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Scheduled Time: Nov 7 10:00 AM

Civil Society in Central & Eastern Europe: Thirty Years After

Session Submission Title: Panel

Brief Description

This panel aims to understand and explain civil society in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) thirty years after communism's end. Activism today is not what scholars, donors, or activists from the region expected. However, individuals and groups are working in different ways to promote change. While some seek change in local communities, others act in response to—in support of or in rebellion against-- populist leaders or dissatisfaction with inequality and/or poor governance. To capture the nature, activities, and role of civil society in the post-communist region, this panel will investigate civil society and civic activism in different sectors, countries, and local communities. The comparative case studies consider historical trends associated with civil society activism, with a focus on the relationships with international actors and national and local governments. The papers also analyze original data on civil society and activism collected in 2019 through semi-structured interviews with activists and/or unique, nationally representative sample surveys with an experiment.

Category

Politics/Law

Chair

James Gerard Richter, Bates College

Session Manager

Name : Paula M. Pickering
Institution : College of William & Mary

Speakers

[Author](#)

When the Donors Go Home: Civil Society Activism in Poland

Contrary to what some surveys suggest, civil society activism, or what some call "low-key forms of grassroots activity" is thriving and quite diverse in Poland. Starting in the late 1980s, this paper first provides some historical context to Poland's post-communist civil society. After establishing the central role of Western donors during the 1990s and 2000s in contributing to the growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), it focuses on the actors and activities in the last decade. It hypothesizes that as Western funding for Polish civil society decreased and government support increased, groups' orientation focused more on socioeconomic issues and practical problems. In other words, "everyday activism" in Poland is sporadic, responsive and hard to pin down. Drawing on recent interviews and surveys, this paper will discuss how and why civil society activism in Poland has changed in the past thirty years.

Author Name : Patrice Colleen McMahon
Author Institution : U of Nebraska-Lincoln

[Author](#)

Forms of Citizen Activism around Local Community Problems in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Citizens' actions can support, abet, or challenge governance by national populist rulers. This paper will report on analysis of new quantitative and qualitative data collected in Bosnia-Herzegovina that seeks to understand better the motivating issues and new forms of activism for citizens, as well as factors explaining their variation. To capture the forms and goals of civic activism, as well as trust in civil society organizations, this paper will investigate data collected in 2019 through an original, nationally representative survey and semi-structured interviews with activists in under-studied small towns in BiH.

Author Name : Paula M. Pickering
Author Institution : College of William & Mary

[Author](#)

Key Dimensions of Civil Society Development in CEE Thirty Years After: What Do We Learn from Survey and Qualitative Research?

The paper evaluates several dimensions of civil society research on the basis of a new dataset gathered through national surveys in Poland, Czech Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia and Ukraine and provides comparative analysis of several indicators that have been tested including an experiment. This empirical data is discussed in the context of various other types of civil society research in the region including qualitative and quantitative data related to new forms of everyday activism, openness or shrinking of the civic space, democratic consolidation or backsliding as well as value orientations in societies. The paper concludes with several remarks about the very understanding of civil societies in the region, their conditions, and the way they should be measured and conceptualized

Author Name : Dorota Pietrzyk-Reeves
Author Institution : Jagiellonian U in Krakow (Poland)

[Discussant](#)

Author Name : James Gerard Richter
Author Institution : Bates College

[Author](#)

New Forms of Gender Activism in Contemporary Russia

This paper draws upon recent field interviews and reflects upon historical comparisons based on research on feminist activism that the authors have conducted over the past twenty-five years in Russia. In the paper we focus on examining how activism has changed in Russia in the post-Soviet period, as well as enduring patterns, and articulate potential explanations for the changes the authors and the activists themselves observe about feminist organizing. One pattern we explore, shared with other civil society movements in Russia and throughout the post-Communist region, is a shift from a trend of professionalization into formal NGOs in the 1990s and early 2000s, to one of more informal organizing recently, often assisted by use of social media platforms.

Author Name : Valerie Sperling
Author Institution : Clark U

[Author](#)

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Author Name : Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom
Author Institution : U of British Columbia (Canada)

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Session Type: Panel

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