the development of the concept of the “individuum”, the understanding of the individuum, and the increasing esteem for the individuum. The idea of equality before God in the Judeo-Christian religions is actually also a start in this direction.

And this went further in the Renaissance, where faith turned into knowledge, the Renaissance when, as Nietzsche once said, the individual was finally unleashed. That was the age of discoveries,

the age of education, free cities – a boom in trade, and a period of great change, the birth of humanism, the strengthening of the bourgeoisie, and the liberation of the individual from the estate-based society of the Middle Ages. The Reformation came after this, the secularisation process and the Age of Enlightenment, the questioning of old authorities and the actual emergence of the civil society. This was followed by the popular revolutions; they began in England, and we have the first democratic constitution in America, the Declaration of Independence of 1776, the French Revolution. And individual freedom gradually came into being alongside the development of political and economic freedom. Individual freedom was given a particular boost in the Romantic period. Today, we have the rule of law in liberal democracies, we have constitutions that protect individual rights and liberties, we have functioning democratic institutions and processes, we have citizen participation, and – at the same time – civil societies and social regulations that have been created over the centuries. Norbert Elias, the amazing sociologist, provides a magnificent description of this in his history of civilisation. In this emancipatory process, there was always a struggle among the common good, the state (that wanted to protect its citizens but also took away, and gave them, their rights), individual liberty, and economic and political freedom, which have frequently grated against each other. And an unbelievable network of norms, morals, and customs, which are subject to permanent processes of change, and have made processes of individualisation possible in the first place, developed out of these processes.

Therefore, this history of liberty, beginning with the Greeks and the polis, brought people an increasing amount of freedom, emancipation from bondage, emancipation from power relations, and the severing of ties with the authorities. And precisely in the modern era, there is a development that the church and the state are no

longer the absolute sources of identity as used to be the case – the church, the king, or the state – but that this is now in the hands of the citizens and that they can establish their own identity. And it is a matter of finding a balance in community life, in a community spirit with other citizens and the realisation of individual freedom, of the plurality of lifestyles, that we have to be thankful to this modern age for. And it is precisely this stabilisation and balance of what makes up the common good, and what is individual freedom, and how we protect our political community that repeatedly experiences a crisis. That is the challenge for the future.

Question: This historical process is also reflected juridically and, to a certain extent, also understood in a juristic-constitutional sense. How can we imagine that; what are the key points without which it is impossible to have a discussion on liberty today?

Andreas Janko: The Enlightenment and the following years were marked by the constitutional struggle; by the fight for a constitution, binding authorities – the absolute monarch – to the relevant stipulations, to the relevant obligations. And of course, this constitutional struggle was ultimately also a struggle for securing fundamental rights. In Austria (if we want to deal with our situation, one of the first high points in this discussion occurred in 1848 – the year of the Revolution – with the first draft constitution (the *Kremsier Draft*), as well as a truly comprehensive catalogue of civil rights. As we know, this was followed by a phase of neo-absolutism and then – in 1867, with the December Constitution, at the very latest – genuine civil rights became anchored in one of the five constitutional laws passed at the time. Naturally, it is necessary to bear in mind that this discussion in the 19th century was one that was also strongly influenced by liberalism, very strongly influenced by individual liberty and free spaces, and – naturally – that can also be found in our catalogue of fundamental rights.

The 1867 fundamental rights are referred to in jurisprudence as classical civil liberties; liberal rights that give the individual freedom from interference by the state – and especially the sovereign state. That is naturally only one facet of liberty – and it was described splendidly by Mrs Ackermann. There was still not very much activity in the area of political liberties at the time; they were still in their infancy. It is true to say that it was not until 1920 that the political right of participation for all, and the principle of equality for all in the political participation process, became firmly cemented – also constitutionally. As we can see, here in Austria we are also very firmly within this representative-democratic model. That means, we have hardly any participation rights in the sense of direct democracy. The referendums that are held are more-or-less mainly for the self-affirmation of those in power, if they want it with a majority, and that is why they hardly ever take place. That is a discussion that has been rehashed again and again in recent years. There is still quite a lot to be done – in the direction of the civil society, but especially from the political side.

And finally, guarantees are a completely different subject when dealing with fundamental rights: guarantees for action on the part of the state, the idea that the state must actively do something, must actively do something positive to make it possible for the citizens to exercise their basic civil rights in the first place – in the sense of protection and guarantee obligations – or even in the fundamental social rights in the sense of services of the state that are not only *de facto* (we are aware that we have been living in a directive and welfare state for decades) but also constitutionally guaranteed – in the form of fundamental social rights. That is a matter that was also highly controversial in Austria in 1920 and actually led to no Austrian catalogue of civil rights being developed in that year and the catalogue from 1867 actually being perpetuated to the present day. Although basic social rights meet with a certain degree of approval

in modern catalogues – the most recent example is the European Charter of Fundamental Rights – you can see that there is still a lot of catching up to be done. And we know that, without these social safeguards, freedom is not worth what we actually expect of it.

The “New Civil Society”: A State that Gives its Citizens Space to Breathe

Werner J. Patzelt / Günther Lutschinger

Summary: On 28 May 2020, the German political scientist Werner J. Patzelt and the Director of the Austrian Fundraising Association Günther Lutschinger discussed new forms of the civil society and what defines the active citizen at the final event in the “Impulses on the Civil Society” series held at the Political Academy in Vienna. The following presents a summary of some of the most interesting passages from this discussion.

Question: John F. Kennedy made the famous statement “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” Didn’t the former American president describe the ideal of a civil society then?

Werner J. Patzelt: This is an appeal to not behave like a customer in a service business: “The state had better provide certain services; I pay my rates and taxes and therefore have a right to them and – if I’m not satisfied, I’ll withdraw from the contract inwardly, and go out onto the street to demonstrate” (of course, that is also a kind of political participation). What Kennedy is actually saying is: Understand the community as your own responsibility. There is a prerequisite if that is to happen – not only in connection with the family, and the organisations you feel close to, such as the sports

club are a member of and that you are pleased to help, but going wider to include your own country – and that prerequisite is that you have a feeling of solidarity with the state that you cultivate. The word we Germans use for this is “patriotism”. And therefore, it is only possible to have a civil society that participates in the state if you cultivate the feeling and fact of patriotism. It was much easier for Kennedy in that respect: Being a good American, being a good patriot, is part of the American self-image. I can’t talk about Austria, but in the case of Germany, I can say that a patriot is usually equated with a nationalist and therefore thought to be a real stinker. It’s not acceptable to be a patriot; the individual is important. And if you take part, it should be in a citizens’ initiative, and that – if at all possible – with a local and social slant, and ideally to prevent something bad from happening. Of course, the citizen then soon finds himself in the role of a griping subject; he wants his ring road, his traffic-calmed street, he just wants to achieve something; ideally by not having to do any more than make his demands known and wait for the political parties to implement them.

Günther Lutschinger: I’d like to bring up another aspect: That was not something just anybody said; the President of the United States said that in his inauguration speech; that was a political call. I believe that if you think about a change in perspective and contrast the responsible civil society with the state, there also has to be a change in perspective on the side of politics – that’s my opinion. For a long time, we had “a full-pension state” in Austria; the state took over all functions and said: “What you do in your free time, what you take part in – whether you are involved in an organisation that provides neighbourhood assistance – is actually your private affair and doesn’t have anything to do with politics.” And it is precisely this divergence that John F. Kennedy referred to – it’s not a matter of the state on one side and the citizen on the other, but of creating an added value for society.

Question: If we take a look at associations, honorary positions, involvement, and volunteerism, do we actually see lived solidarity? Isn't solidarity something that – grosso modo – already exists and that we now want to strengthen; or do you think that there are mainly other motives for it happening, where solidarity possibly needs go a little further?

Günther Lutschinger: We see – at least in many Western democracies – a high level of understanding of solidarity, of responsibility coupled with freedom, of solidarity with the neighbours outside of clubs and associations. 1.2 million Austrians take part in neighbourhood assistant projects. On the one hand, a very, very large number of people are simply active in this area, while others are organised in associations. Around 2.3 million Austrians are members of clubs and associations – we are really “club freaks”. Not all of these associations have a solidary structure. I would like to bring up one aspect: What are the characteristics of a society – in my eyes, at least? State rules are nothing that I follow voluntarily; they are things that are necessary for organising living together and if I break them, the state has the right to sanction me. What I voluntarily bring into the society has a completely different quality: That is actually what holds society together; that is what ultimately creates cohesion, solidarity; there are many terms that can be used for it. We are also somewhat aware of it from other social forms. Volunteer work, civil society, honorary position – whatever we want to call it – only comes about where there is a high level of trust in the state. In societies that have no trust in a central state, in failed states, people might become involved in the immediate environment, close to the family, and actually do nothing for the state. I don't want to say that they are “opponents to the state”, but at least they do not feel that they are part of a central state authority and do not become involved in any way. I believe that that is an important aspect. The state has to create the framework, build trust, so that

the citizens can take part within this framework, can be solidary; if not, what we are left with is a form of solidarity that withdraws to the lowest level, to the family and the immediate environment.

Werner J. Patzelt: I would like to add this from my German experience. A lot of people in the new federal states say: Of course, many things were bad in GDR days, but there was a certain feeling of human warmth and solidarity. All of that no longer exists now that we are in the FRG, in this so-called “elbow society”. Now that I have described that, I should make a brief analysis.

What looks like solidarity, and is even glorified sometimes, was really just people coming closer together under the conditions of a “scarcity society” in which they were forced to rely on exchange, on trading with the scarce goods that were available, and where it was difficult to get by if you couldn’t find others with whom you could organise something, and somehow profit from the situation. That is the kind of solidarity that is created in a society that simply has no trust in its state, that is not free to move forward, that does not have a free spirit. A free person in a free society is solidary because he is not weighed down by worries about his life as it were. At the other end of the scale, there is also the solidarity I have just described as a kind of “union born of necessity” that often appears in times of crisis and quite simply cannot occur during this corona pandemic because we are forced to practise social distancing and closeness to others is frowned on.

Question: Now we are coming closer to the civil society in the narrower sense. Whenever we talk about a “society of citizens”, the concept of the “civil society” finds its way into the discussion. Some people even use the two terms synonymously, while others create a sharp, conscious differentiation. How do you differentiate between the civil society and voluntary commitment?

Günther Lutschinger: For me, a civil society is also a society that not only acts in the family or social area, and there solidarily and jointly, but also becomes involved in public political processes. That creates a stronger link between the two sides of the same coin – with the state on one, and the citizen on the other side. Of course, this presumes that such a civil society will find wide-open doors on the part of the state, an invitation to take part in a dialogue. There are many models for this, and I feel that here we are also repeatedly discussing the question “What is participation in the political decision-making process?” – and that is obviously a very important question. However, participation can only function when there are people involved who want to participate, who want to take part in the game in the first place. Naturally, commitment is required, but it also demands time, as well as passion that can possibly even lead to a demonstration in the streets; but this participation is a very important, vital element in a pluralistic society. I would be cautious about saying, there are the “good involved” who are well-behaved and do what serves the state – or, more precisely, politics – and then there are those who are involved in a way that upsets the state. As long as this involvement takes place within the scope of the constitution, ultimately, everything should be possible in a liberal society and everything also permitted. Regardless of whether you join the voluntary fire brigade and are active there, or you are in a citizens’ initiative that possibly doesn’t want to have the next ring road or opposes other projects like that.

But that is precisely the point in a pluralistic society; that this vital interaction between the citizens and politics is an open dialogue and not a one-way street, in a manner of speaking; of coming to an agreement or voting every five years, with that as the only participation so to speak. That is because we would probably also experience what we see in some European countries where the citizens’ participation in elections, in the state, and in political

activities is declining. And that can't be what we want, in my opinion, because how would it be possible for a society to develop if the citizens distance themselves from what the state does?

Question: How do you differentiate between the civil society and honorary commitment?

Werner J. Patzelt: Let's begin by ascertaining that the citizen is the opposite of a subject. The subject is the well-behaved person who does what the authorities want. This kind of civil-society involvement was known as "Subotnick duty" in socialist countries. Subotnick was weekend work, on Saturday or Sunday, when institute buildings were tidied, streets cleaned, and weeds pulled up. That was civic involvement. The people didn't come because they were so keen on it, but because it was desired by the society and enforced politically. That is subject involvement, but it is not citizen involvement – that takes place voluntarily. And the state does not have to agree with the involvement on the part of the citizens. There Mr Lutschinger is absolutely right – as in many other cases. You could say that there are "bad involved" and "good involved" – the "good" are those that do what the authorities, the government, the administration wants, and the "bad" are those who throw a spanner in the works in a manner of speaking. They just have other ideas about traffic planning than the council, or the district administration, or the responsible infrastructure ministry. No, everything that does not put liberty in danger is permissible in a liberal society; but that is not what we are talking about here. And the state has to tolerate that, and – of course – also tolerate the others who are involved.

At the moment, we are once again experiencing extremely harmful splits in Germany. This is how it is: there are the "good committed" and the "bad committed", and the "baddies" are the right-wing

populists – regardless of whether they were once seen in the form of PEGIDA or today as critics of corona policies; the “goodies” are those that demonstrate against the evil right-wing populists. That is also not in order. You should be able to disagree with the content, you don’t have to like the other side, but they are citizens who are committed because they want to achieve their political goals.

One last remark: I repeatedly experience the civil society in its most beautiful form when I am travelling in those two Swiss cantons that still have cantonal assemblies. The cantonal assemblies in Glarus and Appenzell, where the citizens still come together to discuss public affairs, make decisions on public affairs, and would feel deprived of one of the most fundamental civil liberties if they were no longer able to do so. And, I feel that this is how far the concept of a civil society should go. The citizens make political decisions – and they do it physically on a market square. I’m afraid that ideas of this kind are sometimes completely unwished for in Germany. Some people have even come up with the idea that it is unconstitutional because the civil society can only function as a representative democracy; and it is sufficient if the citizens are involved in political parties and civic initiatives and can go to the polls every couple of years. That is not my idea of a political civil society.

Parties sustain the state and that makes being involved in the parties so important. Things cannot work without party members, and we have too few of them – at least, that’s the case in Germany. As a result, there is not enough innovative energy in the political system. Participation in organisations with political goals – from preventing a ring road to enforcing the same ring road. Participation in the social area – there is so much potential there! We particularly noticed something in Germany during the major migration crisis: If the civil society hadn’t done as much for the migrants as

it did, the state and its administration would have been essentially unable to cope; they would have well-nigh collapsed. Therefore, practise solidarity with those who need it at the moment.

And: in an aging society like ours, and in the federal provinces in former East Germany where the population is rapidly decreasing and the old are being left behind, honorary involvement is needed quite simply to guarantee the food supply, medical services, and the care for these people. For financial reasons, that cannot be simply provided by people paid by the state; the citizens themselves have to become involved. However, that actually requires – and that brings the argument to an end – more involvement on the part of the state to promote civic involvement; that any compensation received not be taxed, that the state does away with granting awards if it doesn't even have enough money for the people who become involved in these areas.

There are forms of participation, and people who participate, where remuneration from the state would be overlooking the real problem. I'll give you a small example: I am a member of various civic institutions including the Forum for Promoting the Dresden State Operetta where I am the chairman. We collect money to finance projects we consider to have an artistic value and that the state either cannot or doesn't want to finance itself. It would be almost bizarre if we were reimbursed for our activity. We enjoy doing it because we want to support culture. This shows that you really have to differentiate when it comes to compensation and, if an honorary activity gives us many hours of pleasure, that should be reimbursement enough.

Question: Mr Lutschinger, financing and donations generally, and self-financing in particular, are major topics for many organisations. What is needed? Based on your experience, maybe you

could talk about the framework necessary for civil-society, honorary involvement to function.

Günther Lutschinger: When you look at civil-society and civic participation in Europe – and, in the meantime, there have been really a lot of studies, including some done by the European Union – we notice a trend that can be summarised under “the shrinking space of civil society”. These activities are not supported in many countries; if we now talk about support, we observe an opposite trend. This cannot only be seen in much-quoted Hungary and Poland; the trend also exists in France, in Holland, and even in Sweden – civil-society activities are being interfered with and restricted in countries that have so far been considered models in the field. This “shrinking space of civil society” is a recent trend that, in my opinion, also emanates from politics in a complex world that says: “We have to make this complex world simpler.” If everybody has a say, it will really become complex and chaotic; in spite of that, I believe it is a trend that must be observed very closely. For example, what does it mean for a pluralistic society when associations are banned? And there, I don’t mean those that are outside of the constitutional arch but completely normal, active associations.

I feel that we should also take a closer look and not just paint a glorious picture – what do we want from politics and what would this interaction between politics and the administration, and the citizens look like – but also report on this opposing trend, because we see examples of it popping up all over Europe and which – in my eyes – could even become threatening if they go any further or even as far as they have already gone in our neighbouring country of Hungary. Volunteers who take part in the fire brigade and something happens while they are on duty are not insured; they neither have self-coverage, in the sense of “for their own activity”, nor for any

damage they cause. If something happens, the volunteer is held responsible for his involvement. I believe that those are points where the state should really take regulatory or supporting action. In the meantime, there are full-insurance coverage possibilities for the fire brigades, but that is not so in all areas; we see that by sector; there is support of this kind in some areas, in some not. I am not a great fan of the question: “Should voluntary service be indemnified?” General reimbursement of costs is actually the only possibility for tax relief in Austria. If a volunteer drives to a football pitch in his own car to train pupils or young people, he does not have to keep a record of his mileage; it is recognised that he is active for the benefit of the community. There is this kind of financial relief, but we also have examples in Austria where the regional health insurer threatened the clubs with fines because they used the anti-dumping law and said that “it was really an activity that should be paid for” and therefore billed them for insurance cover.

Werner J. Patzelt: There are insurance law problems and it is important that the state takes care of such things. That is much more important than a financial handout to the person performing voluntary work. And that is a genuine problem for some people, especially in rural areas with their sinking populations when it is a matter of taking on medical assistance services. You can soon find yourself with one leg in the poorhouse if something goes wrong and you weren’t able to get the right insurance to cover it.

Question: On the one hand, the state has to create more free spaces, but, on the other, you can also turn your eyes on the state and ask: Where do we need the state? What are the functions and aspects where we could say that would be the responsibility of the state, even in an active civil society?

Günther Lutschinger: It is not an easy matter to find those political and social areas where you can say: “That one belongs entirely to the state and the other to the citizens.” When all is said and done, it is really an entangled situation. I feel that we all believe that it is good that we have a state education system, that there are schools that the state finances; nevertheless, when there are initiatives in Austria – and I also know of some institutions in Germany – that try to help children with learning disabilities, or with a migrant background and language barriers, to integrate; that is something that can definitely be easily organised or co-organised by volunteer bodies. Here, I would also like to bring up another topic: There is one central difference between Austria and Germany. In Germany, we see that the booming foundation generation, the foundation sector – in a word, capital that is used for social purposes – has grown enormously. We are talking about many million euros that have been allocated as foundation capital in recent years. It is completely the opposite in Austria where the greatest portion of the capital is parked in private foundations for private purposes. You could say that we have lost the past 20 years to motivate these citizens – in the form of civic trusts or similar constructs that are flourishing in half of Europe – and encourage them not only to collaborate, but also to establish something in the long term that would flow back to the society, to give something back going beyond the real performance in the participation branch. If you look at these numbers and make a comparison, Switzerland is similar to Germany – a great deal of social commitment is organised in foundations with high contributions of capital; this is a form of participation that – and I have to be quite honest about it – has a lot to do with the political parameters that only started to improve slightly in 2016 when the state made the clear statement that: “We are actually (I am being rather blunt here) quite happy that the wealthy are also not getting involved in politics but buying their yachts and all the other things, and not meddling in politics like

the Bertelsmann Foundations and similar organisations do when they play a political role in Germany.” I feel that is also something like a discussion: How much free space will I make available? In my eyes, we don’t have very much free space in Austria; I believe much more that there is still potential for all of us, for the development of a civil society; however, at the end of the day, the offer that this should – and must – develop has to come from the political side and – to come back to the beginning – like Kennedy said also demand and not simply make an offer: “If you don’t know what to do with your time, become involved.” The people who are most involved in volunteer activities are often those who are also extremely active in their professional life. It might be possible to also think that the unemployed, and people with a lot of time on their hands could also become more strongly involved. That points back to the questions: “Do I trust the state? Am I fine? Do I lack anything?” People who are unemployed and feel insecure therefore also do not become involved in community projects.

Werner J. Patzelt: I would like to add the following to that: On the one hand, it is really astonishing – or maybe not – that those who already have a lot to do and are also highly committed become even more active in various other areas. Probably, because they have the impression that the society gives them many opportunities for development, and they want to repay it in some way. And to boot, those who not only work hands-on in civil-society projects, but are also involved in organisational matters, have many interesting encounters, and that pays them back for doing something like that.

On the other hand, let’s talk about the unemployed and participation. It is clear that they have more pressing concerns than becoming involved in civil-society projects. And, if I can recall the findings accurately, the hope that an unconditional basic income

would lead to those who were given it becoming more involved in community work as a kind of compensation for this money did not materialise. I can't swear that the numbers I have are right, but Mr Lutschinger can probably say something more about it.

The next point: the foundation system. That is really very important. There are also quite different cultures in this area. Germany had a well-developed foundation system even before the 19th century. Frankfurt am Main is one of the "foundation capitals" not only of Germany but of Europe as a whole. The foundations are suffering from the current monetary policy. What is the good of all the invested capital with the zero-interest policy? There are no yields. I am on the board of a foundation and I know only too well how this limits possibilities for action.

And now we come to the question: Which areas can the state hand over to the society? That can't be split so easily; there is always a cooperation. One thing the state should on no account relinquish is security – internal and external. I observe with great concern that more and more private security services are being employed – the Americans even do this in their foreign politics – and that removes them from political control. The area of legislation and the administration of justice is the responsibility of the state; the civil society has no role to play in that. For a long time, there was a neoliberal illusion that the privatisation of the water supply, electricity supply, and other services would make everything more efficient; however, this reduces the quality of the citizens' service. And everything that has to do with and about education, and social balance and fairness, must also stay under the state's control. And then there are many, many other fields where observant contemporaries notice that involvement is necessary in order to make things better in this or that area of society.

Günther Lutschinger: What civil involvement could take over is a certain watchdog function – on the one hand, to keep an eye on the effect legal matters have; I believe that is an important correction possibility and feedback loop. If I get feedback on my politics from the population – by way of commitment groups, civil-society structures, and associations – about the part of my politics that finally reaches them, I will be able to adjust my policies accordingly. Even in those areas where the state is 100 per cent responsible, this feedback loop can – and ultimately must – bring politics forward. This also in the sense of the watchdog function: What are the excesses, what are the undesirable developments? And here, it is quite right to say: “Watchdogs are not pleasant companions in any area – not even in the non-profit sector – but they are necessary to drive the society forward.”

A Civil Society in Europe? Strong Impulses from the Regions

Europe and Society Start at Home – On the Effective Power of Applied, Initiated Formats of Encounter and Dialogue in the Regional, as well as Cross-border, Context

Verena Ringler / Magdalena J. Schneider

Summary: The concerns, contributions, and chances of the civil society are already accepted in most countries – especially in rural areas. Especially efficient programmes offer direct contact experiences between people going beyond the borders of language, generations, and attitudes. According to the EU Cohesion Monitor of the European Council on Foreign Relations, this method results in a high level of efficiency and efficacy that is underestimated by finance ministers and budget planners to a large degree.

In addition, strong structures of trust, a high regard for self-efficacy, and a climate of openness for what is new represent three key factors for the success of a vital civil society. A feeling for tradition, strong rural characteristics, and closeness to nature do not prevent a lively, contemporary civil society – as examples from Germany, Italy, and Switzerland show. It is much more the case that they can even provide the ideal starting point, links, and framework for new undertakings and multi-stakeholder alliances.

“In Western democracies, our civil or civic society is perceived as a new societal form that is structured and developed through the active participation of its members in public life. The civil society is borne by the involvement of its protagonists, the citizens. [...] The central demand of constitutional liberalism and the idea of human rights was the individual’s freedom to act, protected from inter-

ference by the state, in a society independent of the state.”¹ This individual freedom to act is presently under review in many countries: The 2020 annual report of the Freedom House organisation considers democracy to be in its deepest crisis for many decades; for the 14th year in succession, more countries have experienced a decrease in democracy than those that have seen improvements.² The undermining of – and attacks on – free and fair elections, as well as political rights and civil liberties, are reflected in all democracy indices.^{3 4 5} It is just as alarming that trust in democratic institutions and actors is sinking, as is participation in elections.^{6 7 8}

The Edelman Trust Barometer feels that the reason for this phenomenon lies in the profound, global tectonic shifts of trust taking place that were already apparent at the beginning of the COVID-19 disruption and have been subliminally intensifying over the long term – away from traditional representative democratic institutions

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- 1 Bürgergesellschaft. (s.d.). In: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/B%C3%BCrgergesellschaft> (2 September 2020).
 - 2 Repucci, Sarah: Freedom in the world 2020 - A leaderless struggle for democracy. In: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2020/leaderless-struggle-democracy> (3 September 2020).
 - 3 The Economist Intelligence Unit: The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2017. In: <https://infographics.economist.com/2018/DemocracyIndex/> (3 September 2020).
 - 4 Center for Systemic Peace: Polity IV Project - Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 2017. In: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/> (3 September 2020).
 - 5 Freedom House: Nations in Transit, 2020. In: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit> (3 September 2020).
 - 6 Ferrin, Mónica/ Kriesi, Hanspeter: Europeans' Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy - Topline Results from Round 6 of the European Social Survey, London 2014.
 - 7 Foa, Roberto S./ Mounk, Yascha: The Danger of Deconsolidation - The Democratic Disconnect In: *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 27, Number 3, July 2016, pp. 5–17.
 - 8 Edelman: The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer. In: <https://www.edelman.com/trustbarometer> (3 September 2020).

and media towards individual, local, scientific actors.⁹ “People have not given up hope. It is much more so that the less informed and educated majority of the population have transferred their trust to other players to such a degree that we are now confronted with a world with two different realities of trust. The informed public – more prosperous, better educated, and often news consumers – still continues to give all institutions much more trust than the masses.”¹⁰ In the European Union, this gap is particularly striking in Germany, France, Spain, and Italy.

However, the conscious creation and methodical cultivation of trust are essential for a flourishing civil society. One only has to remember the statement made by the political scientist Eric Uslaner: “Trust! That is as essential for coexistence as chicken soup.”¹¹ A number of studies by the Pew Research Center also indicate that “democracy is stronger in a society where people trust each other, the economy is more thriving, and social grievances are rarer.”¹²

The authors will therefore devote themselves to two questions: First, how can trust be created concretely? The regular surveys carried out by the European Cohesion Monitor of the European Council on Foreign Relations provide strong, repeated evidence that programmes for the direct contact and meeting between citizens (people-to-people) contribute to the reduction of prejudices, to intercultural understanding, and to a willingness for coopera-

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Uslaner, Eric: Producing and Consuming Trust. In: *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 115, no. 4, 2000-2001, pp. 569–590.

12 Wike, Richard/ Holzwart, Kathleen: Where Trust is High, Crime and Corruption are Low, 15 April 2008. In: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2008/04/15/where-trust-is-high-crime-and-corruption-are-low/#fn-1036-1> (3 September 2020).

tion. Second, the authors investigate which experiences there are in connection with successful activities and interventions from the civil society in various regions of Europe, and present four practice-oriented, regional projects of the successful civil society.

1. The effect of direct contacts between citizens

Simple contacts between citizens strengthen stability and resilience in the European Union much more than generally believed. This has been shown repeatedly in the EU Cohesion Monitor of the European Council on Foreign Affairs (ECFR), which was first published in 2015 and has been issued every two years since then.¹³ The survey has the aim of better understanding the behaviour of the EU member states and their citizens. “The Community idea is a central component of the genesis of the European Union, an institution that makes decision on the basis of consensus and cooperation. However, we want to know what forms the foundation of this solidarity and which factors play a role in this” was the statement made by the study leader Josef Janning when the EU Cohesion Monitor 2019 was presented at the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna in July 2019.¹⁴

According to Janning, the EU Cohesion Monitor used 10 indicators to show the connections between societies within the EU. They are fed from public data sources, such as the Eurobarometer

13 European Council of Foreign Relations: EU Cohesion Monitor - An assessment of cohesion in the 28 member states of the European Union, Berlin 2019.

14 Diplomatische Akademie Wien: Keeping Europeans together - Insights and Perspectives from the European Council on Foreign Relations' EU Data Project Perspectives for the upcoming EU institutional cycle – focus on Austria's role. In: <https://www.da-vienna.ac.at/de/Events/Archiv/More-Information-de-AT/Id/3274> (3 September 2020).

and Eurostat. Five of the indicators describe individual solidarity (microlevel = personal expectations, experiences – e.g. with other EU citizens, attitudes towards the EU, convictions, and the voting behaviour of the EU citizens). The other five indicators register structural solidarity (macrolevel = economic and political inter-relationships, ability to master crises, cooperation in security matters, financing, and geography).

There was a surprising finding in the most recent edition of the Monitor from 2019: Overall, solidarity within the EU increased once again after the crisis years: 17 of the 28 EU member states showed higher cohesion values than in 2007. The solidarity between Europeans is therefore less strongly affected by upheavals in times of crisis than is frequently proclaimed in the public sphere. The co-leader of the study, Almut Möller, stated: “The prevailing narrative about the European Union in recent years was a fragmentation. But there is another tale to tell – that of the breath-taking resilience of the EU itself confronted with the economic and political crises of the past decade.”¹⁵ There is obviously a strong adhesive that holds the countries and societies of the EU together.¹⁶

Fundamentally, it can be seen that the structural cohesion also remains relatively stable in dynamic periods. Negative effects can only be recognised when dealing with individual solidarity. This can fluctuate in insecure times and can, in turn, be reflected in the results of political elections. In order to strengthen the common bonds in the EU comprehensively and sustainably, the study leader feels that it is necessary to pay particular attention to those fac-

15 Möller, Almut: EU Cohesion Monitor 2019: The untold story of European resilience, 11 April 2019, In: https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_eu_cohesion_monitor_2019_the_untold_story_of_european_resilience (3 September 2020).

16 Ibid.

tors that influence individual solidarity: attitudes, experiences, and expectations, as well as the general welfare of the European citizens.

In their summary, Almut Möller and Josef Janning come to this conclusion: “If governments wish to strengthen solidarity, offers for encounters, exchange, and dialogue among the citizens are a reliably effective field. Governments systematically underestimate the value of people-to-people programmes, while they overestimate the effectiveness of regional and infrastructure funding.”

There is therefore a connection between the possibility for individuals to have direct contact and an increase in the “trust value” in what were formerly “strangers”; in turn, this represents an important piece of advice for political planners – especially in the budget area – for the most efficient and effective allocation of resources. Those working in the intercultural field are aware of the positive long-term effects from the research carried out into the major German-French exchange programme¹⁷ and the organisation of student and youth exchange programmes, which continue to be strongly promoted and widely accepted in Germany in particular, not only with traditional host countries but also with Turkey and China for example.¹⁸ On the other hand, the “contact hypothesis” in psychology underlined the findings of the EU Cohesion Monitor, namely that direct encounter formats between Europeans cost less and have a stronger effect than is perceived and practised.¹⁹

17 Böing, Maik: Der deutsch-französische Schüleraustausch 50 Jahre nach dem Elysée-Vertrag - Herausforderungen und praxisorientierte Strategien zur Weiterentwicklung. In: *Französisch heute*, 2015, vol. 46, no. 4, pp. 5–17.

18 Austausch macht Schule: Das Gleiche – aber anders - Schulpartnerschaften zwischen Deutschland und China - Nachgefragt bei Melina Rath-Kastrinogianni. In: <https://www.austausch-macht-schule.org/interview/das-gleiche-aber-anders-schulpartnerschaften-zwischen-deutschland-und-china> (3 September 2020).

19 “The contact hypothesis was developed by G. Allport in 1954 and purports

2. The effectiveness of intervention in the village, city, and region

According to the Edelman Trust Barometer 2020, large majorities – seen globally – place their greatest trust in scientists (80 per cent), followed by “people in the local region” (69 per cent), and “people in the home country” (65 per cent).²⁰ The local environment therefore provides a space for the potential and application of trust. In spite of digital networks – and especially during corona – this seems comprehensible, seeing that the local area represents the natural, most concrete, and closest circle of belonging for the citizens. This is where they live, work, and follow their goals, confront their challenges, are integrated within a social network, and are active culturally.²¹ Local politicians are more visible, approachable, and directly accountable to the voters. The local level provides contacts going beyond socio-economic differences and level of education. Processing local problems is much more practical and tangible than national – let alone multilateral – negotiation pro-

that frequent contact with members of other groups (ingroup, outgroup) (e.g., ethnic minorities) reduces the prejudices against these groups. According to Allport, this is especially the case when the people in the contact situation (1) follow cooperative goals (cooperation), (2) are of the same status, (3) have to interact with each other to achieve their goals, and (4) have the contact that is supported by authorities. In their meta-analysis with more than 250,000 interviewees, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) were able to show that the effect is robust and also occurs if Allport's conditions are not – or only partially – satisfied. In representative surveys for Germany, Wagner et al. (2006) revealed that prejudices declined in districts with an increasing percentage of foreigners. Recently positive effects were also shown for contacts that were only imagined (Bagci et al., 2018), as well as extended (meaning, when one has friends who have contact): Árnadóttir et al., 2018.” Source: <https://dorsch.hogrefe.com/stichwort/kontakthypothese>.

20 Edelman: The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer. In: <https://www.edelman.com/trustbarometer> (3 September 2020).

21 Van den Brande, Luc: Auf die Bürger der EU zugehen – Die Chancen nutzen – ‘Über uns, mit uns, für uns’, Luxemburg 2017.

cesses. Solving challenges on the communal or regional level can be more easily controlled and adapted to the circumstances. This is especially the case where a strong community spirit can be felt, and people are prepared to become involved on a voluntary basis. One finds many mediating individuals and organisations that play, or can play, a major role in overcoming the most difficult challenges facing democracy in communities, cities, and regions.²²

Democratic processes should be stimulated and experienced, bottom up. This starts by creating the citizens' trust in their capabilities of being able to solve problems and the significance of civil knowledge and participation. Strengthening political education and individual solidarity could also increase cohesion within the EU. Stronger interaction on the part of the citizens inside the EU going beyond national borders could become an instrument for confronting nationalist and populist movements.²³ Offers for experiencing democracy and improving living together – conceived subsidiarily if possible – therefore present themselves as a contribution to problem solving. The authors of this essay have been involved in the initiation and implementation, as well as the study, of the effect and sustainability of non-formal and informal political education and value work in the regional context for many years. It should be noted that there is not necessarily a connection between a strong civil involvement and non-formal political education, but that this can also be traced back to formal approaches, such as access to political decision-making processes.²⁴

22 Klinenberg, Eric: *Palaces for the People - How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*, New York 2018.

23 Janning, Josef: *Crisis and Cohesion in the EU – A Ten-Year Review*. In: https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/crisis_cohesion_ten_year_review (3 September 2020).

24 Stiftung Mercator: *Zusammenhalt beginnt zu Hause – Erhebung zur non-formalen politischen Bildung in Bulgarien, Tschechien und Österreich*. Unpublished raw data.

Formal, as well as non-formal, political and value education has no significant individual and institutional champions in Austria. When we summarise the offers provided throughout the country, we arrive at the following result: Political education and, with it, strengthening the civil society are structural blank spaces in the formal, as well as non-formal, arena. On the one hand, since the early 1980s, legal frameworks, public awareness, institutions, structures (political didactics), and promotional instruments have rarely focused on this matter. On the other hand, Austria – in comparison with other countries such as Germany and Switzerland – also has almost no offers in the field of political education, democracy pedagogy, the formation of values, and participation, as well as associated fields such as Europe and integration in the private sector. The only exception is the province of Vorarlberg with its focus on citizens' councils and dialogues.

In order to provide inspiration and stimulation for those concerned with values – especially in Austria – the authors would like to introduce four regional value and educational projects in the immediate vicinity: in Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. We will provide an overview of the Wertebündnis Bayern (Bavarian Values Alliance), the StartNet EU project that is active in Apulia/Basilicata in Italy and has a regional learning platform in Brussels, the Zusammenhalt (Cohesion) project of the German Ministry of the Interior and Federal Agency for Political Education, as well as euphoria, the international empowerment project that started in Switzerland and is now active internationally.

3. Case studies

3.1. Wertebündnis Bayern

The Wertebündnis Bayern (Bavarian Values Alliance) was founded on the initiative of the Bavarian Prime Minister in March 2010. Since that time, the Alliance, which is unique in Germany, has developed into a real model for success. The Value Alliance is a consortium of 190 organisations and associations from all over Bavaria.^{25 26}

Democracy is lived in the Value Alliance and, in this way, given a new lease of life: In addition to opening up space for experience and action – especially for children, youths, and young adults – the Alliance, as a laboratory for Bavaria as a whole, shows how a debate on differing values can take place on the basis of democratic values. In addition to concrete projects, the main focus is on strongly-experienced debates in the Value Alliance itself, and increased networking with the civil society.

The Value Alliance is a heterogeneous network that more or less represents the Bavarian civil society. The Professional Association of Fine Artists, the Bavarian Regional Command, the Bavarian National Costume Association, and the Islamic Youth in Bavaria – to name only four examples – each have a seat and one of the 177 votes in the general assembly. The Bavarian Landtag has one vote, as does the AGBY (Working Group of the Foreigner, Migrant, and Integration Committees in Bavaria) and the Association of Large

25 Wertebündnis Bayern: Das Wertebündnis – Gemeinsam stark für Kinder, Jugendliche und junge Erwachsene. In: <https://www.wertebuendnis-bayern.de/das-wertebuendnis/> (23 July 2020).

26 Wertebündnis Bayern: FAQs. In: <https://www.wertebuendnis-bayern.de/faqs/> (23 July 2020).

Families. This invests their projects with a democratic legitimation and, at the same time, a solid foothold in society that is greatly beneficial for the continuing structural operation after the end of the project period.

An excerpt from the projects of the Bavarian Values Alliance:

- The most important project of the Bavarian Values Alliance at the moment is the Initiative for Integration and Tolerance. The eleven associated projects make it possible for young people to meet on an equal footing – regardless of their background. The aim is to approach migrants with an open mind, to show an interest in the story of their lives and culture, and – simultaneously – open up the greatest variety of access to the local society possible.
- Currently, 14 joint projects in Bavaria are dealing with the subject of values formation. Even the youngest members of society are taking part. The values of the primary school-age boys and girls, who philosophise in the HörensWERT (WORTH Hearing) project and then develop audio plays and sound collages in a creative and knowledgeable way, are impressively clear.
- The youths also display their media competence when they investigate social networks in the ICH WIR IHR im Netz (I WE YOU in the NET) project. How does value awareness 2.0 function? Those a bit older could really learn a lot about this question from the youngsters. That is the reason that parents are also taught about the world their children have long been at home in in this project.

- The approach taken by the WERTvoll MITEinander (Values, Together) programme is learning from each other, accepting otherness and diversity as an enrichment. Parents, children, teachers – the entire school family is accompanied professionally as it makes its way along the path to more intercultural education.
- Young people learn how to form their own opinion and respect other views in the mehrWERT Democracy (Value Added Democracy) project. Here, pupils investigate the foundations of our social order in schools and homes all over Bavaria. They gain concrete experience in what democracy really means. “We argue about the right path to follow. But, in the end, we arrive at the goal together” is how one young participant describes it.
- Those who stray from the path are given a second chance. The JOBLINGE (Job Helpers) support disadvantaged young people looking for an apprenticeship place. The keys to success are practical experience and strengthening one’s own sense of responsibility.
- “I need to be genuinely convinced before I can accept responsibility for myself and others.” The position taken by this student sums up what the VerANTWORTung leben (Live Responsibility) series of lectures stands for. Students are motivated to reflect on the aesthetic aspects of their subjects – going beyond theory and factual knowledge – in lectures and roundtables.
- Actively participating in democracy, reflecting, and experiencing – the Long Night of Democracy makes an inspirational, multi-perspectival immersion into the fundamental structures of liberty, democracy, and the rule of law possible. In addition to multilingual discussions, the programme is enriched with

musical and cultural contributions. The project takes place every two years in a number of Bavarian cities.²⁷

The impulse behind the foundation of the Values Alliance was that today's society has become heterogeneous and characterised by a great variety of changes. This transformation process and living together with people with different backgrounds, different social experiences, and different ethnic, cultural, and religious structures goes hand in hand with a change in value orientation. It is therefore essential to continuously redefine the existing fundamental values and make those that are non-negotiable clear. People look for support, security, and orientation in times of manifold, sweeping changes. Young people in particular desire respectful, reliable partners in their relationships, clear role models, and space for experimenting with the organisation of their lives. They therefore take up values that cement solidarity, support liberty and democracy, and strengthen the responsibility for the common good as points of reference. That benefits each and every individual, and society as a whole. The Values Alliance has the goal of collaborating with the widest range of social actors to anchor the Judeo-Christian and humanistic fundamental values more firmly in the community.

The Values Alliance focuses mainly on the wellbeing of children, youths, and young adults as well as those individuals and institutions that have an influence on, and are responsible for, the upbringing, development, and education of young people. Parents have a special responsibility in this regard. They play a key role. Parents and teachers, tutors and training instructors, and youth leaders, as well as the peer group, have a special influence on the

27 Wertebündnis Bayern: Das Wertebündnis – Gemeinsam stark für Kinder, Jugendliche und junge Erwachsene. In: <https://www.wertebuendnis-bayern.de/das-wertebuendnis/> (23 July 2020).

value systems of young people. These and other leaders in public life – media, politics, economy, the church, religious communities, initiatives, associations, and clubs – act as role models. They set an example for values through their activity and the impact they have and make them visible and perceptible. The partners of the Alliance contribute to strengthening the awareness, and conservation of, as well as responsibility for, values in young people and also those in charge of their education and training. They have the goal of opening up spheres of activity and experience in which young people can reflect on their values, practise and live value-oriented behaviour, and develop their powers of judgement. Together, the Alliance's partners highlight concrete examples of where this has already been successful. In their reciprocal networking, they develop new ideas and strategies for future activities in collaboration with other partners of the Alliance. The goal is always the development of responsible citizens with strong ethical values.²⁸

3.2. Industry, economy, school, and profession: StartNet Europe

StartNet was initiated as a new project in Apulia and Basilicata in 2017 with the aim of providing children, youths, and young adults in this region with equal opportunities on the labour market and combatting unemployment among young people. It is intended to create a functioning system that accompanies pupils from the primary school level and prepares them for their entry into the working world. The coordination of this plan is in the hands of the Goethe Institutes in Rome and Brussels. This is because, in addition to practical work locally, StartNet Europe also functions as

28 Wertebündnis Bayern: Bündnispapier. In: <https://www.wertebuendnis-bayern.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Anlage-zur-Satzung-B%C3%BCndnispapier-Werteb%C3%BCndnis.pdf> (23 July 2020).

a Europe-wide platform for networking and exchange for similar initiatives.²⁹

In keeping with the collective effect method, the leaders of the project brought prominent personalities from the fields of industry and economy, schools and parents, administrations, and community bodies together to create trust and sustainably improve the chances of young people entering the labour market. The project was initiated and developed by Verena Ringler within the framework of her activities with the German Mercator Foundation. The interim report that was published in 2020 is extremely positive: As one example, teachers in Apulia were encouraged to take part in solving local entrepreneurial problems while the young people were still at school.³⁰ According to Cesare de Palma from the Apulian branch of the Confindustria employer organisation, the detailed efforts to develop contacts, exchange, and trust in the region itself had already paid off. De Palma stated: “We had neglected an exchange between our young people here in Apulia and our business world for the past 30 years. For example, our own young people did not know that our region played a strong role in robotics and the chemical industry”. Another conclusion of the report: “Convincing all of the interest groups to cooperate in introducing young people into the professional world is easier said than done. Interests, organisational cultures, and perspectives are frequently hugely different, and sometimes even contradictory. It is necessary to build a great deal of trust and connections in order to overcome all these differences and focus our strength on the common goal of giving young people a chance.”³¹

29 StartNet: Über uns. In: <https://www.start-net.org/de/uber-uns> (23 July 2020).

30 Kilimann, Susanne: StartNet - Gehen oder bleiben. In: <https://www.goethe.de/ins/it/de/spr/mag/21792387.html> (3 September 2020).

31 Goethe Institute Brussels: StartNet - Inspiring practices on young people's #TransitionToWork, Brussels 2019.

3.3. Interior Ministry plus civil society: Solidarity through Participation

The “Solidarity through Participation” programme, which is active throughout Germany, is also well worth mentioning. It was initiated by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, together with the Federal Office for Political Education, in the year 2010. The volume of funding is 12 million euros per year; the target regions are Germany’s rural zones and economically underdeveloped areas. The programme promotes projects to strengthen democratic participation and combat extremism. The centre of focus is placed on organisations, associations, and disseminators that are firmly anchored in the region. Their competences are supported and expanded. Solidarity through Participation’s goal is to strengthen and train attentive and respected local contact persons. The project is intended to be preventive – especially in defusing possible extremist dangers before they occur – and create the fundamental conditions for living together in equality and without violence.

The projects mainly rely on the potential to be found in amateur sport, in voluntary fire brigades, the volunteer organisations of the Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW), as well as in welfare and other civil society bodies. In collaboration with other players, the projects also aim at having an effect on the local community and developing regional networks for dealing with antidemocratic incidents. Another pillar of the federal programme is the implementation of model projects in the area of digital improvement, and the development of organisations paying particular attention to increasing participation in democratic studies. Associations and clubs are requested to develop innovative concepts, methods, and instruments to make it possible to establish these new competences firmly in the structure of the organisations with the full-

time and volunteer workers. Local people can discover that they have their future in their own hands and that they can organise it actively and with each other through their participation in the projects. Democracy – the fundamental idea behind the programme – should be fostered where it is born: at the basis. Solidarity through Participation is a prevention programme; it counteracts extremist and anti-constitutional tendencies.³² Close to 300 projects have or will have received support from this programme in the years between 2010 and 2024; so far, more than 2000 people were taught to be democracy trainers. Within their organisations, they raise awareness for recognising anti-democratic positions, accompany the development of prevention strategies, and provide advice when local conflicts develop.

3.4. euforia, Switzerland

euforia is an innovative NGO with its seat in Switzerland and a community of volunteers in more than 20 countries on three continents. The NGO, which was founded by young people for young people in 2007, is driven by the need to confront global challenges locally and take action for a more just world where all can develop their potential and, at the same time, respect the environment and others. Co-founder Yoko Malbos: “We want to promote collective intelligence, self-guidance, agility, and a holistic approach. We place people in the centre of organisations, institutions, projects, and decisions. In this way, we accomplish a change from an ego-system to an eco-system.”³³ Since its foundation, euforia volunteers

32 Zusammenhalt durch Teilhabe: Hintergründe des Programms. In: <https://www.zusammenhalt-durch-teilhabe.de/ueberuns/141916/ueber-uns> (22 July 2020).

33 euforia: New ways of working – Potenzial in Organisationen freilegen. In: <https://www.euforia.org/de/new-ways-of-working> (3 September 2020).

have implemented this impulse in the form of training, promotion, and networking offers. The combination of non-formal education and transformative teaching methods enables euforia to launch people and organisations on their own path as active citizens.

- *implact* is one of euforia's core programmes; it encourages young people to become involved in new or existing civil society initiatives. More than 10,000 young people were supported in changing their routines, consciously integrating volunteer activities in their lives, and becoming social entrepreneurs in almost 200 *implact* trainings in more than 20 countries. Eighty per cent of the alumni reported that taking part in *implact* had changed their lives.³⁴
- The community *implact* programme, which was reintroduced in Switzerland in 2018, is another significant component. This programme for people with a refugee or migrant background contributes to promoting sustainable integration and a multicultural, diverse society.

euforia is financed by private foundations, the state sector, and initiatives for supporting young people, as well as paid trainings and workshops. The euforia programme has already been honoured by Ashoka, UNESCO, and the World Economic Forum (WEF).³⁵

34 euforia: Projekte die ihre Wurzeln bei euforia hatten. In: <https://www.euforia.org/de/poweredbyeuforia> (3 September 2020).

35 euforia: Wer wir sind. In: <https://www.euforia.org/de/who-we-are> (3 September 2020).

4. Conclusion

The concerns, contributions, and chances of the civil society are already accepted in most European countries and, in many cases, have been contemporarily interpreted and further developed. At the same time, the case studies show that strong trust structures, the high value of self-efficacy, and a climate of openness represent three fundamental prerequisites for the success of a vital civil society. Consideration of tradition, a strong rural characteristic, and a relationship to nature in no way hinder a lively, contemporary civil society – quite the contrary, they can even provide the ideal starting point, points of reference, and framework for new projects and multi-stakeholder alliances.

A high level of effect assumption is yielded by person-oriented approaches that combine the macro and micro levels (e.g., EU and regions). As the EU Cohesion Monitor shows, individual encounters and experience cannot be seen as having too little impact potential, and that they can provide finance planners with an indication of effective and efficient political projects and areas of expenditure in the region. Putting it casually, it is fundamentally the case that “regions have the civil societies they deserve.” Flourishing networks that clearly adhere to European values, and innovative alliances for value education and solution-finding need resources. The most important of all is the focused desire for the further, common – often regional – development in an age of digital and social change.

Make Austria Flourish!

The Role and Potential of Active Charitable Foundations for Society and the State

Ruth Williams / Christoph Robinson

Summary: There is a long tradition behind the desire people have to make private capital available for a specific socially-relevant purpose that, in the past few months, has received increased attention due to the activity initiated by some philanthropists to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. Charitable foundations finance and provide links in situations where the state and economy are not always active or have no resources. In addition, they play an important role in supporting civil-society initiatives, and the “new” trends, such as community foundations, show that foundations can function as a platform for wide-ranging community involvement. Austria should also have an interest in building on the positive trend reversal of the past years and make increased use of the potential of the charitable foundations of private people and enterprises. The important and well-developed welfare and social state should not result in discouraging the complementary use of private means for charitable causes. This is because the state, enterprises, and the civil society all have a contribution to make. It is a matter of both/and – not replacing state activity but using civil-society involvement more strongly as a complement and innovation. This is more important than ever.

Introduction

What do these charitable foundations actually do? This is a question that is asked time and time again and became especially prominent in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the meantime, we all know that the founder of Microsoft and philan-

thropist Bill Gates warned about the threat of a virus pandemic in a lecture held within the framework of the TED series.¹ The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation he and his wife established in 1999 deals with global development, health, poverty eradication, and education, and with an endowment capital of close to 50 billion dollars, is one of the world's largest private foundations. It has been involved in pandemic prevention and the development of vaccines for many years. In addition, its contribution of 310 million dollars makes this charitable foundation the largest donor to the World Health Organisation (WHO).² In recent months, these facts have led to increasing the discussion and criticism of private philanthropy on the part of billionaires, not to mention the increasingly bizarre conspiracy theories and fake news. This is something we have been aware of for a few years in connection with another globally active organisation, the Open Society Foundations. With its 18 billion dollars, the foundation that the investor and philanthropist George Soros – who was strongly influenced by the Austro-British philosopher Karl Popper – established in 1993 is another of the largest private foundations in the world. The group of Open Society Foundations mainly supports civil-society initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe and, as the name implies, promotes an open society. George Soros' activities in the university sphere became more widely known in Austria through the recent transfer of the Central European University from Budapest to Vienna as a result of the increasing hindrances from the Hungarian government. What both examples demonstrate in such an exemplary fashion is the way private capital, in the form of charitable foundations, can be utilised for socially-relevant purposes in a great variety of areas: education, social affairs, health, and art and culture, as well as science and research.

1 https://www.ted.com/talks/bill_gates_the_next_outbreak_we_re_not_ready (12.09.2020).

2 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/who-funds-world-health-organization-un-coronavirus-pandemic-covid-trump/> (12.09.2020).

It is a matter of both/and

One criticism that frequently arises in discussions about the role of (charitable) foundations concerns the transfer of obligations into private hands and the lack of democratic legitimation. One often hears: “The state should fulfil these duties”. This controversy over “state versus private” should have long been overcome, as should have the question of “more or less state”. It is imperative that the state fulfils its obligations in a high-quality manner and that does not necessarily have anything to do with the size of the administration or the amount of government spending as a great variety of examples from successful countries around the world show. The important – and, in Austria, well-developed – welfare and social state should, in no case, lead to not supporting the complementary usage of private means for charitable affairs. It is not a matter of replacing state activities, but one of both/and. The state, the economy, and the civil society can all make a contribution to solving social challenges – and do so even more effectively if they work together.

The states' capacity to act is strongly dependent on the success of the economy. And the enterprises play a crucial role in driving this forward; they create most of the jobs, and their taxes and rates represent a significant financial source for the state. Civil-society involvement is, on the other hand, dependent on voluntary contributions in order to fully develop its activities for society. The charitable foundations take on an important role here. They provide financing and networking – especially in situations where the state and economy are not always active or have no resources. This philanthropic approach has a tradition reaching far back into history.

The development of the foundation system³

A social innovation is born

The foundation system can be followed back to 3000 BC. The desire of people to dedicate their private wealth to a specific purpose already existed in ancient times and the early days of Christianity. Historically, the term “founder” or “benefactor” refers to a person who was the patron of a building or cult place; the Egyptian foundations were often devoted to the cult of death, while foundations in Babylon also included the gods. Social foundations that provided the impoverished population with money and grain followed in the wake of the Roman wars of conquest. The foundations system experienced a change with the spreading of Christianity when the concept of “charity” came into play. Foundation law as we know it today has its origin in religious foundations and the roots of Caritas can also be found in this era. A number of different foundation forms appeared in the early middle ages as a result of the amalgamation of Roman, Germanic, and canonical law.

The golden age in the medieval period and Renaissance

The foundations made significant advances possible – especially in the social and health areas, as well as in modern science – during these periods. An increasing number of secular hospitals were established with the hospital’s assets as the legal core. The foundation of the University of Vienna as Alma Mater Rudolphina in the year 1365 can also be traced back to a “founder” – Rudolf IV.

³ This chapter is based on: Bund gemeinnütziger Stiftungen / Julius Raab Stiftung / ERSTE Stiftung: Gemeinnützige Stiftungen. Wie wir Österreich zum Blühen bringen, Vienna 2015.

Secular foundations, which no longer had a connection to the churches, started to develop for the first time after the 15th century and were recognised as legal entities. One of the richest men in the history of the world was also active at this time: Jakob Fugger. The merchant, banker, and entrepreneur endowed a large portion of his wealth. As just one example, the “Fuggerei” still exists in Augsburg as the world’s oldest social settlement. It was founded for needy citizens in 1521 and has been maintained from Jakob Fugger’s endowment fund to the present day. During the Reformation, many foundations were abandoned or redesignated if their purpose was not compatible with Protestantism and the oversight function increasingly came into the hands of the state or cities.

Secularisation breaks through

The trend toward the secularisation of the foundation system and its purposes continued in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the centralisation of the administration also had an impact on the foundations. Canonical foundation law was forced to give way to the state’s administrative law. It was not until after the Congress of Vienna in 1815 that the concept of foundations once again found increased recognition, and it flourished anew in the Romantic period. The sector reached its heyday in Austria after the turn of the century when there were around 10,000 foundations and funds in the country. The individual’s desire for self-determination, which became increasingly the centre of focus, also influenced the foundation sector when the will of the benefactor of the foundation became more important.

The century of stagnation

While major foundations, such as the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations, were established in the early 20th century in the USA, the First World War led to a demise in foundations in Austria. The next major setback came with National Socialism and subsequent plundering by the Nazis. Many foundations were abandoned or rededicated, and their assets confiscated. Of the 5700 foundations and funds that existed in Austria in 1938, only around 300 with a National Socialist focus remained, some of which had been allocated assets from abandoned foundations, due to this criminal regime. A restoration of the status was no longer possible after 1945, seeing that most of the confiscated, reallocated, or abandoned foundation assets had disappeared. After passing the Foundation and Fund Reorganisation Act in 1945, it was only possible to restore legal entity to around 100 foundations. There was a renewed revival with the Federal Foundation and Fund Law in 1974, although the strict regulations for start-ups were not particularly attractive and, in spite of the economic boom, the foundation system in Austria remained insignificant to a large extent. In 1983, there were only around 400 foundations in the country; 260 of them were state foundations. There was a new impulse as a result of the Private Foundation Law passed in 1993 that had the principal goal of preventing an outflow of capital to foreign countries. This instrument was also used to establish charitable foundations.

The charitable foundation sector in comparison

A glance at the neighbours

Not only a short review of the foundation system but also a glance to our neighbours in Germany and Switzerland shows how great the potential for Austria is and the important role this sector can play. In Germany, 95 per cent of 23,000 foundations under civil law have a charitable function. Among the large foundations, after assets, we find very famous names, such as the Robert Bosch Foundation, the Volkswagen Foundation, and the Bertelsmann Foundation. The number of foundations is growing continuously and more than doubled from around 10,500 in the year 2002 to approximately 23,000 at the end of 2019. “Society” dominates clearly before “education”, and “art and culture” as a foundation’s purpose.⁴

Switzerland, on the other hand, has traditionally had one of the world’s most liberal foundation laws, and this is reflected in the strength of the sector. The more than 13,000 charitable foundations, with assets amounting to approximately 100 billion Swiss francs, make Switzerland internationally outstanding, and with a density of 15.6 foundations per 10,000 inhabitants, the confederation has six times as many foundations per capita as the USA or Germany. Of the around 13,000 charitable foundations, almost 50 per cent provide assistance in the areas of education, research, and social affairs, considerably more than operative foundations.⁵

4 <https://www.stiftungen.org/stiftungen/zahlen-und-daten/statistiken.html> (accessed on 12.09.2020).

5 <https://www.swissfoundations.ch/stiftungssektor/zahlen-fakten/> (accessed on 12.09.2020).

An overview of Europe as a whole shows that European philanthropy is as colourful and diverse as the European society. There are more than 147,000 foundations that invest around 60 billion euros in civil-society activities annually. The interview with a former board member of the Donors and Foundation Networks in Europe (DAFNE) in the annex of this essay, provides a brief but vibrant sketch of Europe's foundation landscape.

Differences in donation behaviour

Donations form a significant basis for financing charitable, non-profit activities and, in spite of increases in recent years, it can be seen that, in an international comparison, the volume of donations made in Austria is rather subdued. The survey done by the Austrian Fundraising Association⁶ shows that more than 400 billion euros were donated in the USA in the year 2017. This amounts to 1100 euros per inhabitant. The volume of donations in Europe, with 46 billion euros, lags considerably behind. This amounts to only around 90 euros per inhabitant. There are many factors that make the comparison with the USA difficult. First, there is a different attitude and cultural development in the field of donations in the USA, and second, donations play a greater role in a less-comprehensive social system than exists in many European countries. However, even when compared to other European countries, Austria still has some catch-up potential. For example, while a little over 75 euros per inhabitant was donated in Austria in 2017, donations per inhabitant amounted to more than 90 euros in Germany, almost 95 euros in Finland, 115 euros in Sweden, and close to 140 euros in the Netherlands. This shows that, in Germany, the donations were more than 30 per cent higher per capita, and they were

6 Fundraising Verband Austria: Spendenbericht 2018.

almost 85 per cent higher in the Netherlands. However, there have been legislative changes in Austria in recent years that have had a positive effect on donation behaviour.⁷

The charitable foundation sector and charitable benefits in Austria

The years of renewal

The previous chapters show that, when compared internationally, Austria still has a lot of room for improvement – especially with regard to donations and charitable foundation expenses per capita. However, especially in the last few years, the sector has experienced a major push in the right direction. The positive development in the charitable foundation sector in Austria is based on a great deal of commitment and the work of some people and organisations who have consistently propelled this topic forward – despite all opposition.

The parameters for charitable activities by philanthropists and founders in Austria were – and still are to some degree – anything but encouraging. For example, in the year 2012, this caused several existing foundations to be dissolved and refounded. This is a complete contrast to the situation in our neighbouring countries of

⁷ In Austria, the framework conditions have already changed significantly as a result of the tax reforms in 2009, 2012, and 2015. Since the reform of 2009, donations to associations and institutions that pursue charitable purposes, or are active in development and disaster aid, or collect for these purposes, are tax-deductible. The organisational purposes supported by donations were expanded in the following years. The donation volume has increased significantly as a result. According to the Fundraising Association Austria, this amounted to only EUR 390 million in 2009, but had risen to EUR 675 million by 2018.

Germany and Switzerland, as shown above. A few years ago, there was some movement, mainly as a result of the commitment of the Austrian Fundraising Association with Günther Lutschinger, the Julius Raab Foundation with its then president Harald Mahrer – and some other protagonists. The position paper “Development of the Charitable Foundation Sector in Austria” by the Julius Raab Foundation revealed the improvements that were necessary for the sector in this country. In 2013, Harald Mahrer was successful in having the idea of a “new charitable foundation” included in the negotiations for the 2013–2018 programme of the SPÖ–ÖVP coalition at the time. After being appointed State Secretary for Science, Economy and Research, Mahrer also played a significant role in its implementation.

The “previous” legal and tax situation in Austria

Until the amendment of the Federal Foundation and Fund Law, the last major legal renewal for the foundation sector in Austria was the Private Foundation Law of 1993, which was intended to stop the outflow of Austrian capital into foreign foundations, to make the country more attractive for foreign capital, and secure workplaces in Austria. In addition, these private foundations were to be given the possibility to keep gained assets, without splitting and multiple taxation, for future generations. Particularly in the case of company transfers, this legal structure provided – and still provides – an important instrument for securing productively acquired financial assets for the Austrian economy. However, the frequent political discussions concerning taxation and legal security created an atmosphere of uncertainty and the interest in establishing foundations decreased constantly.

Self-serving and charitable foundations have different objectives, which should also be taken differently into account from a legal and tax perspective. The Private Foundation Act puts the main focus of the framework on self-serving foundations, while social and charitable engagement in this legal form is less attractive and was, therefore, hardly ever chosen for charitable engagement. The legal forms for charitable foundations were provided in accordance with the Savings Banks Act, the fund and foundation laws of the individual provinces and the federal government, as well as church foundations. This confusion in the foundation legislation, the different responsibilities, and the bureaucratic enforcement, did not produce a favourable climate for charitable founders. In addition, charitable donations in the form of private foundations were – and are – not very attractive from a tax point of view.

Since then, Austria's foundation landscape has experienced a positive development. The current 745 active charitable foundations declare as much as 70 million euros each year.⁸ The importance of charitable foundations in securing social welfare is increasing – especially in times of crisis. In recent years, active charitable foundations have made hundreds of millions of euros available to secure social cohesion – to combat homelessness, for the inclusion of people with disabilities, in the areas of art and culture, environmental protection, education, and – last but not least – in the struggle against COVID-19 and its social consequences. They have now become an indispensable component of the civil society and important complementary actor in the third sector.

⁸ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000119752898/experten-fordern-weniger-buerokratie-fuer-gemeinnuetzige-stiftungen> (19.09.2020).

The diversity of the sector

Foundations that are active in the charitable area have different legal structures and goals. However, they are all united in the desire to change something in the civil society field. Most foundations of this kind support individual people or charitable organisations, societies, and NGOs. Some also implement their own projects and programmes. A few foundations are exclusively self-active – they conceive their own projects, run social facilities such as hospitals, or carry out research on socio-political matters. Austria has a strong third sector, but in comparison with our German and Swiss neighbours, most of the involvement is in the hands of the around 125,000 associations. Nevertheless, there has been an unbelievable amount of change in the vibrant, diverse founder scene since the amendment of the Federal Foundation and Fund Law in 2015. The charitable foundation Teach for Austria, the MEDA educational foundation, the Munus Foundation – Ground for a Good Life, the University of Innsbruck Foundation, the Carinthian Cultural Foundation, The Technical University of Vienna Foundation, the alpha+ Foundation of the FWF Austrian Science Fund, and many others have been established.

Another small island of success and a step forwards in this area was the establishment of state Innovation Foundation for Education (ISB). As a state foundation, it offers concrete public/private partnerships with private foundations and philanthropists for the first time. One of these sub-foundations is the Meaning Construction Foundation that has been established by 14 private foundations. In collaboration with Ashoka and a subsidy from the ISB, the BILDÜNGER project got off the ground. The Meaning Construction Foundation aims at solving urgent problems in the educational field by supporting innovative initiatives and driving lasting changes forward. This form of cooperation between the

state sector and private patrons is the future; foundations cannot take the place of the state, but they can fill the gaps where the state's social system does not take hold, and that is why strong cooperation is so necessary. Charitable organisations can give sustainable help for the development of our community. They help victims of violence, as well as homeless people, they are active in the area of catastrophe assistance, and support building schools, are involved in climate and animal protection. The valuable work that charitable foundations do has become especially obvious during the virus pandemic when it is a matter of research into COVID-19 and combatting the social aftermath of the disease. In the first months of the COVID-19 crisis, more than 20 members of the association jointly acknowledged that they would continue to stand by their partners in these difficult times, even though the parameters could possibly change, under the hashtag *#PhilanthropyDoesNot-Stop!* Foundations were – and continue to be – extremely relevant actors for social cohesion in times of crisis.

What the sector needs

Step by step, legislative changes have led to an increased appreciation of common public interest and brought movement into the multifaceted foundation arena. The Federal Foundation and Fund Law is an extremely important component in the revaluation. However, in practice, there are still some hurdles to be overcome, and here improvement is needed. In comparison with Germany, the limits for tax relief are still too low in Austria. With a limit of 10 per cent of the yield with a 500,000 euro maximum – and that is restricted to the period from 2016 to 2020 – this offer is considerably below that in the neighbouring countries and, as a way of testing the waters, creates little trust with foundations. The areas that are eligible for tax relief are also too narrowly drawn in our

country. In particular, the sphere of tax relief for donations to educational projects in Austria should be expanded. If they support educational projects, foundations are still required to pay capital gains tax. This is not the case in most European countries, including Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. Tax benefits would mobilise more donations and contributions from foundations and, by so doing, have positive effects on the educational system. In its study “Fiscal Effects of Measures to Support the Public Interest”, EcoAustria, commissioned by the Association of Charitable Foundations, collected with around 35 million euros of additional donations and contributions from foundations annually. This could be compared with costs of only 10 to 15 million euros.⁹

Donations to charitable foundations can currently only be considered for tax purposes if they are included on a list of charitable organizations. One of the requirements for registration is for the organization to have existed for at least three years. This is a hurdle, especially for newly established foundations – just as it is for newly established NGOs – particularly in the first three years of their existence when the risk is highest and outside capital most needed. Another factor is that foundations need the approval of two authorities when they are being established: the foundation authority and the tax authority. This process is very time-consuming, as the two bodies create specifications for donors independently of each other. This means that the set-up process can drag on for months and cause high costs for the founder.

The measures that the federal government anchored in the area of public benefit in its government programme 2020–2024¹⁰ at the

9 EcoAustria: Fiskalische Effekte von Maßnahmen zur Förderung von Gemeinnützigkeit, Vienna 2019.

10 <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/bundeskanzleramt/die-bundesregierung/regierungsdokumente.html> (19.09.2020).

beginning of the year are gratifying. The planned establishment of a coordination, advice, and service centre for foundations, non-profit associations, social enterprises, and volunteers can make their work easier in the future and thus make a positive contribution to the necessary sector development. The clear commitment to favouring charitable activities of foundations with tax benefits, the exemption from capital gains tax for ecological and ethical investments, and the planned expansion of donation deductibility for associations in the education sector are important steps towards a modern set of rules for the Austrian foundation system. An active dialogue will make it possible for the Austrian public-benefit sector to continue to develop positively. A charitable foundation will not be the appropriate vehicle for all forms of involvement. However, particularly in regard to the great social challenges facing us, and the intensification of some social imbalances resulting from the pandemic and its effects, foundations are the most lasting variant to bundle civil-society commitment and get it moving in the right direction over the long term.

The future of philanthropy

Force social impact¹¹

In recent years, new sponsorship models, such as Social Impact Bonds or general loans for social enterprises, have developed. As defined by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care, and Consumer Protection,¹² a Social Impact Bond (SIB) is an “... effect-oriented financing instrument for projects in the social sector. It

11 Achatz, Markus / Jöchtl, Sonja / Leitner-Bommer, Nikola / Lindinger, Wolfgang / Sperz, Daniela / Williams, Ruth: *Achtung, Stiftung!*, Vienna 2020 p. 104.

12 <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Soziales/Soziale-Themen/Soziale-Innovation/Social-Impact-Bond.html> (26.09.2020).

consists of a partnership between various actors that is initiated and managed by the public sector.” In a Social Impact Bond, a social service provider pledges to furnish an intervention and, in this way, achieve a measurable social impact. The intervention is financed by private investment capital. If the intervention achieves the desired social impact, the investors receive the capital invested plus a return that depends on the effect of the social measures. However, the return paid does not come directly from the social service provider but is paid by the public sector if the financed intervention has proved to be effective and savings can be generated in the public budget.

Make new sponsorship models possible

There is no standardised definition for social business and also no individual legal status. Social businesses want to confront social challenges in their business model. Nevertheless, they still manage to make a profit. Four of the best-known examples in Austria are Sindbad, Three Coins, Vollpension, and More than one Perspective. Active charitable foundations are often approached as potential investors in this connection. However, the current legal situation in Austria means that it is not such an easy matter for charitable foundations to participate in funding models of this kind. Seeing that, from an economic perspective, an investment in a Social Impact Bond represents loan financing in which the repayment and/or interest depends on the social impact of the intervention financed by it; this creates a dilemma for the foundation according to the current tax laws: Due to their typically low prospects for earnings from the risks assumed (e.g., default risk, earnings risk), a Social Impact Bond (SIB) is not a suitable means for investing assets. On the other hand, an SIB cannot simply be used as a funding instrument as the foundation only creates the

conditions for the social business to pursue charitable purposes. The active charitable foundation therefore only pursues its purposes indirectly and, consequently, violates the requirement of immediacy. Currently, a charitable foundation can only appear as an investor in a SIB if the social business is a nominated beneficiary of donations because this represents a departure from the principle of immediacy.

New trends

The example given above shows that there is still some legislative adjustment necessary to enable charitable foundations to fulfil their role to the greatest effect. Foundations are predestined to pilot ideas and accept risks and, in this way, bring the sector forward. However, they need the parameters that allow a modern project practice and, especially, also provide the space required to try out new things. Especially when being innovative, it is important to be in the company of others who think alike, to be able to bundle knowledge and other resources and, together, achieve more and come closer to the common goal. Currently, a trend towards cooperation is clearly recognisable in the Austrian foundation sector. In addition, the subject of participation is steadily increasing in importance. Stakeholders, who are relevant to the ecological system – and even the benefited target groups – are being integrated into project development and decision-making processes.

#VertrauenMachtWirkung (Trust has an effect) is a trailblazing project in this area.¹³ The initiative was launched by Dreilinden, PHINEO, and Wider Sense and is supported by members of the Federal Association of German Foundations, as well as Austrian

13 <https://www.vertrauen-macht-wirkung.de> (26.09.2020).

organisations such as the HIL Foundation. The group is convinced that this can be successful through a participative, critical debate. Nine theses are used to discuss what is necessary for foundations to be fit for the future – and remain so. Life-long learning, continuing education, and new forms of cooperation are some of the relevant factors that play a role in shaping the philanthropy of tomorrow.

The civic foundation

An old trend, which is new in Austria, that could lead to a significant change is the concept of the civic foundation – a charitable foundation with a shared governance model. The Association of German Civic Foundations defines the concept as follows: “In community foundations, people from a city, district, or region donate together. The community donors not only bring in money, but also time and ideas. [...] Community foundations are active for their homeland – in a variety of projects of their own, as sponsors of other committed people, as a platform for civic engagement. Community foundations are independent, have a broad foundation purpose, and are open to everyone. Community foundations are mostly set up ‘from below’ – that is, jointly by many citizens. Companies, associations, credit institutions, and other organizations can participate as donors.”¹⁴

The first civic foundation was established in the USA in 1914; at present, they can be found in many countries worldwide. Our neighbouring country Germany has a large civic-foundation movement with more than 400 actors throughout the country. They are characterised by independence, non-partisanship, and neutrality. Their focus is on supporting regional, civil-society initiatives and

14 <https://www.buergerstiftungen.org/de/buergerstiftungen/was-ist-eine-buergerstiftung> (26.09.2020).

scaling ideas through the cooperation of many. Community foundations have the potential to act as bridge builders between civil society actors (NGOs, social businesses, cooperatives, associations) and foundations. The introduction of the community foundation could bring a completely new understanding of foundations to Austria and be an exciting alternative to associations, non-profit cooperatives, and other actors in the third sector.

Résumé

Although it has been possible to have the impression that the state could empty out its cornucopia after the “no matter what it costs” principle, and actually suggested that this was possible, it must be clear to everyone that this is a false conclusion. The state only has limited resources and – with us, the taxpayers, in mind – should deal with these carefully and responsibly. Responsibility does not mean handing a rucksack, which is full of debts and becoming heavier all the time, down to the coming generations or tightening the tax screw more and more. This should also make philanthropists and donors, who are prepared to do without some of their assets and employ them for charitable purposes, even more welcome in Austria. The diversity in the sector, as well as the positive trend in recent years, should be seized by politics to not only continue with the (tax) legislation parameters, but also develop them further. In this way, additional means, which would not otherwise be available, could be mobilised for overcoming social challenges. In addition, it should not be underestimated that foundations could be important actors in piloting innovative projects and taking risks that politics and the administration could not (be allowed to). If we strengthen this role and increase this great potential, we will make Austria flourish even more.

Annex

Rosa Gallego, Director of International Relations, Regional Groups and Finances of the Asociación Española de Fundaciones (Spanish Association of Foundations) AEF, and former long-term member of the board of the Donors and Foundations Networks in Europe (DAFNE), provides a brief but vibrant sketch of Europe's foundation landscape.¹⁵

Donating for charitable causes appears to be an attractive option for the wealthy, fundraisers, and – not least – target groups to utilise private capital. Is that a perception that is shared throughout Europe?

Philanthropy – or maybe we should say, transforming private wealth to benefit the public – looks back over a long history in Europe. In spite of that, it is clear that donating for the public good only plays a small role in specific niches when it is compared to the state sector.

However, each niche is necessary because that is where people and problems that the state does not reach are addressed. Foundations can accept challenges and take higher risks that the state has to avoid and, with their long-term perspectives, attack the roots of a problem instead of trying to fight symptoms for a short period.

Philanthropy is expanding in Europe. *Making a difference*, that is what founders and donors want. And they are worried that the resources they provide are not employed really efficiently in the sense of reaching the goal and becoming effective.

15 Verband für gemeinnütziges Stiften: Anstifter 2017.

If we compare Austria with Switzerland and Germany, it seems that we are far behind the trend. How diverse is the foundation landscape in Europe?

The European foundation landscape is extremely diverse; the legislation and tax law parameters for foundations differ massively between the individual European countries and make possible (or prevent) completely different types of foundations. There are no really good or really bad parameters for foundations because – looking beyond Europe – they are in a permanent state of dynamic change.

Have we overcome the ideological – state or private? – debate, or not?

The ideological debate seems to be moving away from “either-or?” to “how-together?”. How can the state, the private sector and the economy solve problems together in the most effective way? The spectrum ranges from ad-hoc cooperation, over long-term cooperative agreements, to the establishment of specific hybrid organisations. New forms and variants of cooperation are being developed all the time. However, one challenge is permanently increasing: sinking public expenditure and transferring public obligations into private hands in countries in which the state draws back with restrictive austerity programmes and growing social problems. In contrast, in other countries, the state targets its power and influence precisely to control civil-society actors and foundations and restrict their scope for action – especially those who perform *advocacy work*.

Would you say that most European countries support the foundation sector?

In general, we see a supportive environment for the development of civil-society organisations like foundations that provide services for society. The members of our network, however, are becoming increasingly concerned about intentional, undesired measures that limit organisations, that are considered to be critical, challenging, or risky in their activity radius through excessively strict regulations and the disclosure of data, and even go as far as banning the organisation itself.

One area in which we see little development is the improvement of cross-border cooperation possibilities. Many foundations would like to operate and finance trans-nationally, but we do not have a unified “philanthropy market”. A European foundation law would not be supported by all the member countries of the EU.

“Cooperative?” “Nobody will come!”

On the Rediscovery of an Often-Underestimated Legislation and Organisational Form

Justus Reichl

Summary: While some people never grow tired of stressing that the concept itself is no longer useable – not to mention the legal form – others are discovering the “cooperative” anew: as an ideal vehicle for the joint solution of a great variety of problems. As a school for lived democracy and shared responsibility and as a vehicle for the cooperative implementation of concerns of a modern “civil society”. In short: as a completely up-to-date form for sustainability in the sense of “healthy” operating. The following contribution provides a brief overview of the historical development of the cooperative system and sketches current examples of foundations. It also provides completely personal impressions against the background of the author’s living and experiential worlds.

Preliminary note

Although I am writing these lines as head of the “Cooperative Competence Centre” of the Austrian Raiffeisenverband in Vienna – and, naturally, mainly refer to experiences made in the Raiffeisen organisation – my fundamental considerations relate to the cooperative sectors active in this country. I have feelings of sympathy and respect for all of them. This is because they all make – and I am completely convinced of this – an essential and often-underestimated contribution to “with and for each other” in practice in Austria as a whole and all the regions of the country.

1. Cooperative?

It happened in 2017. Colleagues from Salzburg had invited me to give a lecture in an unusual setting – around 2000 young people were expected to attend the so-called “fit4future-Day” in the Kongresshaus. All of them were about 17 years of age and one year away from graduating from secondary school. And all of them were encouraged to put their individual morning programme together out of the good dozen various lectures that were sketched in the programme booklet. As a result, none of the lecturers could be guaranteed a full auditorium. I became particularly aware of this situation when I finally had to submit the title of my lecture, complete with a small synopsis of its content, in the programme booklet. When I suggested simply naming it “Genossenschaft?”, the German word for cooperative; the first reaction of the person responsible – who was somebody who had a good opinion of me – was: “No – please, not that!” When I countered, “But why not?”, he came back with, “Cooperative? – Nobody will come!” I then adapted the title, or to put it better – translated it. The final version was “Cooperatives – the Future lies in Togetherness!” And, lo and behold, in spite of considerable competition on the lecture market, several hundred participants made their way to my hall. It seems that my colleagues had really not reckoned with that happening. And they found something else just as surprising: the universally positive feedback. After a good hour of presentation and discussion, the words “We never realised just how modern the *cooperative* could be!” were used quite often.

For me personally, that morning in Salzburg confirmed, yet again, the following realisation: It is worthwhile to look at what is supposedly taken for granted from time to time, to tell stories in a new and different way, and bring them up to date with contemporary images and concepts, to create a “setting in life” for

today.¹ One example is the German term “Genossenschaftlicher Förderauftrag”. It means something like “cooperative service mandate”; but who knows what used to be hidden behind it? Sharing economy, crowdfunding, swarm intelligence, platform economy, network nodes, or hub? They also sound much less antiquated. Those terms click, even though they are actually all the same: using the power of cooperation to solve precisely those problems that an individual would hardly be able to solve alone, if at all.

Anyway, studies and survey results made in the recent past show: Although knowledge about the typical characteristics of cooperatives is little developed in the majority of the population, as a whole, they are (even if one explicitly uses the German word *Genossenschaft* and does not anglicise it like I did in the Salzburg programme booklet) considered to be increasingly sympathetic, trustworthy, and – above all – lasting organisations that are fit for the future.²

1 The term “setting in life” was originally used in biblical studies; more precisely, in form criticism, where it was used to describe the social and cultural conditions and circumstances that led to a specific text – the assumed original situation of its genesis or function. If knowledge of the respective setting in life is missing, the understanding of the individual concepts or the text itself are lost.

2 Cf. Rößl, Dietmar et. al., *Das Image von Genossenschaften in Österreich*, Vienna 2014, p. 255ff; as well as a survey (Austria-wide, and representative) that has been carried out regularly since 2014 (most recently in August 2020) by the Austrian Raiffeisen Association in which the answers to explicit questions on “cooperatives” revealed increasing sympathy and approval ratings – especially in the 18–35-year-old age group.

2. Cooperatives worldwide – historical development and the present day

A wide variety of collectives already existed in pre-Christian times: in Egypt, in ancient Greece, *and* in old Rome, where they were known as *collegia*. The craft guilds in medieval cities were further steps along the path to ordered cooperation. At the same time, the first attempts at cooperative economic activity occurred in the Alpine regions. The term *Allme(i)nde* can still often be heard to describe the common use of non-subdivided pastures and meadows. And the root of the German word *Genossenschaft* also has something to do with the meadow; the Old German word *noz* means livestock. The prefix *Gi* or *Ge*, which always indicated a commonality, is added to this. The *Ge-selle* (assistant or journeyman) is somebody who resides in the same hall (*Saal* in German); the *Ge-fährte* (companion) participates in the same journey (*Fahrt*), and the *Ge-nosse* (comrade) has a share of the livestock or common grazing ground.³

Cooperatives in the modern sense developed out of the bitter need of large sections of the population at the time of industrialisation in the middle of the 18th century.⁴ Major pioneers in the field⁵ were the Swiss social pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), the Scottish cotton manufacturer Robert Owen⁶

3 Cf. Faust, Helmut: *Geschichte der Genossenschaftsbewegung*, Frankfurt a. M. 1977, p. 20.

4 Cf. Bertolini, Rita / Mätzler, Frank: *Allmeinde Vorarlberg. Von der Kraft des gemeinsamen Tuns*, Bregenz 2012, p. 14.

5 Cf. Eichwald, Berthold / Lutz, Klaus Josef: *Erfolgsmodell Genossenschaften*, Wiesbaden 2011, p. 30ff.

6 Here is a pertinent bon mot with a connection to Austria: Owen hoped that many people would copy his reforms but saw himself surrounded by bitter opponents. When he told Freidrich von Gentz, the Austrian politician and Metternich's closest advisor, about his initiative sometime around 1818, he

(1771–1858), the English physician and philanthropist William King (1786–1865), who gave impetus to the establishment of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers – the world’s first consumer cooperative, as well as Victor Aimé Huber (1800–1869), a German social politician and scientist who provided the theoretical foundation for the development of credit, distribution, consumer, productive, and housing cooperatives following his study trips to England and the reports he wrote thereafter.

In the middle of the 19th century, Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch (1808–1883) and Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen (1818–1888) stimulated the cooperative movement that is now a worldwide phenomenon. Schulze-Delitzsch paid specific attention to the craftsmen who, with their medium-size businesses, were no longer able to compete with increasing industrialisation. Raiffeisen, on the other hand, particularly made a name for himself as the advocate of rural populations. And both developed – largely, independent of each other (and occasionally in conflict with each other), but on the basis of the same three principles of self-help, self-administration, and self-responsibility – the foundations for establishing the first loan funds associations and loan cooperatives that we know of as Volks- and Raiffeisen Banks today. As a jurist and Prussian parliamentarian, Schulze-Dietrich also performed great services in connection with the composition of a suitable cooperative law, while Raiffeisen’s book “The Loan Funds Associations as an Aid to the Need of the Rural Population”, which was first published in 1866 and translated into many languages during his lifetime, started its triumphant progress in Europe and abroad where it found any number of enthusiastic emulators.

replied: “We fully understand what you want. But we do not want the masses to be independent and prosperous. How could we govern them then?”, cf. Metje, Caterina: *Kleine Genossenschaftsgeschichte*, Münster 2013, p. 8.

Today, a good 150 years later, there are around three million cooperatives with close to one billion members worldwide – twelve per cent of the world’s population. This shows that cooperatives are not a fringe phenomenon; it is quite the opposite. They employ 280 million people – ten per cent of the world’s employees. And they are not always niche players in the sense of being cute and insignificant: The 300 largest cooperatives on earth had a total turnover of 2035 billion dollars in the year 2019, somewhat more than Italy’s gross national product, putting them – purely hypothetically – at place 8 in the round of the G20. Against this background, it is not so surprising that, measured on the number of people it represents, the International Cooperatives Association (ICA) is currently one of the largest non-governmental organisations in the world.⁷

3. Cooperatives and their characteristics

On the occasion of the “International Year of Cooperatives”, proclaimed by the United Nations in 2012, the then General Secretary Ban Ki-moon stated that “Cooperatives are a reminder to the international community that it is possible to pursue both economic viability and social responsibility.”⁸ But how can that be done?

In contrast to capital companies, cooperatives follow one main goal: the economic support of their members.⁹ That is a fundamen-

7 Cf. <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/facts-and-figures> (accessed 25 November 2020).

8 Cf. <https://social.un.org/coopsyear/> (accessed 25 November 2020), as well as Rößl, Dietmar et. al. *Das Image von Genossenschaften in Österreich*, Vienna 2014, p. II.

9 Cf. Paragraph 1 Genossenschaftsgesetz (GenG): “...Personenvereinigungen mit Rechtspersönlichkeit von nicht geschlossener Mitgliederzahl, die im wesentlichen der Förderung des Erwerbes oder der Wirtschaft ihrer Mit-

tal difference! Of course, cooperatives also have to perform professionally, conform to the market, and be economically efficient and, in this way, remain competitive. However, the main focus is not on profit maximisation for individual owners or anonymous shareholders, but the long-term wellbeing of all its members – and, therefore, also of the region they live in.¹⁰ On this basis, the cooperatives not only create sustainable benefits for their immediate members but also set a regional economic cycle in motion that is, to a large extent, independent of alien influence. This is often not immediately recognised (and often not appreciated) by outsiders, but, at the same time, it increases prosperity in the region. This can be in the form of fundamental strategic decisions, the corresponding thesaurisation or reinvestment of profits, creation of workplaces, support for social and charitable projects and associations, for cultural initiatives, educational offers, and similar ventures.¹¹ Around 150 years after the founding of the first cooperatives in Austria, that might all seem to be a matter of course but – on closer inspection – we see that this is in no way true. The recent developments in connection with corona and COVID-19 have made the strengths of these principles that unite all members of the cooperative family apparent. And the fundamental differences between the cooperative mindset and a form of – mainly globally-oriented and, therefore, to a large extent, location-independent – economy

glieder dienen (Genossenschaften)” (Associations of persons with legal personality, with a non-closed number of members, which essentially serve to promote the income or the economy of their members (cooperatives) online under <https://www.jusline.at/gesetz/geng> (accessed 25 November 2020).

10 In this respect, cooperatives can be compared most closely to businesses run by families for generations.

11 Against this background, cooperatives are also ideally suited as a vehicle for the cooperative implementation of concerns of a modern ‘civil society’. A good synopsis of this can be found under: <https://www.genossenschaftsverband.at/die-genossenschaft/genossenschaften-und-buergergesellschaft> (accessed 10 November 2020).

that is becoming increasingly free of values, and whose strategic considerations are frequently only limited to short term profit maximisation, have become just as apparent.

Fundamental characteristics of cooperatives:

- Standing by each other – the principle of solidarity: This central feature of the cooperative makes each member responsible for the whole organisation and the reverse also applies. Only through this is the individual member placed in the position of being able to achieve more than by operating on his own.
- Self-responsibility – the principle of identity: All cooperatives have one thing in common; their members are both proprietors and clients. On the one hand, each member is financially involved and, in keeping with the respective statutes, has certain powers of co-decision making, but is also a recipient of the services offered by the cooperative. This is a fundamental difference between cooperatives and other forms of cooperative collaboration.
- Self-administration – the principle of democracy: The members organize the internal conditions of their respective cooperative independently and bear responsibility for their current direction and future in different ways. The supervisory board and, to some extent, the honorary board of directors are elected from the group of members. The supreme body of the cooperative is the annual general assembly. Each member usually has (only) one vote and, therefore, the same weight in decision making. In this way, individual interests cannot dominate, and there is also no risk of a hostile takeover by third parties. Only the annual economic audit, which is also the manage-

ment audit (this is another difference) of the cooperative, is outsourced. As a rule,¹² it is carried out by an independent, knowledgeable, and competent auditing association, whose report is brought to the knowledge of all members annually.

- Closeness to the market – the principle of regionality: The radius of action of a cooperative is usually easy to grasp – it is regional. This guarantees the best possible understanding of the market, as well as the clients, great flexibility in everyday business activities, and the greatest possible closeness to the members themselves. In combination with the previously-mentioned self-administration, regionality also makes short decision paths and timeframes possible – also in the case of challenging affairs going as far as situations of crisis.
- Help where it is needed – the principle of subsidiarity: The power of the cooperative only comes into play when the power of the individual is insufficient. The cooperative community only fulfils those obligations that the individual could not perform as well, or even better, himself.¹³

12 Something topical: This was precisely not so in the case of the officially closed *Commerzbank Mattersburg* (CBM) that dominated the headlines in 2020 – after all, it was an institute that had left its originally responsible auditing association in the mid-1990s and for which a stand-alone solution was created for its owners' cooperative on the basis of the (then still applicable) legal framework – with the unpleasant outcome we are all aware of.

13 This principle is valid within the individual cooperatives, as well as for cooperation between various cooperatives in the association.

4. Cooperatives as a solution – for many problems of our time

What do a village pub in a rural district in Upper Austria, a car-sharing initiative in Vorarlberg, a consortium of IT technicians in Styria, a health-care network in the Tennengau region of Salzburg, and the Austrian Press Agency (APA), as well as the Biotope City, in Vienna, the Transkribus project, initiated by the University of Innsbruck (by the way, this was recently the winner of the renowned Horizon Impact Award 2020 of the European Union), the Red-Zac Group, with its headquarters in Biedermansdorf near Vienna, the Holz die Sonne ins Haus (Bring Sun into the House with Wood) HSH ÖKO-Invest in St. Veit an der Glan, as well as the Domaine Andau in Burgenland, have in common? They are all among the around 1600 Austrian cooperatives at the present time. And they are all the result of active cooperation between their respective joint owners. There are countless other examples ranging from internet to artists cooperatives, from photovoltaic and local supplier cooperatives to the open technology laboratory. A scientific survey that was recently commissioned by the Austrian Raiffeisen Auditing Association¹⁴ also certified that there is considerable potential for development in the following fields:

- Housing, city, and district development
- Cooperatives of and for one-person companies and SMEs
- Company succession
- Healthcare and social welfare

14 Studie “Kooperatives Wirtschaften – Forschungs- und Entwicklungsprojekt *Neue Genossenschaften*” (Author: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ralph Grossmann, OD-Consulting, Vienna).

- Cooperation between consumers and producers (Food Coops)
- Sustainable energy supply
- Communal and regional development

Seen against this background, something seems even more surprising: Why aren't (even) more new cooperatives being established? Although an increased interest in this legal form has been felt in recent years, it would be premature to talk about a boom in this respect.¹⁵ The problem is that in spite of the increasingly urgent social and economic challenges – particularly in the areas mentioned – cooperatives can hardly, if at all, be directed top-down. As a result, no matter how well meant they might be, the – usually centrally coordinated – founding initiatives can only have an accompanying character or provide initial impulses. The starting point for new foundations almost always stems from proponents suffering from some concrete distress where they feel that it can't be overcome alone – and who then manage to find comrades-in-arms for a joint venture. One example of this is a very recent foundation in Graz, which was briefly mentioned before: Here, a handful of IT one-person-companies got together to form the First Styrian IT Cooperative (ESIT), focussing on IT infrastructure, system security, and web solutions, to be able to have a stronger joint presence on the market and, simultaneously, a better work-life balance for themselves (in the demanding IT business world). There was no precedence for a cooperative of this kind in Austria,

15 On the basis of a statistical analysis compiled by the Styrian Raiffeisen Association, a total of 464 new cooperatives were founded in Austria between 2000 and 2020 (in all cooperative sectors), i.e., around 23 per year. Between 2000 and 2007, the number of start-ups was up to 30 per year, between 2008 and 2016 they then fell to well below 20 in each case, and a noticeable increase to around 30 start-ups per year has only been discernible since 2017.

and nobody could give them any tips. This new foundation came into being solely through the considerations of a single person who managed to get others enthusiastic about his idea. It was only from this point in time that the tried and tested start-up support service of a specific cooperative association came into action – but the fundamental decision, first by the individual and then the small founding group, could not anticipate this. Cooperative – a classic bottom-up movement that is (only) as strong as the people who bear it together.

Precisely because it cannot be set up centrally, it seems to me all the more important to move the cooperative, as a modern legal and organisational form, significantly more into the public spotlight or, in some cases, to reposition it completely and – let's just put it this way – also advertise it: for example, in the field of school and university training¹⁶, in business start-up consultancies, in support programs to strengthen rural areas. Consciously, also as a much more suitable alternative to the association model, which is often chosen prematurely for projects and then turns out to be no longer suitable. And, last but not least, in the political discourse, where the eco-social market economy, developed in Austria in the 1980s and later promoted primarily by Vice Chancellor Josef Riegler, is an ideal starting point for promoting the cooperative idea.¹⁷

16 In the 2020/21 school year, for example, the pilot project “Cooperative makes school – learn to do business cooperatively”, jointly supported by the BMBWF, BMLRT, and local cooperative associations, was launched to implement the model of student cooperatives, which had been tried and tested in Germany, for the first time in Austria at academic and vocational secondary schools.

17 Cf. <https://oekosozial.at/unsere-themen/oekosoziale-marktwirtschaft/> (Stand 25. November 2020).

5. Cooperatives – a genuine alternative for healthy economics

Don't let this shock you – at the end of my remarks, I am going to go back to the roots of my education, concretely, back to my years as a student at the Catholic-Theological Faculty at the University of Salzburg. That is where I came into contact with the so-called “salutogenesis” of the sociologist Aaron Antonovsky (1923–1994) from the USA towards the end of my first stage of studies – professional theology and philosophy. To put it simply – he carried out life-long research into what people need to remain psychologically healthy. Antonovsky's realisation: A trio of things is necessary that he summarised in his three salutogenetic principles, namely *comprehensibility*, *manageability*, and *meaningfulness*. If one considers these three principles parallel to the three core values of the cooperative, *regionality*, *subsidiarity*, and *solidarity*, one discovers what I consider to be astonishing parallels: Local people are the owners of their own cooperative and, therefore, are able to understand the correlations in their enterprise – understandability. As members, and therefore co-owners, they also participate actively and are involved in important decisions concerning the cooperative – manageability. And finally, the economy of the respective cooperative also increases the local economy and, with it, the cycle of life and prosperity in the region – transparent and perceptible meaningfulness. The cooperative, seen from this perspective, is lived *salutogenesis*.

In conclusion, cooperatives are playing their old, and at the same time consistently modern, trump cards – and they should communicate this even more clearly in chorus with like-minded partners, strong regional roots, a high degree of initiative and personal responsibility, short supply chains and decision-making channels, a correspondingly quick responsiveness to changing circumstances.

And, quite generally, cooperatives promote the following position: Let's find creative solutions ourselves before waiting a long time to see if someone comes from somewhere to help us. In other words, cooperatives are the ideal legal and organisational form for people who want to change something through cooperative management. Those who have had enough of "We should!". Who have recognized for themselves: "We can!" Or, as Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen put it in a speech on the occasion of the Cooperative Day in 1879: "We have to help ourselves. All conditions for this are in place, all means and forces are plentifully available to us. We only need to apply them. It is by no means necessary to look for outside help. This is evil and only has a paralysing effect on your own strength."¹⁸

18 Cf. Raiffeisen-Worte, Auszüge aus den Schriften, Reden und Briefen F. W. Raiffeisens, Neuwied 1922; as well as Brendel, Marvin (ed.): Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen – Zitate, Berlin 2018.

Social Entrepreneurship: Attempt at a Classification within the Civil Society

Elisabeth Mayerhofer

Summary: Being able to recognise a problem and knowing that one is allowed to do that, developing a solution and knowing that one is allowed to do so, and then implementing this solution and knowing that one is also allowed to do that – those are all central elements for the success of a civil society. This contribution takes a number of very different cases to show what that has to do with social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship links entrepreneurial thinking and acting in order to address social problems – independent of the organisational form. Of course, there are some prerequisites attached to that: Application-oriented education is one of the central factors, as is access to data.

It probably took place in an office, behind a large desk with an impressive view over a bustling city, when Larry Fink, CEO of the investment giant BlackRock, was polishing up one of his “letters from the CEO”. In 2020, he made it clear that his enterprise was going to put sustainability in the centre of its investment activities. In this letter, Fink prognosed that we were on the threshold of a radical change in thinking in the financial world, because an increasing number of investors recognised that the social problem of climate change was becoming an investment risk.¹ In this way, Fink was acting in the sense of what Edward Freeman, Professor of Economics at the Darden School of Business, described as “the

1 Fink, Larry (2020): A Fundamental Reshaping of Finance, in: https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/investor-relations/larry-fink-ceo-letter?cid=ppc:CEOLetter:PMS:US:NA&gclid=CjwKCAiAsIDxBRAsEiwAV76N8zYUubHkF4Kc-oMvcYjrkG4q1YHpGdJHh02hfLKYWukYcOFFkql_SzhoCzq8QAvD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds (accessed on 25.10.2020).

power of the AND”²; Fink was combining entrepreneurial action with solving social problems. By doing this, he started an attempt to create an environment in which economic success and social benefits could be considered together: He wanted to make capital available to solve this problem.

Change of scene

We are now in Germany, and a woman in her mid-40s – let’s call her Ina – is sitting in a waiting room; she is leafing through a magazine to pass the time away before she has her breast examination. In Germany, around 70,000 women contract breast cancer every year; 18,000 die of it. Early detection can save lives – and Ina knows that. However, in Germany, only women between 50 and 69 years of age are offered a preventive examination in the form of a mammography screening – and only once every two years. Of course, palpitation of the breast is part of any visit to the gynaecologist in Germany. However, there are usually time constraints and there are no standardised and validated procedures for it. This is the reason that many tissue changes remain undetected.³ The door is opened and a blind woman – let’s call her Anna – leads Ina into the examination room. In it, there is not the gigantic apparatus needed for a mammogram, but only an examination couch. Anna examines Ina. Anna works as a Medical Tactile Examiner (MTU) for the Discovering Hands[®] organisation, which was founded by the German gynaecologist Frank Hoffmann in 2008. The idea behind it: The tactile facilities of people with severely limited or non-existent visual capacities are many times better than those of people who

2 Freeman, R. Edward; Martin, Kirsten E.; Parmar, Bidhan L.: The power of AND, Columbia 2020.

3 Cf., discovering hands, in: <https://www.discovering-hands.de/methodik/taktilographie> (accessed on 25.10.2020).

can see. Discovering Hands® takes advantage of this capability and trains women who are blind or have strongly impaired vision in a special method for the early detection of breast cancer. In combination with this training and their highly developed sense of touch, MTUs are able to identify small changes in the breast tissue at an early stage and, in this way, save lives.⁴ With Saving Hands®, Frank Hoffmann not only introduced a new, cost-efficient, and effective method into the market, but also created a context in which a supposed deficiency – visual impairment or blindness – became a strength. In this way, he now employs 43 women who are blind or partially sighted in Germany.

We change the scene once again

Now we are in a slum in Bangladesh. Prem is young, but he doesn't know exactly how old he is. He is not homeless, but he doesn't have an address, let alone a passport or any other papers. He lives in a slum with his younger brothers and sisters. He takes odd jobs at highly dangerous building sites to help provide his family with the bare essentials. If he is lucky, he gets paid and doesn't injure himself. However, Prem is not insured for his work at the site. This is because Prem does not satisfy many of the conditions for classical insurance coverage: People in Prem's circumstances are often unaware of many things that are common practice in the insurance world that is based on data and prognoses: age, place of residence, and their next of kin. This means that precisely those people who actually need insurance cover most desperately are those who are excluded from it. It would be a genuine threat to his

4 Nagatkin, Anton: Discovering Hands®: Wie sehbehinderte Frauen Brustkrebs aufspüren, in: Social Start-Up Magazine (2014), <https://www.social-startups.de/discovering-hands-brustkrebsfrueherkennung/> (accessed on 25.10.2020).

family's existence if they had to do without the benefits of Prem's labour. That is the reason that Prem takes advantage of the offer provided by Microensure. The enterprise, which the Briton Peter Leftley founded in 2002, offers people in Prem's situation a number of insurance products. The path to the goal was a rocky one, but the result is an economically viable social innovation. Microensure's philosophy about "insurance" is radically different: The only thing its customers have to provide is a mobile telephone number. The insurance product can be renewed every month or simply expire. For example, the costs for health insurance run from just a few cents to one US dollar and are charged over the mobile phone bill. Microensure has already made it possible for more than 56 million registered clients to benefit from insurance coverage and shows a profit in 80 per cent of the markets the enterprise is active in.⁵

Any time left for another example? OK then

A major Europe-wide study showed that 22 per cent of the 42,000 women questioned had experienced physical or sexual abuse during a partnership.⁶ This also happened to Ana Bella Estevez. After 11 years of indescribable domestic violence, the Spanish woman, decided to leave her husband along with her four children, in spite of her economic dependence. Her path first led her to a women's shelter. And that is where Ana experienced the next humiliation: The woman who had suffered years of physical and emotional abuse from her husband, who had protected her children and craftily

5 Cf., Christensen, Clayton M.; Ojomo, Efosa; Dillon Karen: Cracking Frontier Markets, in: Harvard Business Review (1/2020), <https://hbr.org/2019/01/cracking-frontier-markets> (accessed on 26.10.2020).

6 Cf., European Agency for fundamental Rights: Gewalt gegen Frauen. Eine EU-weite Erhebung, (2014), in: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-at-a-glance-oct14_de.pdf (accessed on 30.10.2020).

managed to ward off the devastating fits of rage of her husband, the woman who was so strong and had put up with so much, held a document in her hands that officially gave Ana Bella the status of a victim. It entitled her to a monthly payment from the state amounting to 300 euros. These are not particularly good prospects for an unemployed single mother of four children. In an interview with the “Ashoka” organisation, Ana Bella Estevez said: “Don’t define me as having been abused. That has nothing to do with my value.”⁷ Her flight to the women’s shelter was followed by the difficult months of separation. In her discussions with other women in a similar situation, Ana Bella recognised the potential they had: They were resilient and, socially, highly intelligent. In general, they were excellent, extremely empathetic, sales talents. Ana Bella used this knowledge to establish a successful international organisation that now consists of a network of 16,000 “women survivors”. The goal is the empowerment of women to overcome domestic violence and the financial dependence on their tormentors, as well as changing the perception of being “victims” of domestic violence in the public sphere. Ana Bella sees these women as survivors, not victims. They are courageous heroines who are able to take their lives into their own hands. With her *Fundación Ana Bella*, she has so far helped more than 20,000 women to find their way to a self-determined life without violence. Women are trained for direct sales in the Ana Bella School. The *Fundación Ana Bella* collaborates with renowned enterprises in this endeavour.⁸

7 Ana Bella Estevez in an interview with Raphaela Tonjic-Sornij, 17.10.2017, in: <https://ashoka-cee.org/austria/2017/10/ashoka-fellow-ana-bella-estevez-2/> (accessed on 30.10.2020).

8 Cf., <https://www.fundacionanabella.org/en/> (accessed on 30.10.2020).

Social entrepreneurship and the civil society

What do all of these people have in common? They recognised a socially relevant problem, developed a possible solution for it, and then also implemented it. In this way, they fulfil fundamental elements of social entrepreneurship.

Social entrepreneurship describes “*innovative, entrepreneurial activities, with the aim of solving social problems*”.⁹ Whether this takes place within the framework of a for-profit or not-for-profit orientation, in a newly-founded enterprise, or within an already-existing structure is irrelevant. Whatever helps to address the social problem is what counts.¹⁰ Once again, people who think and act entrepreneurially turn a challenge into a chance.

Social innovation	describes a process for developing solutions to social problems.
Social entrepreneurship	describes an entrepreneurial stance.
Social business	describes a business model that invests profits in the desired success (impact) in connection with a social problem and completely – or to a large degree – forgoes paying dividends to the owner(s). ¹¹

9 Social Entrepreneurship Center der WU, <https://www.wu.ac.at/sec> (accessed on 31.10.2020).

10 See: Social Entrepreneurship Center der WU, <https://www.wu.ac.at/sec> (accessed on 31.10.2020).

11 Impact Garden: Social Innovation / Social Entrepreneurship, in: <https://impactgarden.org/social-innovation/> (accessed on 31.10.2020).

This attitude towards life makes them central players in the civil society. They act as free people in the community with the aim of combining economic and social benefits. That is because money is a great tool for bringing about social change, and entrepreneurial success in the sense of financial profit: A person who has a sustainable business model can also offer his solution to social problems when there is no state assistance. A person in the market economy who addresses social problems also finds himself in competition with others. This creates incentives for innovation and further development and contributes to making the best solutions available at the best price.

The civil society is not without presuppositions

Despite the pandemic and far-reaching changes, I am writing this article in a stable democracy in which – at the moment – its social cohesion is challenged by the effects of corona but not (yet) in danger. Nevertheless, it must be clear to us: Democracy, social cohesion, social peace, prosperity, and quality of life are not there only by chance. Each generation has to acquire them anew. Free people who make a contribution to this in society are not just born that way. Being able to contribute is not without any presuppositions; it requires education and trust in oneself. A person who does not know that he can and is allowed to recognise a problem, that he can and is allowed to develop a solution, after which he can and is allowed to implement it, cannot – in the sense of the civil society – be accused of being irresponsible and lacking in solidarity. He just does not have the right tools for the project.

Mind your own business

Entrepreneurship Education addresses exactly this issue. The goal is not to turn all children and young people into entrepreneurs. The goal is to establish a stance and the capability to also operationalise it, meaning to act accordingly. Competences in three application-oriented levels are acquired to achieve this:

- *Core Entrepreneurship* describes those core competences that are necessary for both entrepreneurial and professional independence, as well as a self-determined private life.
- A culture of independence, empathy, and sustainability is learned and lived on the level of *Entrepreneurial Culture*; relationship and communication culture play a central role.
- The third and final level, *Entrepreneurial Civic Education*, has the goal of strengthening children and youths to become mature and independent, as well as establishing a sense of responsibility for social challenges.¹²

Good news for the civil society

In Austria, the “Initiative for Teaching Entrepreneurship” (IFTE)¹³, in close cooperation with the Education Ministry, offers trainings for teaching staff and education material. With the help of the IFTE 2019 for the implementation of Entrepreneurship

12 See: Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung: Entrepreneurship Education, in: <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/schule/schulsystem/sa/bmhs/kfm/entrepreneurship.html> (Accessed on 31.10.2020).

13 More under: <https://www.ifte.at/> (accessed on 31.10.2020).

Education at elementary schools, the province of Salzburg made its way into the “Innovation in Politics Awards” final.¹⁴ Sixty-two schools in Austria have participated in the certification programme “Entrepreneurship Education for School Innovation”; 32 are about to complete this process.¹⁵ The “Gründerzentrum der WU” (Start-up Centre of the University of Economics)¹⁶ provides students with a contact point where they can turn their ideas into entrepreneurial action. For many years now, the Rudolf Sallinger Fund¹⁷, in collaboration with the Start-up Centre, has awarded a prize in this field: The Future Founders Challenge.¹⁸ The submissions make a trend visible: Most of the start-up concepts presented are connected with a social problem. The students want to make use of their time and their talents to solve social challenges. Entrepreneurial thoughts and action appear to be useful tools for achieving this.

14 Innovation in Politics Institute: Innovation in Politics Awards 2019: Fünf Finalisten aus Österreich bei internationalem Preis für innovative Politik in Berlin, in: https://innovationinpolitics.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/press_release_23.pdf (accessed on 31.10.2020).

15 See: EESI-Impulszentrum, in: <https://www.eesi-impulszentrum.at/zertifizierung/> (accessed on 31.10.2020).

16 Gründungszentrum der WU, in: <https://www.wu.ac.at/gruenden> (accessed on 31.10.2020).

17 More on Rudolf Sallinger Fonds under: www.sallingerfonds.at (accessed on 31.10.2020).

18 Future Founders Challenge des Rudolf Sallinger Fonds, in: www.futurefounders.at (accessed on 31.10.2020).

Raw material for the civil society of the future: data

Not only citizens, but also enterprises and organisations, have central responsibilities in assuring the success of a civil society. The state is another important player. This can be seen in an example from Germany that is related to the corona pandemic. During the first corona wave, the German Federal Government, at the initiative of the civil society, organised the world's largest Hackathon: 28,000 people developed 1500 solutions for corona-related problems within the framework of #wirvsvirus.¹⁹ A central responsibility of the state offices was to make their knowhow of the problem – data relevant to identifying and solving it – available.

According to Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, Professor at the Oxford Internet Institute, 85 per cent of all relevant data remain unused. That is problematic in a data economy. One thing is valid today: It is not the organisation with the best ideas and best minds that brings the best innovations – and, therefore, the most effective solutions to problems – onto the market, but the one that has the access to data. In his new book “Machtmaschinen”, Mayer-Schönberger speaks in favour of introducing a “data-use tax”: Enterprises, organisations, and the state should make their relevant data accessible to others. This is because Mayer-Schönberger believes that data are the only goods that are not depleted by being used; they increase in value only when they are used, which is independent of how many people or organisations use specific data for their innovation processes.²⁰

19 See: Die Bundesregierung, in: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/finale-wirvsvirus-hackathon-1792462> (accessed on 31.10.2020).

20 Mayer-Schönberger, Viktor / Range, Thomas: Machtmaschinen. Warum Datenmonopole unsere Zukunft gefährden und wie wir sie brechen. Hamburg 2020.

Conclusion

People who recognise problems in the sense of the social entrepreneurship mindset, develop a solution, and also implement this solution are central actors for the success and further development of a civil society. It does not matter in which organizational form they operate or whether they describe themselves as social businesses. What counts is addressing a social problem with entrepreneurial thinking and acting. But being able to think and act like this is not without preconditions. Education as conveyed by Entrepreneurship Education is essential. And, looking to the future, we need accessible factual data so that we can identify innovation-relevant problems and develop the best and most effective solutions based on this data.

The Civil Society – the Family as a Learning Environment

Wolfgang Mazal

Summary: The family can provide an experiential and learning environment for a Christian-humanistic image of humanity and understanding of society. If one assumes a concept of the family based on intergenerational, personal responsibility, there are many points that show how behaviour in families can be shaped in a way that is necessary and useful for the functioning of a conservative society – characterised by the desire for the greatest possible individuality and sense of community. In this way, the family can form both the primary learning environment and the nucleus for a bourgeois society as a whole.

1. Civil society

1.1 Definition of the term

It can be assumed that the terms “civil” or “civic” society, which are the unifying concepts for this volume, are enormously controversial and used in a number of different contexts with various contents: It will be left up to other contributions to present them in detail. The following expositions develop what the Political Academy considers a civil society: According to that institute, it is “a community of free and responsible people who live with each other in a solidary and subsidiary fashion on all levels. In them, the individuals feel responsible for identifying problems and actively collaborating in their solution. Whatever can be solved by individuals and smaller groups themselves in a self-organised manner should be managed in this way. The state institutions see themselves as partners and companions of these people and become

active where a ‘big solution’ is more advantageous. This is how we ensure a high level of personal and individual freedom.”¹

1.2 Image of humanity and understanding of society

The background of these concepts is formed by a certain image of humanity and understanding of society, which is not a matter of course today and is only reflected by a minority of the population. The political disputes transmitted in the media revolve around the poles of “individuality” versus “solidarity”, “freedom” versus “compulsion”, and “liberal” versus “social”, and the attempt to establish a hierarchy between these postulates.

Sooner or later, a situation of “either/or” is developed and a decision, as to which values are to be selected as definitive, has to be made. It is assumed that one can only be “typically neoliberal” or “humanistic-solidary”; or that one can only be in favour of more Europe or, quite simply, a bad European; or that one should either accept state regulation or be considered to be a freedom-loving objector of the state.

However, is the assumption of a hierarchy in the realisation of values such as freedom and solidarity correct? Why shouldn’t it be possible to head for poles that seem to be diametrically opposed corresponding with the understanding of the civil society as defined by the Political Academy? People who live their life in individual freedom and solidarity, who understand the institutions of the state as partners and companions and external determinants, and who want to combine a liberal claim to freedom with social action: Equally important goals have an equal value and are

1 <https://politische-akademie.at/de/aktuelles/buergergesellschaft-landingpage> (last accessed on 20 September 2020).

set against each other in our world of social polarisation and are also communicated as contradicting each other.

This dichotomous perspective is closely connected to an understanding of society and history based on a narrow concept of progress. If social progress is understood to be the overcoming of existing relations in an absolute view tolerating no return, the dichotomy of values is irreconcilable and irrevocable. Anyone who wants to replace liberal market-oriented systems with a solidarity based model, must charge the polarisation through the concept of a hierarchy of the models and understand any compromise as merely a preliminary intermediate step on the further, almost inevitable, path of history corresponding to his ideas. In these ideas, individual and state action is understood as the implementation of historical necessity and not as a participatory negotiation of values of equal rank in conflicts of objectives.

Here, it should not be overlooked that, there is a clear hierarchy of values within the positions guaranteed by constitutional rights that, for example, has a higher regard for the value of life than material goods (and, therefore, limits the right to emergency aid) and that has less regard for domiciliary rights than the requirements of constitutional truth-finding (and, therefore, permits house searches if certain precautions are taken), etc. Nevertheless, the examples mentioned previously show that there is no absolute priority for any particular legal right and that it is always necessary to evaluate against the background of real experiences, which assumes the structural equivalence of positions protected by constitutional rights that can only lead to differentiating evaluations in concrete situations.

1.3 Negotiating conflicting goals

However, the multipolarity of the individual's striving for both "freedom" and "integration", and that of society for space for individual development, as well as the necessity to create collectives, and the negotiation of the resulting conflicts of goals in democratic processes has a long European tradition. Its roots can be found in an image of humanity and understanding of society that Aristotle aptly described with the concept of the "zoon politicon". Man can only do justice to his human nature when he lives in a polis – a legally constituted community – and the polis can only do justice to the human being as the space of experience for human development if it also respects individuality.

From my experience, this image of humanity and understanding of society are not only plausible but have proven their worth many times. In particular, European history and the history of ideas teach us that Europe has had bad experiences when it has turned towards one of the mentioned intellectual poles. Whenever a self-contained conceptual system and understanding of the world has laid claim to the sole definitory power and been in the position of being able to enforce this to the greatest extent possible, the resulting constriction has led to, often bloody, persecution and the eradication of those who think differently, with the consequence of intellectual degeneration, decreasing social productivity, and material stagnation. European societies have always experienced their greatest periods of intellectual, cultural, and material prosperity when they were able to unite diversity and unity. This is also conveyed in the motto of the European Union – "In varietate concordia" – "United in Diversity", which is itself an expression of a typical bipolarity.²

2 <https://europa.eu/european-union/about.eu/symbols/motto.de> (last accessed on 20 September 2020).

However, at first sight, these concepts do not appear to be particularly attractive, because they fundamentally lead to an unsatisfactory situation: For example, a person who is convinced of the necessity for individual freedom, and is prepared to subordinate other priorities to this idea, will be just as unenthusiastic about a “both/and” concept as somebody who considers solidarity to have the utmost importance. People and societies that consider such values as equally important and pursue them will inevitably produce experiences of deficiency: Both too little freedom and too little solidarity are preprogrammed.

And even if the concept of opposing, but nevertheless equivalent, goals is accepted, the question of how, and under which circumstances, they can be realised arises. How can people and societies be made to realise the consequences of this concept in their concrete behaviour?

2. The family as a learning environment

2.1 Acceptance of personal responsibility

In my opinion, the family could provide a learning environment for this kind of civility. However, it is necessary to begin by clarifying the concept of the “family”, which – as is well-known – is often controversial and burdened with idealistic notions or dismissals. Neither in the historical perspective nor in real life does the family represent the situation of an intact world or a kind of social prison. Neither never-ending “blue skies” nor exclusively traumatic experiences characterise the experience billions of people have made over time; it is more the case that, with all the imperfections of human relationships, the family has always been experienced as a “social structure where intergenerational responsibility is lived

out of personal responsibility.”

What makes personal responsibility so special, is its holistic character. In contrast to long-term obligations for services or material goods, accepting responsibility for a person is not limited to certain specific guarantees but exists as a concern for the other person in their entire existence, material, immaterial, and over time. Personal responsibility, understood in this way, offers the chance for comprehensive security, on the one hand, as well as the danger of a totalitarian claim, on the other. Finding a balance is one of the major challenges that the family members have to continually struggle with if they do not want to become bogged down in set behavioural patterns.

An open concept of family, which encompasses a great variety of forms, can develop if the acceptance of personal responsibility is focussed on; several points need a more detailed description.

2.2 Theoretical model instead of an ideal

In respect to this open concept of the family, it is necessary to note first of all that it does not consider itself a normative ideal, but a theoretical model that attempts to illustrate real experiences. These can be concretised graphically into their components with the help of the abstract-sounding formula:

- On the one hand, intergenerationality, as a constitutive element, can be expressed in family formulas according to which family is the environment where responsibility is taken for children; but it also includes other life situations such as where children take responsibility for their parents, aunts for nephews, grandparents for grandchildren, and vice versa.

- The gender of the people who take responsibility is not significant, nor is the question of whether or not they are living in a partnership; the decisive factor is that this responsibility is taken out of free will and not regulated by service contracts (as is the case with kindergarten teachers), or – if there is no personal relationship – when it is accepted in expectation of material consideration (as is the case when care is primarily provided in anticipation of an inheritance).
- The reason for the assumption of personal responsibility is an open question and there are many possibilities: It can be due to a biological relationship through conception and birth, through a legal relationship as the result of foster parenthood or adoption, through common experiences of war, material need, and similar fateful occurrences, such as social pressure, or also derived from a feeling of personal responsibility for another person, as can often be observed in blended family when a relationship is established with the partner's children from a previous relationship that is similar to that with one's own children. Family is always there where responsibility is lived for the sake of the other person, and it has an intentional permanent character because this fundamental affirmation of the person cannot, a priori, be subject to temporal reservations.
- It is in no way imperative that the personal responsibility always has to be two-sided. If parents take responsibility for new-born children, it is usually one-sided, and the result of the bond created by conception and pregnancy. There is no comparable form of behaviour on the part of the child – even in the first year of the child's life; but the child does partake of an experience through the bonding on the part of the parents, which typically leads to the development of a feeling of obliga-

tion, with the effect that, when the one-sidedness of assuming responsibility is felt and recognised, children can also take responsibility for their parents. However, children sometimes reject this responsibility, especially if they have been treated irresponsibly by their parents.

The second clarification concerns the gap between the theoretical construct and reality: Regardless of how family is defined, a discrepancy between the theoretic construct and the reality of families typically remains. Even if the assumption that the overwhelming majority of people live their family relationships in the model-like conditions sketched (and, which will be explained in more detail) was correct, it is obvious that it is not possible to illustrate the diversity of human experiences in a model, regardless of how openly it might have been conceived. However, this does not force one to forego the theoretical model or even postulate it as a goal: After all, the discrepancy between the model and reality could result in the further development of the model or provide opportunities to criticise reality. From this perspective, the theoretical model fulfils both an explanatory and critical function to the same extent.

Based on this interpretation, it is possible to use some dimensions of experience to outline why the family is a central learning environment for the image of man and understanding of society described above.

2.3 Continuity and nearness

Regardless of how family is lived, an immanent factor of this model is that continuity and nearness are experienced in families of this kind. Family is an existential relational experience that – once the contract has been finalised – never ends. This is the result of the personal dimension of the relationship that is linked with deep emotions and leads to family experiences being typically more formative than those made in other encounters and relationships. As a result, experiences made in family relationships are typically much more difficult to change, cast off, or master than those in other encounters and relationships. Even if formal ties are broken, even if biographical commonalities are spatially and temporally watered down, or even ended by death, the experience of emotional closeness and intentional continuity cannot be erased. Regardless of whether continuity and closeness are experienced as stressful or protective and reassuring, family experiences force one to take a stand and assume responsibility for shaping the relationships on which these experiences are based. This is independent of whether the feeling of closeness was experienced positively or negatively, regardless of whether the continuity is desired or not. Even if contact is broken (this is frequently only temporary, but sometimes final), this decision of choosing a specific way of life is also the result of familial influences.

In this way, family experiences – as a result of the personal nature of the relationship – call for examining the responsibility for closeness and distance, and the desire for continuity and discontinuity, in relationships. The personal nature of these relationships typically leads to this examination not being performed lightly as a consequence of a short-term problem, but as a process embracing more profound dimensions of the bond.

The interaction between personality, intentional continuity, and closeness is also important for the way trust is handled. Closeness and intentional continuity make it tangible that people are not like automatons and do not always act and react in the same way; however, fundamental personal responsibility also makes it possible to experience a sustainable acceptance going beyond these changes. Depending on how the individual members of the family interact, both high stability and instability can influence trusting behaviour: tolerance for frustration and mistakes, overcoming ups and downs, cultivating relations through familial experiences. This can either result in a positive approach to security in the fulfilment of expectations or, if there is a breach of trust, the experience of personal endangerment. Both help shape how we deal with others.

2.4 Self-efficacy and deficit experience

A benevolent encounter is possible if, and insofar as, someone accepts personal responsibility for another person, as described above: The assumption of responsibility takes place – as indicated in the etymology of the word with its roots in Latin *repondere*: to answer – by asking questions about the behaviour of the person who accepts responsibility in connection with the needs of the person for whom responsibility is taken. This then puts this person in the centre of another person's consideration for their own sake, which inevitably influences the interaction between these people, as well as its intensity. This influence can be experienced and intended positively, but also negatively: Family is frequently an experience of deficits between wishes and supposed aspirations on the one hand, and reality on the other. Surprises and disappointments are often closely related and do not pass both people by without leaving a trace: Both a widening and narrowing of breathing space, both the dialogical encounter and refusal to talk, both

affection and rejection, etc. inevitably have the effect that – similar to balls that are influenced in their movement after they collide – the people involved feel the effects of the interaction, and that influences their further development.

The previously mentioned closeness in an intentionally permanent relationship leads to the family becoming a constant experiential space of concentrated human encounters in which patterns for dealing with these encounters are developed: No matter whether they are considered positive or negative, some people are strengthened by these encounters, while others are weakened, but, in any case, both people immediately experience each other's efficacy – both in terms of the effects and repercussions. In this experiential space, the patterns of action and reaction in concrete situations are not given, but are, in turn, the result of previous experiences and, possibly, their reflection and, although they can sometimes be controlled, are inevitably also part of the basis for future reactions.

Inasmuch, family – independent of whether positive-developing or negative-restrictive behavioural patterns are lived – makes it possible for people to experience their self-efficacy and, in this way, mature to become those consciously-reflective people expected by the conservative society.

2.5 Diversity and dynamism

The open concept of family assumed in these considerations also indicates that the way in which family is lived is diverse. There are fundamental differences in the relationships, the material wellbeing of the family members, and in the way they live as a whole, between families made up of a pair of parents and one child and families with many children, three-generation families and those

where two generations live together, etc. Nevertheless, they all fall under the concept of family, see themselves as families, and are addressed as families in the perception of the public and political activity. The sense of togetherness in the claim of being a family, but simultaneously having different experiences, is important for everyone living in these families because it forces them to consider other types of family, examine their own realities, and compare them to develop an individual identity.

Experiencing change in an overall picture structured on continuity is also of great importance for the formation of identity: Being faced with the intentional – and, in comparison with other relationships, also often real – long duration of familial relationships makes it necessary to learn how to deal with change and preserve the demand for continuity at the same time. The fact that continuous change in detail is required to ensure continuity in the whole is also essential for the development of the dynamics in the sphere of biographical and social issues. In personal relationships, as well as in society as a whole, the consolidation patterns in small details marks the end of dynamism and sustainability.

2.6 Conflicts of detail and compromise

One of the many points in which the family can be an educational environment for society is the condition that families and its members typically have conflicts of objectives as a result of the coincidence and diversity of their goals. These can relate to the arrangements desired by each person, as well as to those people for whom responsibility is taken, and do not necessarily have to coincide with those of other people in the relationship structure of a family.

This makes it essential to set priorities and accept that the total realisation of one's own ideas is rarely possible. A negotiation process is not always possible, but can also be necessary as a one-sided approach. The inclusion of those affected in decision-making processes, as well as the acceptance of external control, requires practice, as well as the ability to make compromises. However, this must not be based on the understanding of the concept of compromise according to which inadequacy is inherent in it. From the etymological roots, a compromise describes a situation of comprehensive satisfaction: If one can undertake something and make promises together, this can only be redeemed from the perspective of continuity if the elements of the compromise ensure mutual satisfaction.

To achieve this, a special form of creativity, consisting of completely giving up one's own position in the interest of another person, in order to experience – in turn – other positions in which one's own concepts can be completely realised, is needed. This is easier to achieve if the relationships are lived in personal responsibility and there is a common goal of being successful in getting through time together: yes, of making each other happy.

The reality of family relationships shows that a culture of compromise understood in this way is one of the decisive prerequisites for keeping interest in relationships alive and discovering the chance of personal satisfaction in the satisfaction of others. Neither the complete abandonment of one's own wishes and ideas, nor a basically half-hearted concession in conflicting goals can generate lasting satisfaction; it is much more the case that the relationship will break if it is only possible for one's own ideas to be half realised in every issue and completely in none.

Conclusion

These reflections made represent an attempt at showing how family can be seen as an experiential, and also educational, environment for an image of humanity and understanding of society that is immanent in the concept of the conservative lifestyle mentioned at the beginning.

If one assumes a concept of family firmly anchored to intergenerational, personal responsibility, many points reveal how behaviour, which is necessary and useful for the functionality of a conservative society characterised by the desire for the greatest possible individuality and community skills, can be shaped in families. It is necessary to stress once again that there are no ideal conditions for family, seeing that the diversity of life situations, the variety of positive and negative experiences, and – last but not least – the diversity of the individuals themselves can produce completely different effects, even in comparable settings. However, one common aspect of these experiences in the model presented here is that intergenerational responsibility is accepted in families. Anyone who strives to ensure that, even in a diverse and sustainably dynamic society, responsibility is taken across the generations, without enforcing specific patterns, but in shaping the further development of society in a participatory way through give-and-take, will try to make the best use of families as an educational environment for shaping a conservative society as a whole: By support, I mean not only in a material form and in the call to an “ideal world”, but in the creation of an overall social climate in which assuming personal responsibility is a matter of course, in which a balance between individuality and a sense of community can develop out of being unconditionally accepted, the necessity of being open to change with simultaneous continuity is seen as desirable, and compromise can be experienced in making mutual satisfaction possible.

A Person with Courage Inspires Courage

The Example of Kolping Austria

Christine Leopold

Summary: Shaping one's own life successfully, while being responsible about the overall picture: This is the position that characterised Kolping people in days gone by – and still does. Adolph Kolping, the founder of the society that bears his name, felt it an obligation to make people aware of the common bond among the various groups of society. The working youth – as the Kolping members were called in those days around the middle of the 19th century – should be perceived as an important part of society as a whole. This provided a signal that a good state should not be allowed to separate into individual components and that the commonalities needed to be fostered and mastered. The organisation should be a place that makes it possible to shape one's own life successfully while showing responsibility for society as a whole: This is the understanding that the members and administration of the Kolping Society have kept up to the present day. The challenges of the day are not seen as being unavoidable; each person should take their destiny into their own hands and attempt to bring about change either alone or together with others. In the following essay, concrete areas that associations like Kolping have helped to shape will be investigated under the categories of "youth", "family", "elderly people", "democracy", "Europe", "one world", and "sustainability".

The second half of the 19th century, the age in which the Kolping Society was founded, was an era in which the total economic, political, social, and religious developments taking place affected people in a great number of ways and completely changed their way of life. The consequences of technical progress could be felt in all aspects of daily life. People were replaced by machines. These

machines worked day and night, and people had to adapt to this rhythm. At the time, smart people attempted to comprehend the consequences of these upheavals, to control and moderate them so that people would literally not go under. At the time, the church took a strong stance for stability. This could be seen in the concept of the so-called journeymen's unions founded by Adolph Kolping that had their roots in the Rhineland.

The core of Adolph Kolping's programme was to strengthen people in developing their own lives in the family and workplace, as well as becoming involved in a society in continuous change; and all of this occurred on the basis of a dynamic Christian faith with a worldly focus. This idea has been preserved to the present day. It was attempted to turn this core programme into reality through pragmatic support measures or, to put it more concretely, through self-help organisations, the "journeymen's unions" of the day.

The journeymen's houses in those days not only served to provide shelter and accommodation but were also places of education and social life. This was where the young people were able to discover a new feeling of self-esteem, and sometimes even a new meaning of life. Together, they found courage for themselves and encouraged the others to come to grips with the difficult situation they had been forced into. This is probably the reason that many people found the Kolping idea so attractive – and that sentiment is still the same.

Then, in the early days, the problem was not so much that the journeymen Kolping gathered around him earned too little money; it was more the case that, as a result of technical progress, many were truly threatened with impoverishment that degraded their dignity and human value. All of a sudden, they were no longer needed and, in many cases, actually stood in the way of progress.

And then Adolph Kolping appeared on the scene with his almost prophetic strength and gave them courage. “Only a person with courage can inspire courage” were his words. It was important to stir one’s own capabilities and inspire young people to, once again, take their lives into their own hands.

This concept, which brings up the subject of fundamental aspect of human existence, can still be found in the history of our society and the biographies of many of its members: to mobilise one’s own energy, to follow common goals, to provide mutual help, to live in solidarity with those who are weaker, and to be accepted in a community based on a modern belief that resists the turbulences of our time and provides permanent motivation.

We are writing this in the year 2020 and our Society and its members have passed through eventful times: the First and Second World Wars, reconstruction, and development into a modern, increasingly diverse, society. And now we must ask the questions: What keeps today’s society together? How can integration – the inclusion of the individual into the overall social picture – be guaranteed?

A society whose fragmentation has already progressed so far, and whose citizens often limit themselves to self-satisfaction, can easily lose sight of social imbalance. In addition, this social imbalance must also be considered within the worldwide dimension of our globalised existence. It is not without reason that the United Nations formulated seventeen sustainability goals and that, in his encyclical “*Laudato si’*”, Pope Francis portrayed the global connections of injustice. This has always been the self-perception and obligation of Kolping Austria – to encourage and strengthen people to be able to embrace their lives as responsible citizens. As a result of our “foundation charisma” as an association of jour-

neymen, our activities have always had a strong practical basis. Therefore, the following examples will not concentrate on theoretical explanatory models for the civil society but on the Society's attempts to encourage people to be socially alert, and to make use of concrete projects and initiatives to bring as many people as possible together to play a role in actively helping to shape our community – in those areas in which we believe it to be important to master the challenges facing our time and guarantee our future.

Commitment for young people

As a social association that was founded to support young people, they form an important part of our community. Thousands of young people come and go at our houses and other institutions each year – people full of potential and elan, many of whom are exceedingly active in the Society, where they accept responsibility and are committed to the common good.

In principle, it can be said that Kolping Families and Kolping Houses are first-class “biotopes” for today's youth: This is where they (around 5000 in Austria annually) can find many things they need to be able to successfully confront the challenges of their specific stage of life – a functioning society, for example, in which respect and tolerance, fairness, open-mindedness, and much more can be learned.

For many, the step from the original family into a new life situation can be a decisive, often life-determining, break – and this applies to the parents, as well as the young people themselves. The friends they find in this house, how they deal with each other, how they integrate their personal talents, wishes, and concerns into the life of the community, what they can take from the community

– and how it provides support – how they are accepted: All of these factors will have an effect on their future lives.

You are never alone at Kolping. Everyday life offers so many opportunities for making friends and developing relationships. Josef Rosenzopf, head of Kolping Youth Vorarlberg, puts it this way: “With us, young people like me find a space – not a room, but a space to live – where they can stay and do things together.” He also emphasises that living together in a house like one provided by Kolping contributes to seeing the cultural and religious diversity that exists not as a threat but an opportunity: “Germans, Turks, Austrian, Christians, Muslims – here, everybody sits together around the same table. There are no prejudices, no xenophobia.”

Caroline Lubenik-Jäger, former Federal Director of Kolping Youth believes that improving social skills, such as tolerance and the ability to communicate, is the key when it is a matter of making it easier for young people to find orientation and avoid undesirable developments. “Those who join Kolping Youth have the opportunity to develop themselves”, she says and, at the same time, emphasises the value of the community, which is the reason that many become involved in Kolping: “Fun comes along with commitment – and, with it, the chances to establish relationships that have a positive influence on one’s own path through life.” This path to adulthood and professional life is not straightforward and smooth for all young people. Some find it difficult to keep pace with our performance society. Most of the relevant youth studies carried out in recent times show that the lives of many young people are often characterised by insecurity and the fear of exclusion. One of ten people in the under-thirty age group lives “precariously” in solidified poverty. Many young people have the feeling that society is disintegrating more and more into a group of winners and one of losers; the social ladder is becoming increasingly slippery

and the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. This is how Beate Grossegger, Scientific Director of the Vienna Institute for Youth Culture Research, summarises the results of their extensive surveys on the subject of “Social Justice from the Perspective of Young People”. Today, many of them see a social decline as a realistic scenario; they feel that they are permanently exposed to fierce predatory competition – an environment in which fighting for one’s own advantage is in the foreground, an environment in which, on the one hand, empathy for the socially disadvantaged is decreasing and, on the other hand, an environment that triggers stress. This arises when people have the impression that their skills and resources (of time, for example) are insufficient to satisfy the expectations and challenges they are confronted with.

At Kolping, we look for the reasons that make starting out in life difficult for young people, and we also point out the possibilities that the individual or an organisation like ours have to ensure that the most young people possible have equal starting opportunities and participatory possibilities. It is often the case that spectacular activities are not required, but simply having the right feeling for providing young people in a difficult situation with exactly the support they need.

The administrators of the Kolping Family in Dornbirn have introduced a network of “trouble-shooters” to help young people who are having difficulties getting started to stand on their own feet. Credit counselling is provided for those with financial problems, and members of the Society act as “apprentice godparents” for young people looking for a job. They make use of their contacts and arrange an apprenticeship – such as a roofer or floor layer – and give the employer the guarantee that they will accompany the apprentices until they are able to fulfil the expectations placed on them, such as coming to work on time, of their own accord. Peter

Rosenzopf says, “It is a matter of strengthening the motivation of the young people. After a while, they realise: I can do it; I can find my way out of the tunnel – first, with some support, but then – by myself.”

At the Kolping House in Vöcklabruck in Upper Austria, which mainly provides a home for vocational students, the focus is placed on remedial courses and learning support. Karl Schaumberger, Chairman of the Kolping Family and a vocational teacher himself, knows from practice what the real problems of the people living in the house are. Some are deficient in basic skills, such as correct spelling, in spite of having successfully completed nine years of compulsory schooling: “We then proceed in a goal-oriented manner in the direction of a test that turns out positive.” Young people who have doubts about their career choice are also advised: “We have 20-year-olds with us, who have already tried a few apprenticeships and then dropped out, who are quite amazed when somebody asks them what they really want to do themselves for the first time”. To quote our founder, you can go a long way with “brain, heart, and hand”. This was the case with an asylum seeker who, first of all, found a place to live by way of the Vöcklabruck Kolping network, and then a job at Kolping – as a deliverer for the in-house catering service and as the driver of a bus that takes people with disabilities to their workplaces.

These highlights show that the Kolping Society continues to adhere to its founding mandate of aligning its actions to the “needs of the time”, especially when dealing with young people who need support of one or the other kind of help in getting started. Some insights drawn from youth research activities are also beneficial for our work in the Society: For example, that, to a large extent, the ability to give meaning to one’s own life, set goals and achieve them, depends on well-functioning social relationships – these are

primarily stable family bonds, but having access to networks in the “social environment” also plays an important role. Not only parish groups, but also social networks such as a choir or football club, as well as every Kolping Family, act as a “reservoir” in which – young and old – people can experience social integration and practical support in coping with life’s work. This is where they can find an environment of trust in which problem-solving strategies can be developed and tested together, and in which people in difficult situations will be able to temporarily tune out their problems and devote themselves to their special needs and interests. To produce and encourage “connections”, in the best sense of the word, is a resource that is needed more than ever before in our society and one that Kolping is able to provide in so many different ways.

Support of families

Communities like Kolping make it possible to experience the significance of the family as the “nucleus of society” in the present day. In a society that is characterised by the “unholy trinity” – profit, consumption, and competition – more than ever before, the importance of the family, as a stronghold of stability and protected area where mutual assistance and affection still count, is increasing. However, recent decades have also subjected this living space to tremendous changes. Regardless of how the individual aspects are perceived, much has become irreversible. There are two important points to bear in mind: First, any change must be shaped creatively and, second, it is necessary to support those who do not have a family in the sense mentioned above.

There are actually many things that affect the stability of families. Today, the family is mainly formed by the working environment and that is the reason that so many are looking for the frequently-

invoked “work-life balance”. Not only that, but the workplaces are often far apart. The father works there, the mother somewhere else, the children at completely different places, and the grandparents live far away from all of them. That is reality that cannot be overlooked in larger cities, and this is the reality that our, and the next, generation are growing into as a matter of course.

In addition, people – or at least those “in the prime of life” – have become selective: relationships (and families) last if, and as long as, they guarantee their adult members those advantages they expect from this lifestyle. As was once the case, people no longer stay together because that is what those around them expect or for financial reasons, but because the “package fits” and living together in the family satisfies one’s own desires and expectations.

When looking for the reasons for the increasing instability of family relationships, it is necessary to take not only personal, but also “external”, factors, into account. What makes the family what it is – relationship, affection, and security – seems to be less suited to a society in which flexibility, mobility, and surviving competition count. If we want a society that is friendlier to families and children than the one we have today, it will be necessary to take a new path in the following areas:

- **Compatibility of family and profession:** “It’s never enough” – this is a feeling many of us who face challenges in our professional life, on the one hand, and in the family with all of its unpredictability – especially if children are involved – on the other, have experienced. Companies are called on to alleviate this pressure (through flexitime models, etc.), as is politics – here, it is principally a matter of making public and private (childminders, etc.) forms of care available.

- **Gender equality:** In this field, experts – including Norbert Schneider, Director of the German Institute for Population Research – recommend a complete paradigm shift. Put in a nutshell, it is no longer primarily a matter of using various measures to integrate women more strongly into professional life but of integrating men into family work. As long as young, well-educated women are forced to curtail their professional ambitions to be able to raise children, and men remain firmly anchored to their role of being the main breadwinner, we will be facing a dismal future for our offspring and the quality of family life.
- **Participation of communities and regions:** Families are often described as the “humus of society” and communities are extremely important “gardeners”. The offers young families find in their immediate neighbourhood are extremely important – suitable schools, childcare, networking possibilities, and many other things. Here, it is necessary for local politicians to create locational advantages: in the years to come, places, such as cities and districts where families can live well, will take the lead.
- **Counselling, education:** to develop the educational competence of parents and their capabilities for mastering difficulties and conflicts.
- **Support for families in emergency situations:** Millions of people in the heart of rich Europe have to think twice about every cent they spend. These are the people who have the worst jobs and the dampest flats, go to the most poorly equipped schools, and are almost always forced to wait longer – for operations and so many other things. In Austria, one in eight people have to survive on an income below the poverty level; more people than we are aware of are living at the limit, and, generally speak-

ing, families are more often hit by poverty. It is all too often the case that, here, “poor” does not only mean financially disadvantaged, but also a lack of relationships, of reliability, education, and possibilities for development.

In all the years and transformations in our society, which can be seen especially clearly and persistently in the changes that have taken place in the image of the family, we Kolping people – as social practitioners – have always sought to find ways to meet the demands of altered family situations and offer help and assistance. Our homes for young people have become post-family locations where parents can rest assured that this new living space has been formed in keeping with their own values and where their children will be well taken care of.

The social facilities of the Kolping Society, which are run in close cooperation with the public authorities, are also available. An important factor is that Kolping Families see themselves as “family-like” communities; there is a special feeling of unity between its members that reveals itself in the acceptance of others and in taking them seriously. It can be expected that Kolping Families play the role taken on by the extended family in traditional societies; in this way, families and their members can find support and stability from Kolping – especially in situations where the capabilities of one’s own family are overtaxed.

Commitment for the elderly

Aging in dignity – a mega-subject of our time. Numerically, senior citizens are the strongest growing group in our society and are being rediscovered as a “target group” by all sides: as consumers by advertising, as voters by politicians, as competent, respon-

sible officers with a relatively large amount of time at their disposal by associations and institutions of the civil society. This is not least due to the fact that the elderly people have drawn attention to themselves and are now enjoying an active lifestyle that gives the years sense and dignity instead of retiring from public life as a kind of “thing of the past”.

Of course, there is another facet of aging that nurses and carers in particular, either in their work or as relatives, encounter on a daily basis: It is marked by fear, pain, confusion, despondency, and other distressing experiences that many people are forced to face – especially those who are very old or in need of help and care as a result of physical or mental impairments.

You do not grow old overnight. For many, the creeping changes that inevitably come can be compensated for, for a time. However, doctors and psychologists agree that those who want to age “healthily” should find a way to accept changes and learn how to bid farewell to those facilities that characterised their earlier days so as to be able to recognise those new opportunities that only develop as one ages.

To take care of the elderly, to perceive them in all their facets, to appreciate their wealth of experiences, and to give them space for (personal and social) development: these things have always been a matter of course at Kolping. Although our society was once founded as a “journeymen’s union” and is still known today as a specialist in homes for young people, Kolping House has always been a living space for both “young *and* old”.

Older people play a special role in the two Kolping Houses in the tenth and second districts of Vienna. Considering the basic rationale of the Kolping Society, becoming involved in care for the

elderly was an obvious development: Just as young people need a place to live when they have to leave their families for vocational training or other reasons, the elderly also need a place to stay if this is no longer possible with their families – or if they have no family at all.

The permanent change in the age structure of the population, and its effects on the care situation, have been receiving increased public awareness for some time now. Along with this, there has also been a change in household and family structures. The living and working situation in our society is often “timed” in a way that makes it difficult for families to take care of their elderly relatives. The number of children in a family is decreasing, the number of people who never have children is increasing, and there are more single-person households, fewer siblings, higher female employment rates...

These are the reasons that Kolping created special care facilities in its “Living Together” houses. We wanted to provide more than the basic services and made these homes even more attractive through many additional offerings. Young and old live under a single roof – for us, that means, elderly people, most of them in need of care, and mothers with children who have had to leave their homes as a result of violence or other emergencies; in addition, there are young men carrying out alternative service, young people performing a “voluntary social year”, interns in various professions, and youths who have been unemployed for a lengthy period, who can gain practical working experience in a Kolping House to make them fit for the primary labour market. They live and work “under a single roof” – this roof is not only perceived as a part of a building, but also as a symbol for the shared living space and spiritual home.

The challenges facing our society, in which senior citizens will make up the majority in the future, will continue to increase and it will be impossible to overcome them by building new and better nursing homes alone. A great deal needs to be done to set the right course in order to be able to cushion the risk to a life of long-term care, and also secure a life in dignity for the socially-disadvantaged elderly members of society. There is also no way to avoid expanding the possibilities available to older people. Various forms of living, which are still the exception in Austria, must be promoted if we do not want to miss the boat: care in residential communities, day centres, short-term and night-time care, community-based forms of living, coordinated neighbourhood care, semi-stationary offers, and much more, are all required.

The prerequisite for these and similar plans is – not only on the part of “care professionals” – a natural, appreciative view of “the elderly” and their needs, an attitude to them as described in an “ideal-typical” job advertisement that appeared in the in-house newspaper of Kolping’s “Living Together” house in Vienna’s Favoriten district: “Looking for people who love a big, wide life; looking for people who love life that has become inconspicuous, needy, injured, and aged; looking for people who want to cherish and nurture life because, in its entirety, it is sacred, great, and full of mystery for them. Looking for people who are still moved and become silent when the last spark of a dying eye and the last breath signifies the end. Looking for people who treat others lovingly, respond to them, go along with those close to them – where that happens, relationships grow and make life valuable for all those involved, regardless of whether they are young or old.”

The following remark seems to be appropriate in this context: From the very beginning, requests to carry out voluntary work in Kolping’s “Living Together” houses were great, and have remained

so to the present day. Various group activities are accompanied, excursions organised, and children helped with their homework... This demonstrates how deeply the topic is anchored in people's minds and how prepared they are to freely offer their time and skills.

Strengthening democracy

Is democracy in danger? Can it be manipulated? What needs to be done to ensure that this priceless instrument that is needed to balance interests, needs, and values remains alive? It has become necessary to ask these important questions once again from a historical perspective – as well as in the face of unsettling current developments.

On the occasion of the memorial year celebrating the centenary of the Republic of Austria in 2018, the Austrian Catholic Social Academy published a dossier dealing with the dangers facing our democratic system: fewer and fewer people who are willing to become involved and growing social imbalance were mentioned, as were the weakness of the parties, as well as the state as a whole, confronted with the power of the multinational enterprises that act globally but do not pay the appropriate taxes anywhere, the omnipresent manipulation of public opinion in (a)social networks, the forced marriage between modern democracy and an economy focused on permanent growth, accompanied by the incapability of fostering a sustainable lifestyle.

One thing is certain: Democracy lives from participation and the “courage to play a role”, and from people who do not shirk the efforts involved in this. Kolping has always seen this as an important task and developed models and approaches to live and

strengthen a democratic form of togetherness – in spite of the lethargy of so many.

It is completely justifiable to describe Kolping as a place for learning how to awaken an understanding of democracy and “shaping the world”. Here, in completely normal club life, it is possible for every member to have a conversation with people of different origins and political leanings, to exchange views with them, to fine tune positions and reconcile them with others. Sometimes, discussion evenings are organised, and one can initiate or take part in local actions, work in the community, become part of a network, or make a public statement. Embedded in a group of people who share fundamental ideological principles, the individual members feel more effective than if they were alone; one develops good ideas and usually does more for “society” than people that are not part of such a community.

The Kolping democratic structures are exemplary. All of the officials are voted into office; it is impossible for anybody to exercise decisional power in our organisation without this kind of legitimation; and – in everything they do – the officers are responsible and accountable to the community. This principle applies throughout the organisation: from the base to the top level. In this way, we live up to a tradition that can be traced back to Adolph Kolping himself: His goal was a democratically organised community that decided on the priorities of its work itself – both in society and in the church.

Seen from this perspective, Kolping has excellent qualifications for playing a role as a major actor in democratic interaction. And these are precisely the kind of actors needed to secure social cohesion or restore it where it has dissolved to a large extent. This was also the evaluation of the ARENA analysis issued to commemorate

Austria's memorial year. Every year since 2006, in-depth interviews have been held with experts from the fields of politics, the economy, and science in which they are asked to give their opinions on current trends. They place their hopes in an active civil society, in work and participation in all kinds of organisations where solidarity is lived in practice and without wearing any ideological blinkers. This is particularly important when one considers that this is where – mostly young – people find a space where they can learn how to accept responsibility and become actively involved in developing their environment and society.

The ARENA questionees refer to a second important key for a renaissance of a democratic attitude towards life: education. This has also always been one of the main attributes of Kolping work. Education makes participation and social advancement possible; it provides people with the means for becoming a social player, for believing in society from the experience of self-empowerment and not cutting oneself off from it out of stifling rage and obstinacy, that feeling that provides the basis for the activities of the agitators and populists. In the community, young people learn how to formulate and present their arguments, to champion them, to listen to counterarguments, and, ultimately, to accept the vote of the majority. And they also learn that, as a community, we make use of our ideas and goals to balance differing interests so that people – especially those who have been forced to the outskirts – are able to participate in our society; this is crucial for democracy.

Commitment for Europe

“What's wrong with you, Europe?” But not only does Pope Francis, the originator of this statement, rub his eyes in astonishment. Despite all of its unparalleled successes, the European work of uni-

fication is experiencing a crisis as national egoisms create a serious threat to a project that has guaranteed peace for the past seventy years. The election of the European Parliament in 2019 made this clear: There is discord on our continent over the goals we have, and the paths that should be followed to achieve them. What is needed in this situation is a reflection on the values that link us and to take this as the starting point for breathing new life into our solidarity. More – or less – Europe? A decision has to be made: both are not possible.

It seems that it is easier to see the true format of the EU from outside. Based on his extensive studies, Timothy Snyder, one of the top historians in the USA, describes the EU as a “unique success story”. According to Snyder, Europe was an assembly of failed empires at the end of the Second World War. Crumbling colonial empires on the one hand, and Nazi Germany, defeated in its attempt to subjugate Eastern Europe, on the other, were faced with the option of either re-establishing their nation-states – a concept that had just ended in disaster – or of trying something completely new: uniting Europe. The continent has this idea alone to thank for its rising from the ashes of war like a phoenix. “Europe outsmarted history”, says the history expert because, instead of a landscape of rubble, a wasteland, that usually remains on the soil of failing empires, the world’s strongest economic area has emerged in Europe. Snyder feels that many have not completely grasped the scope of this development, “simply because this united Europe is something fundamentally different, something absolutely new.”

As Kolping members, we take pride that our association is one of those forces in society that takes responsibility for Europe. All over our continent, Kolping people are helping to guarantee that Europe regains perspective and confidence. They know from experience that each group of people – regardless of whether it is a club

or the European Union – lives from the fact that many individuals are prepared to “commit their hearts” – as our founder once said – and never take the good that has been created for granted as that would be tantamount to risking it.

With annual educational events and cross-border meetings, the Kolping Society helps to strengthen awareness of Europe, especially among young people from the individual member states who come together regularly to discuss political and social issues of transnational importance. The International Kolping Peace Hike, which has been organised by a different European country every year for more than 50 years, also makes a contribution to peace and international understanding. Kolping provides training to qualify young people in many Central and Eastern European countries. The organisation has the goal of supporting peace and democracy in the region and strengthening the civil society. The focus is on helping disadvantaged people who, frequently, do not receive adequate assistance from the state: socially disadvantaged families, the unemployed, people with disabilities, and the elderly.

Dedication for the “one world”

Although it was originally mainly represented in German-speaking countries, over the past fifty years, the Kolping Society has developed into a global association that is active in many countries around the world. It is currently active in 61 countries on all continents and has a total of 400,000 members worldwide. The world has become a “global village”, and this has made it possible for people to experience the “foreign” in a way that was not possible in the preceding decades. Images of absolute poverty appear dramatically before our eyes. What we previously only knew about through newspaper reports and black-and-white photographs can

now make an impact in the news and in reports and documentaries from around the world: Almost a billion people on earth live below the poverty line and half of them are children. Many of them die before reaching the age of five as a result of preventable diseases such as diarrhoea or because the only water they have access to is polluted. We live in a world where one in nine people still goes to bed hungry at night.

How can this absolute poverty be explained? Definitely not by a lack of economic resources on earth! These are actually sufficient to allow all people to live a life of dignity – despite the increasing global population – but they are extremely unequally distributed. This applies to both income and possessions. The much-abused image of the “income gap” between the rich and poor that is continuously widening is not an outdated metaphor – it is highly topical. While the richest per cent of the world had 43 per cent of its wealth in 2002, this had increased to 51 per cent in 2018. Global inequality, as well as inequality within our societies, is also increasing. And this is not as a result of the tremendous achievement of the very few who have earned their wealth through hard work, but of a lack of – or incorrect – political control. This makes it possible for those who already have more money than they can ever spend to get more and more returns on their investments, while those who live from the work of their hands and heads have a smaller share of economic growth than they did thirty years ago.

“Poverty is like a punishment for a crime you have not committed”, says journalist Eli Kahmarov. He expresses what the justice theorist John Rawls calls the “lottery of nature”: none of us has any influence on our place of birth or the circumstances into which we were born. From a material perspective, a person who was born in Central Europe is one of the winners in this lottery; in contrast, those who saw the first light of day in East Africa, India, or many

areas of Latin America are confronted with much more difficult starting conditions.

At Kolping we do not stand idly by and just look at this global injustice. Here, I refer to something that Markus Demele, the General Secretary of Kolping International, for one, stated at a conference on “Development Work at Kolping”, held in Vienna in the autumn of 2019. Put briefly, he said that it was in the DNA of our organisation, and fully corresponded to the enduring mission of the Blessed Adolph Kolping, that we show solidarity with each other. Today, this solidarity extends far outside of the circle of one’s own Kolping Family.

Trans-continental partnerships form the image of Kolping worldwide. In the spirit of our founder, we want to contribute to overcoming the structures of poverty by helping to build dynamic civil societies. As a democratic organisation, we promote the holistic education of our members and, in this way, create the basis for their socio-political commitment. In many places, our Kolping Families have become the voice of the poor and disadvantaged in their region.

Our projects follow the principle of “helping people help themselves”. We use a wide range of measures to promote people’s talents and make it possible for them to create a better life for themselves in their home country. Kolping’s work focuses on vocational educational, such as training craftsmen, measures, such as providing access to clean drinking water, which help their existence, and rural development, as well as small-loan programmes. These efforts have a lasting effect and are supported, on site, by a familiar association environment with established structures and shared ideals.

One-world work has also become an integral part of the annual activities of many Kolping Families in Austria. This partnership work brings joy in life – and often also new members, as the commitment to fairer structures and a sustainable lifestyle appeals to other people. This seems an attractive proposition in a world and at a time in which a “throwaway culture” has been rightly denounced by Pope Francis. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remind us that all countries are “in the process of development” and that – regardless of where we live – we are called on to maintain a lifestyle that enables people everywhere to lead a dignified, a good, life. That must be the goal of our development.

Our founder Adolph Kolping once made the following statement: “The needs of the times will teach you what to do!” Partnership work at Kolping is a beautiful, meaningful way to fulfil this mandate in today’s globally networked world.

Act sustainably

The clock is ticking. Climate change is becoming more tangible year after year. The summer ice is melting in the Arctic, and gigantic icebergs are about to break off and slide into the sea in Antarctica. A major species extinction is underway – on land, but mainly in the oceans that still bind large quantities of CO₂ but will then suffer from over-acidification. Harvest yields are decreasing worldwide, and all kinds of freak weather conditions are increasing. The UN has prophesised that, soon, more people will leave their home country as a result of climate change than wars and poverty. Whether we admit it or not, we are all standing at a historical fork in the road and the direction we take will determine nothing less than our future. But there is some good news: We have a map in our hands that shows the “right way”, a route that all 193 states

represented in the UNO agreed on at the “Sustainability Summit” held in New York in the September of 2015. The “signposts” along this path are provided by the 17 global goals adopted at the Summit that the global community hopes to implement step by step – in keeping with a precisely determined schedule – by 2030. By then, hunger and poverty, among other things, should have been overcome, the earth and environment protected, all children should have access to schooling, inequalities tackled, and societies that are peaceful and just will emerge.

In the same year, Pope Francis published his highly-acclaimed encyclical “*Laudatio si*”, in which he expresses his concern for the earth that he describes as a common home for all people, going as far as to refer to it as our “mother” or “sister” crying out because of the harm mankind is doing to her. According to the Pope, solutions to this situation cannot primarily be found in the area of what is technically doable, but in people and their behaviour. Nobody is suggesting a return to the days of cavemen, but it is imperative to change to a lower gear – especially out of consideration for those living in the poorer countries of the world who are suffering most from the consequences of climate collapse although they contribute least of all to pollution and contamination.

Most recently, the corona pandemic sent us a message that it is time for us to rethink our former lifestyle. Important voices are now calling for us to take advantage of the current crisis to get rid of many of those harmful things that have determined our actions. “The afterwards has already begun” were the words spoken by Pope Francis at Easter as he stood alone on Saint Peter’s Square: The pandemic should lead humanity, which is heading towards its impending doom on autopilot, to a “humanistic and ecological turnaround”.

Before the lockdown, which has so far cost trillions of euros, those who criticised the prevailing growth model were frequently described as being naïve, climate change was thought to be illusory because it could not be financed, and there was no alternative to the current form of globalisation. People kept on merrily clearing the jungle, flooding the oceans with plastic, and manufacturing (and buying) SUVs. Corona has shown that, if agreement can be reached about the sense and necessity for drastic measures, it can be possible to implement actions that, until recently, were unthinkable: “Whatever the cost”. This principle must not only be used to save the economy (and there, taking the question of whether some destructive activities should not be curtailed into account), but also to save our planet. Dodging, denying, and neglecting to take the necessary steps results in innocent people suffering and even dying – whether from a virus or global warming. And nothing is more expensive than simply letting an imminent catastrophe take its course.

For Kolping, the topic of sustainability – in all its facets – has been the focus of our work for several years. At all levels, we are dedicated to the question of how we can make and expand our contribution to a future that is suitable for our grandchildren. The SDGs and “*Laudato si*” serve as a double guideline.

Internationally, the General Assembly held in Lima, Peru, in the autumn of 2017 provided the starting signal for a stronger focus on sustainability. During an exchange between delegates from all continents, just how far the destruction of our environment and the transformation of the world into a greenhouse had already progressed in many places became shockingly clear. Kolping officials from Asia and Africa reported that, in some areas of their home countries, the temperature rarely fell below 45 degrees Celsius for many months, that there were periods of drought that

depleted both the people and the soil, and that there were rainfalls that then washed everything away. This is a mixture that inevitably results in hardship and misery, and robs an increasing number of people of their livelihoods, making it one of the main reasons for flight and migration.

The close linkage between the situation of the disadvantaged in our world and the increasing damage being done to the environment makes it essential for us to develop the courage required to do what is necessary. It is up to us, the citizens of prosperous countries, to promote a change in lifestyle and development policy at the macro-level as stated in the position paper “Combating the Causes of Flight” that was adopted in Lima. Among those things the delegates specifically committed themselves to were more conscious consumption, a sustainable lifestyle, and stronger socio-political commitment with the goal of advancing a balance between the north and the south.

Kolping Austria had already dealt with ways to realise the global sustainability goals in specific areas at a conference held in Innsbruck in the spring of 2017. Based on the keynote speeches by the two main speakers Bishop Erwin Kräutler and ex-EU Commissioner Franz Fischler, several measures, including increasing the energy efficiency of Kolping Houses, communitising mobility, and promoting sustainable alternatives in the nutrition area, were agreed on. The delegates were encouraged to explore their personal approach to sustainability and tap into those sources of strength that would make a lasting and substantial change in lifestyle possible. As a conclusion, they drafted a self-commitment (“*compromiso*”) on sustainability.

Compromiso is a term frequently used in Latin America; it does not mean a “compromise”, and definitely not a half-hearted one,

but a voluntary, binding obligation: “I have recognised something as right, and that is why I am committed to it from now on.” It is sometimes translated in a similar way to the word *amen*, let it be so, but it actually implies much more, namely: “I agree with what you say, and you can count on me. I am completely convinced of this and, therefore, will use everything in my power to achieve it.”

The first results of our actions in terms of sustainability were presented one year later, in 2018, within the framework of a Federal General Assembly – these included the installation of photovoltaic systems on Kolping Houses, concepts for the responsible treatment of food in our kitchens, cooperation between local Kolping Societies and specialist organisations such as the Climate Alliance Network, and “upcycling” projects to avoid waste. We paid particular attention to one aspect of sustainability that is emphasised by the UNO, as well as in Catholic social teaching: its close connection to the issue of reducing poverty.

“Justice – Peace – Preservation of Creation”. These three values belong together and, here, Kolping makes valuable contributions throughout Austria; on the one hand, in our total of 33 social institutions ranging from those that concentrate on women and children affected by poverty (“MUKIs”) to initiatives for the integration of jobless young people into the labour market (“chance2work”) and, on the other hand, through those numerous initiatives to promote peace and dialogue in our society. This is where Kolping people consciously improve our world in a time that is often affected by exclusion and resentment. There are many examples of this including a refugee café in the Kolping House in Dornbirn, integrative learning support in Vienna, and an initiative for encounters between “locals and those with two homelands” that also takes place in Vorarlberg.

This is an impressive record of achievements – but it is only an intermediate step. Further initiatives must follow, and the example set by the pioneers must act as a model if we are to be successful in handing a world worth living in over to our children and grandchildren.

Final remarks

Living in an increasingly individualised and economised general social context fosters tendencies towards desolidarisation; this also applies to countries with a traditionally tight social network. The situation of many people is characterised by vulnerability, helplessness, and insecurity – a finding that the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated. In addition, the climate crisis can be seen lurking on the horizon as another dark threat: Many people feel that the fight against it has already been lost.

Confronted with this development, the individual often feels powerless and helpless – this applies particularly to young people. Some members of this age group adapt to the prevailing circumstances and, sooner or later, no longer question them.

What can provide the foundation? Small groups, communities, associations, societies, and organisations – in this article, I chose the Kolping Society to act as an example – promote a culture of justice and solidarity, as well as the freedom of the individual to develop within the framework of their activities; and that is exactly the opposite of individualism and egoism. The skill of associations, communities like the Kolping Society, and other players in the civil society is that they take people's freedom seriously but still say: Wherever we have networks, think tanks, and traditions that can help make life successful, reduce suffering, and protect creation for

future generations, we offer this to people – not as an additional obligation or burden, but to assist them in their development as a person, and as a tool for helping form society. That is exactly what I mean by a dynamic civil society.

This contribution was produced with the assistance of Mag. Wolfgang Engelmaier, Federal Secretary of Kolping Austria.

The Protection of Life in the Civil Society

Martina Kronthaler

Summary: For me, the idea of the civil society is inevitably connected with the image of humanity that could – or should – be its foundation. This is because the whole – the state – and all of its components depends on this. I understand the civil society as a productive collaboration between the public sector and independent, self-aware, active citizens to benefit the population of the individual states and larger federations such as Europe. It does not mean that the public sector should withdraw from its official obligations, and it is important that a party acknowledges the subject of the protection of life in its basic programme as the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) does.

One example of lived civil society is Aktion Leben Österreich (Action Life Austria). Aktion Leben performs exemplary work based on its awareness of the necessary responsibility for weaker and underprivileged members of our society; its aim is to stand by and support them and, at the same time, give them a voice that can be heard by the state and administration. It also provides an example of direct democracy through the instrument of the citizens' initiative. It calls for the fulfilment of the state's responsibilities and a dialogue on matters relating to the protection of life.

The beginning and end of human life are vulnerable phases that are especially in need of protecting. A civil society that wants to take a constructive stand in these affairs is built on seven basic elements: a positive image of humanity, the courage to take a stance – but never against the people, compassion, professionalism, scope for action, and finally, on independent, informed citizens and trust.

1. Civil society needs a positive image of humanity

“There are ultimately only a few concepts that influence the world as much as our image of humanity. What we receive from each other is what we elicit. When we talk about the greatest challenges of our time – from global warming to diminishing reciprocal trust – I believe that successfully overcoming them begins with the development of a different image of humanity.”¹ In his book “*Humankind: A Hopeful History of Human Nature*” (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), the historian Rutger Bregman, who was born in the Netherlands in 1988, provides a number of examples that impressively prove his “radical” idea: Most people behave cooperatively. His résumé is that history has taught us that “the best in us comes to the fore when bombs start falling from the sky, or dykes collapse.”² The horrible terror attack in Vienna on 2 November shows exactly that: some passers-by and pub workers became heroes, police risked their own lives, and many other similar things occurred.³

But what do Bregman’s premises have to do with the protection of life and the civil society? If we consider people as being fundamentally kind and cooperative, we also recognise that their life has a purpose and see it as a bearer of dignity and rights. We trust each other but know all too well that people are not “angels”. Bregman stresses that “We have a good and a bad side; the question is which side we want to develop.”⁴

1 Bregman, Rutger: Im Grunde gut. Eine neue Geschichte der Menschheit. Hamburg 2020, p. 27 (*Humankind: A Hopeful History of Human Nature*. Bloomsbury, London 2020).

2 Bregman, p. 21.

3 Report, for example, in “Der Standard”, 7/8 November 2020, pp. 2 and 3.

4 Bregman, p. 27.

In my eyes, a civil society with a positive image of humanity develops the good side, the side that is turned towards life and the community. It has unconditional respect for the dignity of others. It is the foundation of human rights and, therefore, also provides the foundation for all endeavours connected with the protection of life.

Aktion Leben follows the conviction that “each and every person has a right to dignity from the beginning of life to death.” And we preface this with: “Each and every one of us begins with the germination of the egg and sperm cell.”⁵ The independent association, which was founded in 1954, has an image of humanity similar to Rutger Bregman’s: Each person is valuable and unique for our world. The beginning is the most important as that is when basic trust and health are established. A person who wants to foster the good in man should invest in early, secure bonding experiences – starting with pregnancy! These make it possible for the brain to mature and social competence to develop!⁶

These capabilities are important for the realisation of a civil society. The German political scientist and journalist Warnfried Dettling describes the image of humanity of the civil society in the following way: “It understands humanity, each single person, as an independent, unique being with a connection to the community.”⁷

As a consequence, our approach to the subject of the protection of life is extremely comprehensive. It is based on the principle of a

5 Mission statement, in: www.aktionleben.at/site/ueberuns/leitbild (5.11.2020).

6 This statement is impressively illustrated in the book by Strüber, Nicole: *Die erste Bindung*. Stuttgart 2017 (4th ed.).

7 Dettling, Warnfried: *Soziale Räume erweitern! – Was kann, was soll die Bürgergesellschaft leisten?* In: <http://www.demokratiezentrum.org/fileadmin/media/pdf/dettling.pdf> (27.10.2020), p. 3.

community of citizens that are aware of, and protect, their rights to the same extent as they fulfil their obligations. This is because: “We are helping to build a life-affirming society in which each and every one of us is prepared to accept social responsibility.”⁸

In my opinion, additional prerequisites must be satisfied in order to solve or regulate the important matters pertaining to the protection of life at the beginning of human existence, such as the responsible treatment of fertility, pregnancy, abortion, reproductive medicine, and the use of embryonic humans in research, in a constructive manner, and in the sense of indivisible human dignity. They are described below.

2. The civil society takes a position – but never against people

Contradictory opinions often clash with each other when the areas of the protection of life mentioned above are dealt with. The debate about abortion in Austria has been at a standstill since the provisions permitting abortion within a certain period were introduced in 1975. One side, represented mainly by Austria’s Social Democratic Party and Greens, unilaterally demands that abortions be covered by the state and no longer subjected to penal law in any form.⁹ The fact that women are not able to have an abortion in a public hospital in all provinces is also a frequent subject of discussion. The National Action Plan for Female Health, which was first published in 2016 and presented again in 2018, states, “The freedom of choice of women to make use of a legally documented

8 Mission statement, in: www.aktionleben.at/site/ueberuns/leitbild (5.11.2020).

9 Demands of the Frauenring, in: https://www.frauenring.at/sites/default/files/artikel/Frauenpolitische_Forderungen_Osterreichischer_Frauenring.pdf (7.11.2020), p. 5.

right must be guaranteed no matter where they live.”¹⁰ Apart from the fact that an abortion is not a “documented right” in Austria, but exempt from punishment if certain conditions are fulfilled, not one word in the chapter on “Reproductive Medicine” suggests that women who are faced with making the decision of having a child or not should have the right to independent psychosocial pregnancy counselling. Aktion Leben also demands that, as a rule, pregnant women should be able to obtain specialised advice close to where they live, in every province.

On the other side, we find fundamentalist organisations that harass women in front of abortion clinics, attempt to make them reconsider their decision by providing them with false information about their legal social rights, and even go as far as describing an abortion as murder.¹¹ These organisations also cause a great deal of harm if they describe their activity as “counselling”. By doing so, they bring counselling for women into the neighbourhood of manipulation and shadiness. They make women, especially those who would be open to serious counselling and information, insecure. They nourish prejudices about counselling for pregnant women and discredit professional organisations. Calling the current regulation into question also hinders nonpartisan efforts to avoid abortions through sustainable offers of support. Instead of talking about it, discussions about whether the regulation is in danger or not stall.

The concrete meaning of protection of life is taking a position for people, for the weaker members of our society. Standing up for unborn children requires great sensitivity in word and deed, seeing that they can only be protected by the pregnant woman herself. To

10 <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Frauen--und-Gendergesundheit/Aktionsplan-Frauengesundheit.html>, p. 65.

11 <https://www.hli.at/verhuetung-und-abtreibung/>

accuse women in a conflict situation, or because they have had an abortion, of having base motives, of not understanding their situation, has the opposite effect and poisons the atmosphere.

How can we get out of this polarisation? We would make progress if both sides would consistently consider the two: the woman and the unborn child. If we expect good from each other, we act in the consciousness that we want to assist affected women – and men – and also feel sympathy for the unborn child. Having an abortion is hardly a dream for most women; we can be fairly sure about that. That makes prevention the top priority. In their statement on the possible obligation to take part in abortions, the German Society for Gynaecology and Obstetrics (DGGG) and the Professional Association of Gynaecologists (BVF) write that an abortion “is nothing other than one of several bad options”. It is an “obligation to make help available to a woman in need as a result of an unwanted pregnancy. However, that does not only include the option of an abortion, but also the right to alternative offers of assistance.”¹²

A civil society that takes a stance in this, or a similar, way talks about the matter at hand and not against people and, in this way, triggers an honest striving for prevention and help. We need to make all efforts required to avoid women finding themselves in this situation in the first place and all the efforts required to make living with a child a good option and one that can be successful.¹³

12 Presse release by the DGGG and BVF of 21.7.2020. In: info-dienst bio-ethik 3/20 der Aktion Leben Österreich, p. 7.

13 See the catalogue of measures of Aktion Leben Österreich for a life-friendly Austria: <https://www.aktionleben.at/site/ueberuns/politischearbeit/unsermassnahmenkatalog> (7.11.2020).

3. Civil society needs compassion

The people in a civil society want a good life and a good community – founded on the basis of reason and communality.¹⁴ One of the things that needs to be questioned in connection with the protection of life is what a good approach to fertility, to unwanted childlessness, to unborn children, and unplanned, unwanted pregnancies should look like.

There are probably a number of very different answers to this. If the basis is supposed to be reason, it would be a good idea to practise two skills: empathy and compassion.

Rutger Bregman provides us with a clear differentiation between the two: Empathy means to have intensive feelings *with* another person and, therefore, also suffer with him. However, this also takes a great deal of energy. Compassion, on the other hand, indicates that we feel something *for* the other person – warmth, concern, love, for example – and, as a result, are able to become active when we recognise suffering.¹⁵

In Aktion Leben, we attempt to train both and live accordingly. That is the reason that we developed an interactive exhibition – “LebenErleben” (Experience Life) – for children and youths (and adults). On the one hand, it provides up-to-date information on scientific developments in a descriptive, well-founded manner. On the other hand, it fosters a feeling of empathy for unborn children and expectant mothers through the simulation of the period spent in the womb or by wearing an artificial tummy to feel like a pregnant woman. What does a child need when it is in the womb?

14 Cf. Dettling, p. 3.

15 Bregman, p. 421f.

What is good for it? What not? Unborn children cannot tell us what they need; their feelings have to be understood. Entering into their world with all of our senses also brings us closer to our own beginning as an embryo and makes us feel a link to children before their birth. The astonishment the young people experience makes them want to become more familiar with this period.

Empathy for unborn children can play a role in wanting to protect them because one also recognises oneself in the first stage of life. This can result in a responsible approach to fertility and sexuality and careful contraception. Empathy is also one of the key competences making it possible to critically question the practices of reproductive medicine, such as surrogacy, in respect to the needs of the child.¹⁶

Compassion can grow out of empathy. This is essential to be able to advise and accompany pregnant women empathically in connection with their needs and those of the child and, simultaneously, keep the necessary distance. A compassionate person tries to understand the other and provides all of the information necessary for arriving at a decision. Nevertheless, compassion does not necessarily mean having understanding for all actions. It is a good idea to ask the people themselves to find out what they need in order to be able to live their sexuality free of the fear of becoming an unwanted pregnancy, or if they are even to be entrusted with bringing up a child under difficult circumstances. It is therefore the duty of the state to take the answers seriously and provide support where it is requested. As the Irish writer George Bernard Shaw said so tellingly: "Do not do unto others as you expect they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same."¹⁷

16 See www.leihmutterschaft.at and www.stoppt-leihmutterschaft.at

17 Bregman, p. 420.

4. The civil society needs professionalism

In a civil society, the state expects the citizen to participate in the “development of a developed country”. Warnfried Dettling explains that the civil society can help by “tackling the central problems of society with greater prospects of success than before.”¹⁸ Seeing that there is no official strategy, the Austrian state is particularly forced to rely on active citizens in the area of the protection of life. Of course, the National Assembly unanimously accepted the ÖVP’s motion “concerning the positive measure for the protection of life” with the legislation on permitting abortion during the early stages of pregnancy. In addition, they all agreed to the formulation “that abortion is neither a socially desirable, nor a medically recommended, method of birth control or family planning.”¹⁹ However, the implementation of these measures has remained open until today or been placed in the hands of private organisations like Aktion Leben. And, their efficiency in reducing the number of abortions has never been checked. How could this happen? In Austria, there are not even statistics on abortions.

The accompanying measures included the development, propagation, and support of family counselling centres, information provided through sex education in schools, the new construction and upgrading of kindergartens, and modern social welfare law – especially to support single mothers. As formulated by the then chancellor Bruno Kreisky, the aim of the measures was to “use all the means of politics to make these paragraphs – the legislation on abortion – as obsolete as possible”. The respective governments have been particularly tardy in providing information and promoting counselling for pregnant women. To this day, there

18 Dettling, p. 5.

19 See Spork, Peter: *Gesundheit ist kein Zufall. Wie das Leben unsere Gene prägt. Die neuesten Erkenntnisse der Epigenetik.* Munich 2017.

is not even a reference to this in the mother-child pass! In the public space, only Aktion Leben advertises professional counselling for pregnant women. The funds have been steadily reduced and the organisation has to fight hard for the remaining ones that it receives. Women have to overcome a lot of hindrances before finding a specialised advice centre, if they even know about it and look for it. The family counselling centres still exist and there are now around 400 of them. However, the topics they deal with are diverse and range from child guidance to relationship counselling. Only a few are devoted exclusively to pregnancy counselling.

Aktion Leben has operated an exemplary counselling office for pregnant women for decades and knows that: It makes a great difference, especially in a conflict situation, if an organisation makes regular counselling on the matter and continues to improve its skills, or whether – in the best case – it is only one subject among many. The area is multifaceted and profound so that experience in specialisations of this kind is necessary in order to be able to provide a comprehensive answer to such important questions and advise and accompany reliably. In addition, very few family counselling centres are in the position of being able to support pregnant women financially if this is needed. Donations have to be collected for that.

A high level of professionalism is required if quality counselling is to be provided to pregnant women; this cannot be achieved with volunteer workers. The counsellors have to be experts in social, labour, and family laws, as well as the rights of foreigners. The information given to pregnant women and their partners must be accurate. Those giving advice have to have completed an education in social work or psychology or another field of consulting recognised by the Family Ministry that makes them able to provide thoughtful, reliable advice. In addition, counselling preg-

nant women requires knowledge about pregnancy and birth, the prenatal development of the child, and bonding, as well as prenatal diagnostics, the dynamics of partner relationships, trauma therapy and grieving, and many other areas.

The sciences behind prenatal and perinatal psychology and medicine are also continuously publishing new findings about the significance of the time before birth. The evidence of the influence of stress on the mother and child during pregnancy, for example, makes it essential that pregnant women are unburdened as much as possible! Misusing alcohol, nicotine, and drugs also has a considerably more harmful effect than even many doctors believe. This makes the financial and psycho-social support of pregnant women one of the most effective long-term interventions and investments of any state.²⁰

Aktion Leben Österreich, as an organisation backed by alert citizens and staffed by professionals, implements these findings in its counselling centres by offering commitment-oriented advice and providing financial assistance. As a pioneering achievement, the organisation has introduced proven methods that serve the health of pregnant women and their unborn children, as well as prenatal relationship development (known in Germany as bond analysis), to Austria. Thanks to the exemplary cooperation with the Family Ministry, Aktion Leben has been able to train and certify 40 professionals to use this method to benefit the pregnant women and their children with enormously positive feedback.²¹

20 www.bindungsanalyse.at

21 Buchebner-Ferstl, Sabine and Geserick, Christine: Vorgeburtliche Beziehungsförderung: Dokumentation von Erfahrungen mit der Methode der Bindungsanalyse. ÖIF Forschungsbericht no. 18, January 2016. In: https://www.oif.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_oif/Forschungsberichte/fb_18_bindungsanalyse.pdf (7.11.2020).

Training in this method has also greatly increased the understanding of conflicts that sometimes accompany pregnancy. It is possible that stressful experiences in a period before the pregnant woman herself was born could lead to a pregnancy seeming exceedingly conflictual or even threatening. Events of this kind during their prenatal period can also cause men to panic when faced with the prospect of becoming a father and lead to them exerting pressure to abort. Counselling that is aware of connections of this nature can clarify the emotions that would otherwise not be understandable.

Counselling pregnant women is an area that demands great professionalism, the permanent updating of knowledge, and continuous training. People who devote themselves to this task must be able to survive situations that are full of tension; they often work on the edge of life and death as is the case with miscarriages. They give non-directive advice, do not pressure the woman who is in conflict to follow a specific path, but open up perspectives for a life with her child. However, it is always up to the woman to make the final decision; she is the one who has to live with the consequences. Counsellors work with respect for the woman's decision, even if she is unable to accept having the child. The mother herself is the only person who can "save" a child. It is necessary to support her and to organise the circumstances in a way that can make life with a child a good one – for the mother and the father!

5. The civil society needs scope for action and financial security

Austria does support family counselling centres. However, Aktion Leben would be unable to provide counselling if it had only these funds at its disposal: they do not cover even one half of the

personnel costs for the counsellors. The association, therefore, also relies on donations to make it possible for it to carry out its work that is so essential for so many women and children and, in this way, fulfil its public obligations.

Support for pregnant women in need must be borne exclusively by private people. Germany, for example, provides the Advice Centres for Pregnancy Conflicts with an assistance fund – the Federal Foundation for Mother and Child Protection for Unborn Life. This fund is endowed with around 95 million euros annually.

A society in which the citizens actively champion the protection of life must make sufficient financial means available for this, especially for organisations that fulfil a public service such as counselling pregnant women. The staff in the centres should be able to give the pregnant women stability and security. It seems to be almost absurd that organisations who employ them have to raise the money for their salaries to a large degree through donations and that the subsidies have remained unchanged for many years and are even reduced when the government has to save money. This happened in 2018 when massive demonstrations led to a back payment but not to compensation for the cuts and definitely not to an increase. Especially in the area of the protection of life, professional organisations need financial security from the public purse, seeing that long-term companionship and support are frequently necessary.

It is important that a party acknowledges the subject of the protection of life in its programme like the ÖVP: “Counselling and help for pregnant women in conflict situations forms the foundation for any credible politics for the protection of unborn life. However, we do not see the prosecution of affected women as a suitable solution.” Nevertheless, these fine words are not enough,

and it should not be left up to the associations to come up with the money required to be able to advise and support pregnant women. But it could and should be the duty of the citizen to make the idea of the protection of life tangible. Small-scale units are closer to the needs and hardships of people, and organisations are able to act quickly and provide help. This often brings about a positive change for pregnant women and families.

6. Civil society needs constructive dialogue and answers from the state

As an association of committed, alert citizens, Aktion Leben also sees monitoring developments and informing politics when – for example – legislation does not serve life or makes the lives of people more difficult, as a component of the protection of life. In Austria, many NGOs and organisations participate when laws are not adhered to and other people are harmed. In collaboration with others, Aktion Leben has already made achievements in improving the situation of pregnant women, such as the payment of a child-care allowance even if the mother was not previously employed. However, an intensive dialogue with – and answers from – the state are still necessary. And most importantly, the state should listen.

The Reproductive Medicine Act (FMedG) of 2015 was passed without dealing with the objections of critical, independent organisations in the appropriate manner. The process leading up to the review was an inglorious example of passing a law that was not oriented on the wellbeing of all those affected. Reliable information and criticism were ignored to a large extent. For example, egg donation was allowed although this is an operation benefitting a third party and is also risky for the donor. Women who become

pregnant with a donated egg also face serious health problems, as do their children in the womb.²² Commercial egg donation is prohibited, as is advertising for it and brokerage.²³ These bans are not controlled by the judiciary and, therefore, violations occur that are only discovered if citizens become aware of them and are informed about their illegality. Aktion Leben has already reported infringements to the responsible province government on many occasions but has not been informed of the outcome. Here, the state is called on to establish and finance a monitoring body and punish any abuse of the laws. Otherwise, they will be completely ineffective.

Aktion Leben joined together with other organisations²⁴ to establish the protest platform *kinderbekommen.at* (Having children) with the aim of making improvements to the FMedG. Until today, the platform has campaigned for flanking measures to this law. These include the creation of a central registry for egg and sperm donations, independent counselling for potential egg donors,²⁵ long-term research on the health of children born after in-vitro fertilisation, and a clear ban on surrogacy.

If the voluntary expertise of citizens does not lead to the appropriate answers, this could theoretically result in lasting discouragement. However, people persistently advocate improvements under the premise of “basically good” because they are deeply convinced of their necessity for the individual and their sense of the common

22 Aktion Leben Österreich: Die Eizellspende – ein fragwürdiger Weg zum Kind. Pamphlet, Vienna 2012.

23 Reproductive Medicine Law – FMedG § 16.

24 Katholischer Familienverband Österreich, Katholische Aktion Österreich, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Katholischer Verbände.

25 According to the present law, the same doctor who wants an egg for his patient can also advise the women intended to donate it. This is classical conflict of interest that would not be permitted in any other setting.

good and, therefore, usually work with well-founded arguments. A state that wants to promote a civil society would be well advised to involve associations and NGOs constructively in change processes affecting their interests. When it comes to the protection of life, it is especially important to consider the following: Who is speaking and what are the interests? Anyone who regularly publishes estimates of the number of abortions in Austria while thwarting recording abortions by the official Austrian statistics authority has no real interest in reliable data.

If reproduction specialists ignore or marginalise the risks associated with egg donation for the donors, when they simply see the surrogate mother as a “carrying vessel” without any feelings and do not find it bad that a child is deliberately withheld from the love of its mother during pregnancy, it becomes clear that they are mainly interested in their own financial benefits.

If some parties are not even willing to listen to arguments in favour of anonymous statistical recording without any reservations, and study the experiences had in other countries, they are acting in the interest of their own ideologies, but not in the interest of a state developing any further, and not at all in the interest of those women who feel that they have been left alone with the subject.

7. Civil society needs independent, informed citizens and trust

I have touched on several significant areas of the protection of life without being able to expand greatly on them. The concerns of children with disabilities and their families, the matter of late-term abortion, the circumstances facing people with disabilities, and the

question of dignity at the end of life, are still missing. But I hope that just how much expertise, how much knowledge, is necessary to accompany people in vulnerable phases of their lives, or recognise dangers and avert them, has become clear. People who open their hearts for the subject and trust organisations by donating money for their activities, or investing their time and skills, are just as important.

In a civil society in which the protection of life could become a central theme, people ask about the needs of affected individuals, choose their words with care, and participate.

Organisations like Aktion Leben are happy about, and thankful for, commitment of this kind, particularly seeing that it regularly carries out citizens' initiatives. The most recent is "Fakten helfen!" (Facts help!), which was presented to parliament for the second time in September 2020. So far, 57,200 citizens have signed and endorsed this initiative! With it, Aktion Leben demands:

- Country-wide, anonymous statistics on abortions and their annual publication.
- Independent of this, regular, neutral scientific and anonymous research into the motives for abortions as a basis for prevention, and the appropriate assistance.

The implementation would not affect the provisions on abortion in any way. Statistics of this kind are a matter of course in most European countries. Only in Austria are they rejected, in an almost irrational manner, by the Social Democratic Party and the Greens, and these parties also reject any dialogue on the matter. How important is this subject for the ÖVP? It supports the concern in its basic programme: "Politics and society should create

those conditions that prevent abortions. It is, therefore, necessary to establish comprehensive anonymous statistics on the number and motives for abortions... However, we do not see the prosecution of affected women as a suitable solution.” Some representatives have become actively involved in this and it is to be hoped that others will soon join in out of conviction.

If the estimations of the number of abortions is correct, Austria – with 30,000 a year – would be one of the leaders in Europe. But we do not know exactly. Without numbers, this subject remains in the dark. We do not know which numbers we can assume, how many women and children are affected, the age group in which abortions are more or less frequent, in which week the abortion is performed, and for which disability, whether it is the first, third, or fifth child that the parents have no resources for, what it would be necessary for politics to do to ensure that children could be expected with joy and assurance and be born.

When all is said and done, that is what the protection of life is all about: The joy of living and passing this joy on. Welcome to the civil society!

Lived Civil Society Needs More Trust!

On the Connection Between Civil-Society Commitment, Social Welfare, and Community Service as Reflected in Regulatory Policy

Elisabeth Anselm

Summary: Civil-society commitment and the activity of private charitable institutions have a long tradition in the sphere of social welfare – this also applies to the activity of Hilfswerk, one of the leading social organisations in Austria. There are good reasons for this, and also obvious advantages: The integration of meaningful community-forging voluntary service with private means, such as donations, as well of the connection between investments and possible profits in the circle of Austrian public welfare. In addition, the so-called “third sector”, as an area between the private sphere and the state, connects merits, such as a special sensitivity for needs, innovative strength, and “client orientation”, with the charge to recognise, articulate, and solve problems. If our aim is to keep the merits of the “third sector” and the strength of civil-society commitment alive in social welfare in the future, it is pressing that we cultivate trust and effect orientation.

If we look back at the history of the relevant charitable organisations in Austria (as well as internationally), most of them have their roots in the area of honorary or voluntary – often neighbourhood as well – involvement on the part of the citizens of both sexes who recognised need and hardship and sought effective solutions for them. The reasons are different and range from religious motives to specific values of a humanistic attitude. One impressive example of this is the development of ambulatory nursing and care for the elderly in Austria that is also reflected in the history of the Hilfswerk. The organisation’s historical roots

lie in the help programmes organised by the civil society in the post-war years (help for returnees and children's evacuation). Over time, systems were developed to support various groups of the population in need of regular, ongoing help in their everyday life, especially people requiring special care and those who were well advanced in years. In order to make it possible for them to stay in their homes, in a familiar environment, various forms of neighbourly help and volunteer services were developed. It was soon realised that professional services were required to be able to assist effectively. Nursing at home and domestic help were introduced. The cooperation between full-time professionals, such as nursing specialists, and volunteers proved to be extremely fruitful. The volunteers accepted (and still do) responsibility in the charitable associations that function as service organisations, and also perform volunteer work like visiting people or delivering "Meals on Wheels".

The organisation became more professional over the course of the years, as did its relationship to the public sector, the state. For its part, the state developed the basis for securing the relevant public services – such as the care allowance and the 15a agreement between the state and provinces to establish a service infrastructure (such as mobile services) that was both accessible and affordable, and institutions (nursing homes and day-care centres). Today, this relationship in the area of nursing and care is characterised by clear service contracts. The public sector (usually the provinces) appears as the principal (client) and the (charitable) organisation as the service provider (supplier). In addition to the service contracts with the provinces (also including financial support from the communities and, indirectly, from the federal government by way of its care funds), financing is also provided by "client contributions", small sums of money paid by the users of the services – this amount is determined by (usually) socially-adjusted

tariffs (in keeping with the income of the household) determined by the provinces – and from the care allowance paid by the state, and other sources.

The special regulative merits of the third sector

Of course, social services can, and could, be provided by profit-oriented enterprises in the classical sense – and that also happens in some cases (for example, in the field of nursing homes but, so far, rarely in the area of mobile services). The special merits of making use of charitable organisations for implementing public services can be easily described and obviously have their starting point in their civil-society background. This description clearly reveals regulative aspects. Through the sponsorship on the part of the charitable organisation and its relevant statutes, which are not targeted on profit making but on fulfilling obligations and solving problems, the third sector is decidedly different from the private, profit-oriented economy. The fact is that the mandate of the charitable organisation is quite simply not geared towards making a profit – the hope that this will happen is not a reason for its activity – but fulfilling a purpose, and marginalising need. In this sense, it guides the perception, articulation, and solution of problems. It therefore takes sides for specific issues and groups of people. The day-to-day management of charitable organisations also differs in that it is not focussed on possible profits but on the tasks firmly anchored in its statutes and needs perceived in this context. In order to be able to serve the same in the interests of those affected (and, at least, cover costs), charitable organisations solicit public and private funding, conclude service contracts with public authorities, and collect donations. Due to its non-profit character, funds invested in the sector, by definition, do not flow as dividends into “private pockets” (in the sense of the so-called non-distribu-

tion constraint), but remain in the cycle of the (Austrian) common good (this also applies to any profits).

On the other hand, there is a clear difference between charitable organisations – on account of their “private” (non-state) constitution – and the state, which primarily faces the citizens in its official function, is characterised by the principles of public administration, and whose acts generally have a high level of formalisation. Beyond this, in the context of social welfare, the state appears not only as a tax state and administrator, but also as a “financer” with corresponding self-interests. The “third sector” has a quasi-intermediary function between the spheres. It positions a piece of “self-empowerment” in the interests of the citizen, as well as an obligation or opportunity for responsible participation, between the state and the citizen. This participation takes place in a number of ways, especially in the form of voluntary work as described previously, in addition to acquiring private funding and donations. Ralf Dahrendorf described the civil society as the “creative chaos of many organisations and institutions, protected from the grip of the state.”¹ According to Dahrendorf, the specific value of the civil society lies in the fact that it closes the gap between the organisation of the state and the individual, gives meaning to the coexistence of people, and, in this way, improves their chances in life. Another aspect that clearly distinguishes the third sector from the state draws on one of the well-known mechanisms of the market economy – the principle of competition. Properly understood, well-ordered (!), and cooperative competition between different social-welfare organisations fosters “customer orientation”, quality, efficiency, sensitivity to needs, and innovation. On the one hand, it is a matter of the interface with the client, the public sector, but is much more about the relationship with the client in the

1 Dahrendorf, Ralf: *Die Krisen der Demokratie – Ein Gespräch*, Munich 2003.

interests of the user, and that means, the people who need support. As Warnfried Dettling put it so pointedly, and on many occasions: Competitive organisation, the so-called “free choice of services” empowers the “client” who, as a result, acquires “social consumer sovereignty”.²

The threat and preservation of the merits of the third sector

As much as the merits of civic commitment and charitable work prove themselves, it is also important to recognise and draw attention to problematic or dangerous developments. In another contribution to this volume, Christian Moser-Sollman describes the tendency to “permanent agitation” on the part of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil-society movements as a regressive potential and “business model”. Michael Meyer³, on the other hand, observed a bureaucratisation and distance from the original core mission (in the sense of professional service) and those affected and looking for support as the result of a misunderstood competitive orientation and technocratic professionalisation, as well as economisation. He also holds the public authorities responsible for these developments. For example, procurement, management, and control practices focusing on input and output and not on outcome or effect – which was also sometimes ineffective – would reduce the charitable organisations to the level of

2 Dettling, Warnfried: Die Phantasie an die Macht, in: <https://www.zeit.de/1993/44/die-phantasie-an-die-macht/komplettansicht> (accessed 15.11.2020).

3 Meyer, Michael: Wie viel Wettbewerb vertragen NPO? Befunde zum Nutzen und Schaden von Wettbewerb im Dritten Sektor, In: Helmig, Bernd/Purtschert, Robert/Schauer, Reinbert/Witt, Dieter (eds.), Heidelberg 2006, Nonprofit-Organisationen und Märkte, 7. Internationales Colloquium of NPO researchers in March 2006 at the University of Freiburg/Switzerland, pp. 59–77.

subcontractors of the public administration that were rewarded for performing work instead of solving problems.

But what is needed to help prevent undesirable developments of this kind and, at the same time, promote the performance and merits of the third sector against the background of its civil-society structure and intermediary function? First and foremost, I believe that it is a matter of developing a new culture of trust. The trust of the citizens and civil-society organisations in democratically legitimised politics and its representatives. This will definitely be one of the major political challenges of our time. But it is just as much a matter of politics' trust of the civil society, its work, and its actors. In addition, both sides must consistently focus on results in the sense of finding "real" solutions to problems.

When the public authorities downgrade charitable organisations to the status of "extended workbenches" or "lean" subcontractors, when they resort to input and output to manage instead of evaluating the outcome intelligently, when they deprive people using their services of their freedom of choice, when they act through allocation and patronising instead of controlling via frameworks, deductibles, and result evaluation, when they do not permit well-ordered and cooperative competition between the organisations, when they demand that providers perform their tasks in only a few minutes, and also only grant the people who need assistance the same time, it is impossible for any lively togetherness to develop between the organisation and those affected in the sense of effective, situational, and individual problem solving. In a landscape of this kind, politics and organisations, as reflections of each other, are threatened with becoming frozen as unimaginative, like "woodcut" products, that are continuously updated, documented, and billed accordingly.

Wolfgang Hinte⁴ gave a similar description of this phenomenon at the symposium organised by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care, and Consumer Protection within the framework of the “Care Taskforce”, held in Vienna on 20 October 2020. His criticism is completely justified. To give just one example; it is now the case in Austria that a wall clock hanging in the lobby of a senior citizens’ community can become the object of an official investigation, while, in comparison, the personal satisfaction and individual needs of the residents receive surprisingly little attention. The details of the ordinance, the accuracy of the execution, have started to reign supreme; the quality of life of the aged and people in need of care – and sometimes even dying in dignity – threatens to recede into the background in a strange and oppressive way.

Trust and effect-orientation as the keys

What is needed in social welfare provided by the civil society that wants to realise the special merits of the third sector sustainably and comprehensively are organisations that are as strong as they are self-confident, as well as sensitive and flexible, that are guided by their statutory mandate with a charitable orientation (and do not focus on profit-making), that see themselves as professional, solution-oriented, and effective providers, as well as intermediaries between the state and its citizens. Only organisations of this kind will be able to mobilise the resources of the civil society, to act as valuable service and development partners for the public sector, to be “client-oriented” and innovative service providers for

4 Hinte, Wolfgang: Im Alter leben, wie ich es will – Pflege im Sozialraum, presentation on 20.10.2020, Symposium of the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care, and Consumer Protection “Care Taskforce” In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wveNQRncBo0> (accessed 15.11.2020).

the people, and make sure that all investments remain in the cycle of the common good. If this is to be achieved, it is essential that the public authorities have a subsidiary understanding and honest respect for the decision-making powers and positive resources of the individual, families, the community, and civil-society organisations. State bodies are required that recognise that, when commissioning services for the public, the quality of the result counts, and therefore intelligently evaluate the outcome (using quality indicators, specialist visits, satisfaction surveys, etc.) and, in this way, determine whether the organisations have served the people in need of support properly and professionally, and to their personal satisfaction, in the sense of the defined framework.

The path the provider and users of the services follow to arrive at this result should, in principle, be left to the parties involved; in view of their specific competencies, they do not need to be given any stipulations on how to fulfil individual tasks and concessions of detailed services. Those affected (or those representing them as the case may be) know what is decisive for quality of life in their personal situation, and the organisation is aware of the technical, legal, and organisational framework, and is responsible for the perfect, state-of-the-art implementation. This is the only way for those involved to strive for the best possible results consistently and sustainably, develop and employ individually effective solutions depending on the situation, and activate and integrate the resources of those affected and their communal environment appropriately. These results need to be paid for, for the measurable outcome, and for the defined effect, but not for the output. One is systematically immune from the potential over-provision that the public sector fears so much by using (socially acceptable) deductibles and/or needs-based individual budgets (capped) as controlling functions. The assessment of the care allowance based on a needs assessment – not in the sense of service side or in the

payment of cash benefits – and the previously mentioned “client contributions” in keeping with socially-graded tariffs already exist as controlling rationales in this context.

In this sense, one can – and must – rely on the specific competence of the actors (in the defined context and framework), as well as on intelligent control that is capable of integrating the calculation of high-quality care and that of economic (budgetary) necessities productively. This requires effort with the goal of establishing, or further developing, differentiated and well-considered control mechanisms that, in particular, leave the excessive, difficult to justify flood of regulations, as well as pure “bookkeeping” (in the metaphorical sense) involved with their execution, behind them. However, a show of strength, with a view to overcoming the distrust of the citizens and civil-society organisations, is also needed. The social reward for an attitude that trusts the civil-society organisation, and achieves good results (in particular, for the quality of life of those affected) within a defined framework as the standard, is an efficient, “client-oriented” flexible supply landscape and a subsidiary-structured, needs-sensitive, resource-activating social welfare that – in the case of charitable organisations – not only keeps all investments in the common good, but also makes a contribution to the valuable social capital of society.

Emmaus – From Paris to St. Pölten

Social Work Concerns Us All

Karl Langer

Summary: After numerous failed attempts, the Emmaus Community St. Pölten – Society for the Integration of Socially Disadvantaged People – saw the light of day on 1 August 1982. Following in the footsteps of Abbé Pierre, the French priest of poor people, the idea of creating a community of the “homeless” and “non-homeless”, where both could live and work, in St. Polten, which had been named the capital city of the province of Lower Austria in 1986, finally bore fruit mainly through the commitment of Karl Rottenschlager. Developed out of Christian, civil-society commitment, the Emmaus Community is now an outstanding place for multifaceted, volunteer involvement, largely due to the men and women, who – based on their social background, educational level, illnesses, etc. – one would not suspect of being able to do this.

The international Emmaus Community was founded by the French priest of the poor, Abbé Pierre, in 1949. He named his movement after Emmaus, the place near Jerusalem where the desperate disciples of Jesus had sought refuge after His crucifixion.

Abbé Pierre was born as Henri Antoine Groues in Lyon on 5 August 1912. The son of a wealthy silk manufacturer entered the Capuchin Order in 1930. Tuberculosis of the lungs forced him give up strenuous life in the monastery and he distributed the inheritance he had received from his father among the poor.

When he was 30 years old, he became a member of the French resistance movement against the German occupying forces. He forged identity documents, organised escape routes, and worked

for General de Gaulle's troops as a military priest. He took his alias of Abbé Pierre during this period. After the end of the war, he became an independent deputy in the French National Assembly.

Abbé Pierre: "I was called one day: 'Father, come quickly, a man in the neighbourhood has tried to kill himself!' I went straight away. The man was a former prisoner. Sentenced to life-long hard labour, but pardoned after 20 years, he discovered such terrible family circumstances when he returned home that he wanted to die after a few weeks. I fully understood that there was little hope that the desperate man would ever settle down. He felt that life had lost any meaning. It was clear that he would make another suicide attempt if I left him alone with his misfortune. That's when I said to him: 'Listen, you are completely distressed right now, but I urgently need somebody to help me. Look, my work is too much for me to carry out alone; come to me, together we'll be able to get all kinds of things done.' And that's how he came to our house.

He was the first for whom Emmaus would become a real home. A second man followed, and then a third. That was in 1949. Up until the day that I gave up my seat in the parliament, four or five of us were always able to live from my salary as a deputy and worked on organising the house. Finally, we were able to buy some barracks with money we had got by begging. In them, we set up dormitories with 100 beds, three meeting rooms, a dining hall, a kitchen, and four rooms, as well as a pathetic little chapel."

My friends, help!

At the turn of the year 1953/1954, he suddenly became famous throughout France. It was a very cold winter. More than 90 homeless people froze to death in Paris alone. Abbé Pierre made an

appeal on the radio that breathed life into a campaign. The first words he spoke were “My friends, help!” and they have remained unforgotten in France to the present day. With the help of the population, he was able to provide the homeless with blankets, food, and simple accommodation.

From that time on, Abbé Pierre remained an obstinate patron saint of the homeless for the rest of his life. Until his death on 22 January 2007, he devoted himself humbly and tenaciously to the needy, especially the homeless, who he lived and worked together with, in the midst of the (capitalistic) consumer society – which all too often has the characteristics of a throwaway society. Abbé Pierre is still recognised as the conscience of France and incarnation of goodness.

His idea was simple: Abbé Pierre collected people in despair and those sympathetic to the cause around him to collect rags and old objects to benefit the poorest of the poor. Second-hand goods were (and still are) collected wherever possible to give new life to those articles that could still be used – and are a form of ballast for our “throwaway society”. These activities made it possible to live as independent groups without subsidies. The motto: “Make new from old” has developed into something of a megatrend in the past decade. Articles that are produced through recycling or upcycling have found their way into (upper) middle-class homes.

Today, Emmaus (International) is active in 40 countries – there are more than 400 Emmaus Communities in more than 280 cities, on almost all continents.

In his testament, the priest of the poor wrote: “The scandal of disdained life, wastefulness, the indifference to old people, the poor, suppressed, and unemployed is our problem, not God’s.”

It became possible in the “glass shards” district

His idea took strong root in St. Pölten through the commitment of Karl Rottenschlager and his friends. Karl “Charly” Rottenschlager, who was born in Steyr in 1946, was initially employed as a social worker in the prison at Stein near Krems for around 9 years. There he discovered that, in spite of all the efforts made, the situation for released prisoners remained characterised by a lack of perspective. No prospects of finding an apartment or work. In most cases, the partnerships and social contacts of the “alumni” had broken up during the time in prison. As a result, many soon found their way back behind bars; and the same is true today. Society felt that its prejudices had been confirmed. Once a “jailbird”, always a “jailbird”.

Charly recognised that neither well-meant advice nor prayers alone could help against this deplorable state of affairs. The basic idea seemed to be relatively “simple”: to rent a dilapidated house with the help of Caritas and offer ex-prisoners accommodation and meaningful activity or work there. However, as soon as the “harmless” idea became known to the public, protests began: “Protect our wives and children from the ex-prisoners...”

After years of resistance, things finally got under way. Charly rented the building of a former horse butcher in what used to be known as the “glass shard” district (a once infamous quarter) of St. Pölten. After the building had been renovated with the active help of many friends (today, this would be described as civil-society or volunteer work) seven ex-prisoners were able to move in on 1 August of the same year. The new “residents” were called guests. Referring to Emmaus clients as “guests” is an expression of esteem. They lived, cooked, cleaned, and worked together. There were still no employees as well as no assistance agreement with

the public sector. The next step was to transform a tool shed into a small carpentry shop to provide meaningful work for the guests – as well as a source of income.

A place for all generations to live and work

Emmaus has grown since those days. Three emergency shelters have been created. One for men, one for women, and one for young people. Hostels – one for men, and one for women – were opened. All of the housing facilities have a kitchen, common rooms, sports rooms, a “pub” (without alcohol), a “chapel”, and many other facilities. People try to solve their everyday problems together, take care of meals (e.g.: deciding who has to get up at 5 a.m. to make breakfast), and organise professional social support. In keeping with motto of the Emmaus Community “Work instead of alms”, numerous businesses and workshops have been established in the past decades. There is a socio-economic business for long-term unemployed people. This is comprised of a handicrafts workshop, a shop for second-hand articles and antiques, which also organises house clearances and removals, and a troop that works on building renovations.

In the past ten years, numerous projects for people with mental illnesses have also been initiated. For example, men with a psychological diagnosis find a place to live – not a home, but still a home – in a residential house in the Viehofen district of St Pölten. Numerous workshops have been set up for people facing psychological challenges. In them, wood and other choice materials are used to produce high-quality products. These are then offered for sale in our shop at Austinstrasse 10 and can also be purchased online at *shop.emmaus.at*.

The City Farm was established on land leased from the St. Pölten diocese. The farm specialises in the cultivation and processing of vegetables, plants, herbs, fruit, and many other products.

In 2020, up to 350 guests (between 17 and 70 years of age) live and work every day in Emmaus. The guests are now supported and accompanied by a full-time staff of around 150 people with social, healthcare, and craft professions. In addition, a good 100 volunteers provide valuable service; they are a real treasure. The areas of activity of the volunteer workers are as varied as the offers of the Emmaus Community. They work in our kitchen, organise leisure-time activities for the guests, make themselves available as dialogue partners, accompany guests to authorities, travel to other (parish) communities in Lower Austria, represent Emmaus at all kinds of events and markets, and sell our products to interested parties. And one should not forget the young men (30 of them) who are currently doing their alternative national service at Emmaus.

[Former] guests become volunteer helpers

A lot has changed in the almost four decades since the organisation's founding. Many things have grown ("Emmaus Lilienfeld", and the two subsidiaries "soogut Sozialmärkte SAM NÖ" and "Atlas GmbH). This is not least due to the faith of the funding authorities, such as the Province of Lower Austria and the public employment service, AMS NÖ. Our positions and values have remained constant throughout the years. The conviction that each person is an image and likeness of God, and that, in God's eyes, there are no hopeless cases. The conviction that love and competence are essential principles for being able to embrace people seeking help without prejudice, and accompany them along a path that

ultimately leads to making it possible for them to once again cope with life by themselves. And the conviction that we would have to “shut down” without the commitment of volunteer/honorary helpers, regardless of whether they are active on the board of the organisation or in the emergency shelters. Their awareness of what it means to have reached rock bottom is invaluable.

Josef (name changed, 65 years old), a former guest in one of our establishments for homeless people and, today, a volunteer Emmaus worker: “I had a good life. Just like people want today. A job, house, wife, children, hobbies.... But I found my way to betting shops more and more often. For 20 years, I put almost all of my money into the machines. And then, there was nothing left. Not only the money, but also the house, wife, and children. Everything gambled away. For years, I found it impossible to admit that I lost control when I was in front of the machines. It was great to be able to forget the world around me.

At the end, I was homeless. I found help at Emmaus. A place to live. A community. And I underwent therapy. It was exceedingly difficult. There were some setbacks. In the meantime, I have my illness more-or-less under control. I was able to move into a flat of my own again. I could retire when I was 63 years old. I had always had a job, you see. I have worked as an Emmaus volunteer since I left their home. I want to give something back. I help in the church. I go shopping. (...) And I bake a cake whenever one of the guests or a staff member has a birthday. I have also founded a self-help group. Speaking about your problems really helps...”

Tolerance for other lifestyles, and the principle of “being poor, but helping those who are even poorer” characterise the dominating spirit of Emmaus, both then and now.

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The human is a social and political being that can only develop in a society. Democracy, therefore, not only lives from the separation of powers and the functioning rule of law, but also from active citizens. Just how multifaceted and heterogeneous the concept of the civil society is in theory and practice is shown in this book. We understand the civil society as being a community of free and responsible people living together in solidarity and subsidiarity on all levels. A democracy of this kind is one in which the individual feels responsible for recognising problems and actively taking part in solving them. We asked top-level scientists, journalists, and practitioners to give us their fundamental observations on the possibilities of the civil society in the 21st century to be included in the present anthology. This publication brings together contributions dealing with the theory, history, and philosophical heritage of the civil society, as well case studies from actual practice. The scope of the pluralism of opinions in the essays provides an impressive demonstration of how the permanent voice of the (critical) public can enrich and supplement politics.

With contributions by Ulrike Ackermann, Elisabeth Anselm, Alexander Bogner, Michael Borchard, Ernst Bruckmüller, Johannes Domsich, Benjamin Hasselhorn, Andreas Janko, Julia Juen, Peter Kampits, Till Kinzel, Martina Kronthaler, Karl Langer, Christine Leopold, Günther Lutschinger, Elisabeth Mayerhofer, Wolfgang Mazal, Christian Moser-Sollmann, Werner J. Patzelt, Manfred Prisching, Bettina Rausch, Justus Reichl, Verena Ringler, Christoph Robinson, Magdalena J. Schneider, Simon Varga and Ruth Williams.

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