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Research Article

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This paper debates the crisis of democracy and the importance of civil society in bringing forth new, participatory models of democracy. This is demonstrated in the case of Croatia following the results of the local elections in the spring of 2013 when five newly founded political parties, which shared strong ties to civil society, saw success. Building on the existing literature on the crisis of democracy, the authors argue that the low level of trust in political parties is not sufficient for explaining this phenomenon. Seeking to provide a more comprehensive solution, the authors introduce the factor of motivation by analysing the failures of CSOs in establishing a dialogue with the government, as well as the structural features of CSOs, thereby establishing a link between the macro and micro level of analysis. The paper indicates similarities with other post-socialist countries, allowing for speculation about possible similarities between them.

Keywords: participatory democracy, crisis of democracy, civil society, political parties, post-socialism

Introduction

In the last local elections in Croatia in May 2013, several recently founded political initiatives caused an upset, winning a significant number of seats in their respective municipalities and outperforming candidates from the mainstream political parties. Despite origins in different parts of the country, several of these more or less newly established parties share a number of common traits. In addition to similarities in their names – 'For the City'(*Za grad*), 'For Rijeka' (*Za Rijeku)*, 'For Smart People and a Smart City' (*Za pametne ljude i pametni grad*), 'Civic Option of the City of Osijek' (*Građanska opcija grada Osijeka*), 'Srđ is Ours' (*Srđ je naš*) - they also predominantly share origins in the civil sector and grassroots movements. They place an emphasis

on the model of participatory democracy, show a regional orientation and liberal social values and transgress the traditional left-right divide. In this paper, we will search for the conditions that led to their emergence, which resulted in the proliferation of participatory democratic parties in Croatian politics.

The crisis of democracy has surely been one of the most explored areas in the field of social and political sciences for decades. A whole array of political scientists has gone on to explore the loss of legitimacy and faith in democratic institutions that have taken place since the 1960s. This is the period characterized by the withdrawal of the welfare state, the emergence of new social movements and economic crises, all of which followed the unprecedented interval of the post-WWII economic growth. However, for the post-socialist context of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and Croatian politics specifically, parliamentary democracy established after the decline of state-socialism faced additional difficulties. The long transformation of the political system from socialism to democracy and the lack of democratic culture[1] – an umbrella term referring to a whole series of phenomena that together resulted in unresponsive democratically elected authorities – have made the democratic functioning of political institutions incomparably more problematic than in most countries in Western Europe.[2] In such conditions, the emergence of new political actors might seem a natural progression. Where, if not here, would you expect a rise of new political initiatives advocating for a higher level of political participation?

All of these factors created an opportunity for new political parties promoting civic participation to emerge. In this paper, we will describe this trend by presenting five political initiatives that emerged in five different cities: Zagreb, the state capital, Dubrovnik, Split, Rijeka and Osijek, with the last three being the largest cities after Zagreb. The crisis of democracy, however, did not automatically lead to the above-mentioned trend. In our analysis, we point out additional variables that set the wheels in motion, demonstrating why this empty space in Croatian politics has been filled by the given actors, and why Croatian civil society organizations (CSOs) presented an ideal candidate for this quite unusual role. By defining the external circumstances (a high degree of public support for the civil society, disappointment of the CSOs with the possibilities to cooperate with the authorities) and the internal characteristics of the CSOs (proactivity, adaptability and mobilization) that allowed them to quickly adjust to the political game, we make an important contribution to the debate on "the crisis of democracy". At the same time, given its area perspective, this paper contributes to scholarship on civil society in the CEE and research on politics in post-socialist societies in general.

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[1] Almond, Gabriel A. and Sydney. Verba. 1963. *Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company.
[2] Arato, Andrew. 1996. *Civil Society, Transition and Consolidation of Democracy*. Paper at the International Conference Democratic Transitions in Latin America and in Eastern Europe: Rupture and Continuity. Paris, 4-6 March 1996. (accessed: 11. February 2015); McAllister, Ian and Stephen White. 2007. Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Post-Communist Societies. *Party Politics* 13(197), 197-216; Merkel, Wolfgang. 2008. Plausible theory, unexpected results: the rapid democratic consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe. *International Politics and Society* 2, 11-29.

The data from which we drew our conclusions were acquired through several
qualitative methodological techniques. The newly established parties were
analysed through a textual analysis of their statutes, programmes and
websites. Moreover, given that desk research can provide little insight into
party organizations, the motivation of actors and programme development,
data were also gathered using participatory observation. The authors of the
article were active in the core team of one of the parties for the entire duration
of the campaign for the May elections, during which time they participated in
party meetings and took part in various party activities. In order to understand
the motivation of actors and the organising principles of other parties, they also
conducted interviews with representatives of other parties, either during live
meetings or via email communication (the interviews were held in the period
between July 2013 and September 2013). The respondents were asked to
describe the circumstances under which they decided to switch from the civil
sector to the political arena, and also about the aspect of participatory
democracy in their decision-making patterns. A series of open-ended questions
depended on the respective interviewees and included questions such as: Please
describe the circumstances under which your party was created. What were the
motives for establishing a political party? How many founding members had
previous experience in civil society? Please specify in which CSOs they
participated. What is the main objective of your party? Please describe the
decision-making process in your party.

Can we assume that our findings from the Croatian case can be generalized to
other countries of the region (post-Yugoslav region, region of Southeastern
Europe, the post-socialist region) or even broader? On one hand, the results
seem strictly related to the specific circumstances and events of recent history
that shaped Croatian society into what it is today. Ideally, several other
country cases would be included in the research. This would allow us to draw
stronger conclusions about tendencies in participatory democracies in different
contexts, as well as about the strength and potential of civil society[3] to cure the
ills of contemporary, representative democracies in environments that differ
from Croatia. However, the methodological approach of this study rendered
this almost impossible; methodology resting on in-depth interviews and
ethnographic research necessarily limited the number of cases. On the other
hand, in this paper we demonstrate the advantages of a case-oriented
approach, which is both historically interpretative and causally analytic.[4] This
allowed us to consider our case as a distinct entity and to explore it as a
configuration of characteristics, not merely as a collection of variables.

The argument will be divided into three parts. In the first section, we will
briefly look at the authors and literature that discuss the participatory

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[3] For a better conceptualization of civil society see Diamond's text (1994) on the concept of civil
society, Kaldor, Mary. 2003. *Global Civil Society. An Answer to War.* Cambridge: Polity for
functions of civil society and Schmitter, Philippe C. 1997. *Civil Society: East and West,* in
Consolidating Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives, edited by Diamond, Larry /
Plattner Marc / Chu, Yunhan and Hung-mao, Tien. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,
239-62 for the difference between civil society in the East and the West.
[4] Ragin, Charles C. 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative
Strategies*. Berkley: University of California Press, 35.

solutions for the crisis of democracy. After providing the theoretical framework of our study, we will move on to the empirical part of the research. We will establish the object of analysis by presenting new political initiatives and their ways of transcending problems of parliamentary democracy, which are explained in the second section. Finally, before providing our concluding remarks, we will analyse the broader social and political conditions that led to this development.

1.   The Crisis of Democracy and Participatory Politics

The crisis of democracy has for decades been one of the most explored areas in the field of social and political sciences.[5] A whole array of social scientists has sought to explore the loss of legitimacy and faith in democratic institutions, trying to explain the failure of democratic systems to deliver "government of the people, by the people, for the people." Due to the fact that democratically elected governments have gradually ceased to represent citizens' interests, it has been said that the degree of trust in democratic systems has been diminished on a grand scale.[6] The democratic systems based on political representation discussed here deviate from the original model of democracy, instead focusing more on normative acts, institutions and procedures that may not always be in correspondence with the needs and will of the people. At the same time, the state of democracy seems almost indistinguishable from the state of political parties, which are the main actors in the democratic political arena.

As described in some of the classic studies of political science, most notably by Lipset and Rokkan and Sartori,[7] political parties are said to have two main roles: *expressive* - representation of different social groups, expressing the demands of their members and supporters, - and *instrumental* - as *channels for communication*. In contemporary politics, however, as numerous authors have noticed, both functions seem highly problematic. Nowadays, political parties are, as the argument goes, more concerned with obtaining votes and mandates, as well as figuring out the means of achieving these goals. Therefore, they are often promising what people want to hear regardless of their ideology and point of view. As a result of the decrease in the representative function of parties, the aggregation and articulation of interests and their delivery to the political system are becoming ever weaker.[8]

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[5] Instead of the word 'decades,' one might as well choose 'centuries,' as the critique of modern representative democracy has been a topic in numerous classical philosophical accounts, from Rousseau and Marx to Max Weber and Schumpeter (see Bobbio, Norberto. 2005. *Liberalism and democracy*. London: Verso and Held, David. 2006. *Models of democracy*. Cambridge: Polity). However, in this account we focused primarily on the contemporary critiques.

[6] Katz, Richard S. and Peter. Mair. 1995. Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party. *Party politics* 1(1), 5-28; Mair, Peter. 2006. *Party System Change*, in *Handbook of Party Politics,* edited by Katz, Richard S. and William J Crotty. London: Sage, 63-74.

[7] Lipset, Seymour M. and Stein Rokkan (eds.). 1967. *Party systems and voter alignments: Cross-national perspectives*. New York: Free Press; Sartori, Giovanni. 2005. Party types, organisation and functions. *West European Politics* 28(1), 5-32.

[8] Ravlić, Slaven. 2007. Transformacija predstavničke funkcije političkih stranaka. *Zbornik Pravnog fakulteta u Zagrebu* 57(6), 979-1004.

Numerous accounts in contemporary social science have dealt with one of the crucial issues of contemporary democracy: how to "rule in common for the common [in a just and democratic way]."[9] The conventional definitions of democracy, which restrict it to the mere electoral process, are in this view simply too narrow. According to Pierre Rosanvallon, there is a need for "a more adequate account [that] would include the various ways in which the people are able to check or hold to account their representatives or the government, irrespective of the electoral process."[10] How can this be achieved? In Rosanvallon's theory of counter-democracy, there is only one solution to bring back the trust in political institutions and improve the quality of democracy - active citizenry where individuals demand more power in the decision-making process. Oversight, prevention and judgment[11] are necessary to utilize democracy to its fullest potential, whereas political parties should return to their fundamentals - interest aggregation and the articulation and delivery of citizens' demands into a political system.[12] If those features were adopted, the argument goes, the political systems would be more responsive and the democratic deficit would decrease.

Attempts to face the ills of liberal democracies, by emphasizing the return to a representational function and stressing a more intensive communication with citizens, represent one of the most interesting theoretical issues in the contemporary theory of democracy. However, if "citizen participation is both the heart of democracy and a mandatory part of many public decisions,"[13] and if individual freedom and personal development can only be achieved by the permanent and direct inclusion of citizens into a policymaking process,[14] then the question emerges, how can this be achieved? Who are the political actors ready to take over the assigned role? Finally, which mechanisms should the participatory democratic parties, which demand deliberation, discussion, higher citizen participation and involvement in the policy-making process, implement to achieve these goals? These questions remained insufficiently elaborated in the empirical (rather than normative) literature on participatory democracy, whereas the analysis of this aspect represents the main theoretical contribution of this paper.

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[9] Brown, Wendy. 2011. *We Are All Democrats Now...,* in *Democracy in What State*?, edited by Agamben, Giorgio et al. New York: Columbia University Press, 44-57.

[10] Rosanvallon, Pierre. 2008. *Counter-democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge University Press.

[11] The first refers to the various means whereby citizens (or, more accurately, organizations of citizens) are able to monitor and publicize the behaviour of elected and appointed rulers; the second refers to their capacity to mobilize resistance to specific policies, either before or after they have been selected; the third refers to the trend toward the 'juridification' of politics when individuals or social groups use the courts and especially jury trials to bring delinquent politicians to justice (Rosanvallon, *Counter-democracy*).

[12] This conception is also close to the idea of council democracy, which can be found in texts by Hannah Arendt, Thomas Jefferson and F.W. Maitland. Council democracy is practiced on the local level with the goal of enhancing community welfare. Instead of representatives being put forward by those in power, managed by party organizations and excluding people at large from the exercise of power, council democracy is conceptualized as a form of government where people meet in their local communities, discuss local problems and some among them are chosen to participate in assemblies higher up. Compare Mosley, Ivo. 2013. *'Council democracy' - reform must begin with the local.'* (accessed: 11. February 2015).

[13] Gastil, John and Peter Levine. 2005. *The deliberative democracy handbook: Strategies for effective civic engagement in the twenty-first century*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[14] Held, *Models of democracy*, 263.

In the following sections, we will analyse the 'deliberative movement' among political parties by providing in-depth insight in the cases of participatory democratic parties. However, instead of quantitative cross-country research, we concentrate on the single country-case of Croatia, with a special focus on the 'new wave' of recently established political initiatives, which achieved success in the last local elections held in May 2013. What is the logic behind this case selection? Even though the crisis of democracy represents a global phenomenon, which can and should be studied in a large N, in this paper we follow the argument put forth by Schmitter and Karl[15] and Linz and Stephan.[16] According to them, the legitimacy of democratic institutions should be studied as entrenched within contextually specific socioeconomic conditions, state structures and policy practices. The post-socialist context of Croatia represents the political setting and local institutional tradition in which we observe the object of our study. Our goals will, therefore, be twofold. On the one hand, we seek to explain a local phenomenon by elucidating the deeper historical conditions that led to its emergence. At the same time, however, we believe that this local perspective can represent an important contribution to the examination of 'the participatory turn' among political parties as part of the global process.

2.   The Participatory Turn in Croatian Party Politics
The descending tendency of the degree of trust in democratic institutions that was primarily established in the societies and politics of the advanced, Western capitalist countries proved even more problematic in the post-socialist context of Central and Eastern Europe. High levels of political corruption, devastation to social capital during decades of authoritarian regimes, and political elites broadly found to be unaccountable for their respective constituencies all created conditions in which the crisis of democratic legitimacy was even more noticeable than in their western counterparts.[17] Recently, however, a new political trend has emerged in Croatian politics that has demonstrated the important healing potential for an otherwise seriously damaged health of representative democracy. Even though they are formally unrelated and

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[15] Schmitter, Phillip C. and Terry L. Karl. 1991. What democracy is... and is not. *Journal of democracy* 2(3), 75-88.

[16] Linz, Juan J. and Alfred Stepan. 2011. *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe*. Cambridge: JHU Press.

[17] Dahrendorf, Ralf. 1990. *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*. New York: Times Books; Markowski, Radoslaw. 1997. Political parties and ideological spaces in East Central Europe. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30(3), 221-54; Limongi, Fernando and Adam Przeworski. 1997. Modernization: Theories and facts. *World politics* 49(2), 155-83; Lijphart, Arend. 1999. *Patterns of democracy: Government forms and performance in thirty-six countries*. New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press; Kitschelt, Herbert. (ed.). 1999. *Post-communist party systems: competition, representation, and inter-party cooperation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Dimitrova, Antoaneta and Geoffrey Pridham. 2004. International actors and democracy promotion in Central and Eastern Europe: the integration model and its limits. *Democratization*, 11(5), 91-112; Šalaj, Berto. 2007. *Socijalni capital*. Zagreb: Fakultet političkih znanosti; Merkel, Plausible theory, 11-29; Merkel, Wolfgang. 2009. *Transformacija političkih sustava. Teorije i analize*. Zagreb: Fakultet političkih znanosti; Roberts, Andrew. 2010. *The quality of democracy in Eastern Europe: public preferences and policy reforms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Bohle, Dorothee and Béla Greskovits. 2012. *Capitalist diversity on Europe's periphery*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

emerged independently of each other, the five parties were frequently perceived as being part of the same trend and sharing a similar political agenda. In this section, we will present the five cases (the data gathered from the party programmes and websites are complemented by the information given in the interviews by the party representatives) and will conclude the section by analysing 'family resemblances' between them.

2.1   For the City / Zagreb

The political party 'For the City' is a regional party that was founded in March 2013 in Zagreb by a group of young university graduates, most of whom pursued postgraduate degrees abroad. Even though the party developed from the Zagreb-based CSO 'The Cyclists' Union', which was directed at improving Zagreb's cycling infrastructure, it soon broadened its scope of interests and embraced a more general, green ideological platform. In the campaign for the May elections, the emphasis was put on three main topics: the implementation of sustainable transport solutions, the promotion of environmental topics and the propagation of participatory democracy. In the local elections for the City Assembly in May 2013, the party won almost 4% of the votes. Despite not managing to cross the 5% threshold, the party won the sixth highest number of votes; at the elections for the 17 city borough councils, it won 13 seats.[18] After the new local government was established, the party continued to promote citizens' participation in the decision-making processes. In addition to the web platform, where citizens of Zagreb could write their proposals for improvements in living conditions in Zagreb, the party representatives of the respective counties opened Facebook groups and established blogs to enhance their everyday communication with citizens.

2.2   For Smart People and a Smart City / Split

The political initiative 'For Smart People and a Smart City' caused the biggest upset in the May local elections, winning 12% of votes for City Council. Marijana Puljak, head of the initiative, became involved in politics before the previous local elections when, together with her neighbours, she started lobbying for the construction of a public elementary school, which in their opinion the neighbourhood lacked. After a disappointing experience of communicating with the city authorities, Puljak, an IT engineer who worked in a bank, decided to run for a position in the council of the city borough of Žnjan, where she was elected in 2008. Encouraged by her success on the city borough level, Puljak and her collaborators decided to run in the 2013 elections with a programme based on the 'Smart City' platform, which has been implemented in a number of cities around the world. Puljak's political initiative avoided topics

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[18]The basic units of local government in Croatia are municipalities and towns that belong to 21 counties (administrative units and their assemblies, which have legislative power; *zupanije*). Zagreb, the capital, has a special status and represents a territorial and administrative whole, enjoying the status of a county. Lower municipal level units (*gradske četvrti*) are actually boroughs (each has its assembly), which are further divided into local councils (*mjesni odbori*). While Zagreb and Split have this system, smaller cities and municipalities do not have the middle level of local government. In Rijeka, Osijek and Dubrovnik, urban local councils are called city boroughs, while suburban and rural local councils are called local councils. See more in: Kregar, Josip / Đulabić, Vedran / Gardašević, Đorđe / Musa, Anamarija / Ravlić, Slaven and Tereza Rogić Lugarić. 2011. *Decentralizacija*. Zagreb: Centar za demokraciju i pravo Miko Tripalo.

of national importance in the campaign for the May elections, primarily emphasizing local topics and advocating for citizen participation. The political programme included various mechanisms for the enhancement of participatory democracy: the introduction of citizen participation in the decision-making processes through public discussions and workshops, permanent and transparent communication with citizens via contact centres, as well as SMS and email referenda, and the use of a pre-existing web platform where citizens can send proposals that are then forwarded to the county governing bodies.

2.3   For Rijeka / Rijeka

The political party 'For Rijeka' was founded in 2006 as a regional political party whose representatives have been selected for the City Council for two consecutive terms, in 2008 and 2013. As in the previous two cases, it emerged from the CSO 'Free State of Rijeka'. Frustrated by the inertia and incompetence of the local political parties, its members decided to become politically active with three main political objectives: decentralization, with an emphasis on the fiscal independence of the city of Rijeka, re-industrialization, with the port of Rijeka having a central role in this process, and the promotion of liberal social values (secularism and multiculturalism, as opposed to Croatian nationalism). Participatory democracy is present primarily through the empowerment of the local authorities by fostering a 'council democracy' and including citizens in the decision-making process.

2.4   Osijek Civic Option / Osijek

In the May elections, 'Osijek Civic Option' passed the 5% threshold and won two seats in the City Council. Unlike other political initiatives discussed in this context, the leading officials of the 'Osijek Civic Option' had prior experience in mainstream political parties, but after several disappointments with this experience, they decided to form a new political initiative. Most of the members, however, have little political experience and are instead professionals, entrepreneurs employed in the private sector and former civil society activists. Besides advocating for transparency values, a more efficient city administration and the development of entrepreneurial policies, 'Osijek Civic Option' put a substantial emphasis on stronger participation of the citizens in decision-making processes. It did this through cooperation with local CSOs and various forms of e-referenda (for instance, SMS referendum) on the level of city boroughs.

2.5   Srđ is Ours / Dubrovnik

'Srđ is Ours' was founded in Dubrovnik a few months before the May elections. This was a direct consequence of the failure of the CSO of the same name in preventing the development of a tourist resort on the nearby Srđ hill, which civil activists from Dubrovnik saw as a major environmental threat. The tourist resort, which includes hotels, apartment houses and golf courses, had been controversial since its official presentation almost 10 years ago. The controversy stemmed from the environmental risks related to the development of golf courses, the dangers of the 'Spanish model' of development of tourist infrastructure (the so-called 'betonization' and apartmanization of the coast)

and most of all, the non-transparent procedure through which the project was permitted by the city authorities. In this sense, 'Srđ is Ours' clearly demonstrates the specific pathway through which CSOs divert their activities towards formal politics and political engagement; they do so by competing with the very same political structures that were the direct cause of their political involvement, through their unresponsiveness and lack of accountability

In spite of the independent origins of the five political initiatives described in the previous sections – the interviews with representatives of the parties revealed that all parties grew independently of one another, without the interference of organizational learning from other contexts – the newly established parties share a number of common traits (Table 1). One of the most instantly recognizable shared traits of the political initiatives is the similarity in the official names of their organizations. The names are syntagmatically structured in an atypical manner different from other major political parties – names of most political parties in Croatia consist of three components, containing the attribute 'Croatian,' the noun 'party' and a third clause representing *differentia specifica*, e.g. the 'Croatian People's Party' (*Hrvatska narodna stranka*, HNS), the 'Croatian Peasants' Party' (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*, HSS). They even differ from the names of mainstream political parties on a semantic level, evoking an activist spirit and a new mode of political subjectivity ('For...' or '...is ours'). In this section, however, it has been shown that the similarities between the initiatives transcend the mere formal level, indicating a deeper analogy in the content of their political activity.

Table **1**: Shared Characteristics of the Five Parties

	For the City	For Smart People and a Smart City	For Rijeka	Osijek Civic Initiative	Srđ is Ours
Civil Society Background	++	++	++	+	++
Participatory Democracy	++	+	+	+	++
E-communication	++	++	+	+	+
Regionalization / Decentralization	+	+	++	+	+
Liberal Social Values	++	+	++	+	++

Source: Authors' own illustration

In a political context characterized by a low degree of trust in politics and a high degree of contempt towards the political parties, emphasizing distance from the mainstream political parties is surely unsurprising. However, an in-depth analysis of the political parties, which constitutes the subject of this analysis, indicates that all of the new parties have, to varying degrees, origins in the organizations of civil society and very little experience in the frames of formal politics. This, to move over to the second point, has led them to start including practices typical for CSOs – horizontal, instead of vertical, decision making processes and an emphasis on the values of participatory politics.

The 'broadening of civic participation' in representative democracy has become a widespread catch phrase even among mainstream political parties. Yet, the concrete mechanisms allowing citizens to take part in the decision making processes distinguish the political initiatives we decided to include in the 'participatory democratic' camp from the merely rhetorical usage of the concepts related to participatory democracy. Some of these mechanisms include: e-referenda, SMS-voting, web platforms enabling the direct participation of citizens in creating party programmes, proposals for decentralization and bringing decision making processes to a lower level of political participation. When looking at these parties, the use of all resources that are available for effective communication with citizens is key in transforming a passive mass of voters into involved and informed stakeholders.

As successful civic activists, who are responsible for mobilizing thousands of citizens to achieve their objectives, the leaders of the five political parties put great emphasis on their new modes of communication. In the context in which they were about to compete for the elections, with financial and human resources almost incomparably lower than for the major political parties, communication via Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media, as well as viral marketing in general, proved critical for their campaigns. Besides these communication channels, the programmes of all five parties put strong emphasis on the need for regionalization and decentralization. This was due to three factors: the excessive level of centralization of state administration in Croatia, the values of participatory democracy and the fact that all five initiatives emerged on a local level, and have so far competed solely in local elections.

The content of their programmes represents a final point of convergence. All of the political initiatives analysed in this paper share similar values regarding human and civil rights, the protection of minorities (ethnic, racial and sexual) and the principles of secularism– what we, somewhat inaptly, called "liberal social values."[19] Instead of alluding to the ideology of individualism in the economic sense, we referred to liberalism as a social doctrine that advocates for the need to emancipate individuals from authoritarian regimes, as well as secular freedoms that enable citizens to resist rigid dogmas of religious communities, which after 1990 gathered significant influence in the political spheres in several CEE countries.

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[19] It could be argued that, given that the equality before the law, right to non-discrimination and the separation of Church and State are guaranteed by the very constitution, promoting these values merely amounts to stating the obvious. However, these attitudes should be understood in the context of recent social and political changes in Croatia, which were strongly influenced by, as some commentators called it, a 'conservative revolution' and intense activities of the Catholic Church and Church-related organizations. The referendum held in December 2013, which approved changes to Croatia's constitution in defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman, is taken as one of their most significant successes. This development can serve as a reminder that secularization is a process that includes a diminishing public and political importance of religious communities, rather than a unique constitutional arrangement.

3.   Civil Society and New Party Development

In the previous section, we have pointed out a new trend that has emerged in Croatian party politics. Our analysis demonstrated several traits that these parties held in common. In the following paragraphs, we turn to the question of how to explain the polycentric development that emerged in a similar period in five different settings in Croatia. What are the circumstances and historical assumptions of the Croatian political arena that have led to this phenomenon? Finally, after more than 20 years of democracy and multiple party elections, what made this moment in time suitable for such a development? We start the analysis by discussing different hypotheses that provide answers to these questions.

3.1   Trust and Mistrust: Civil Society vs. Political Parties

The crisis of democracy represents an obvious hypothesis for the question of why the political situation resulted in the emergence of participatory democratic parties. Diminishing trust in political institutions, the ideological dislodging of traditional political parties, and a general impression that institutions of democratic representation no longer manage to stand for citizens' needs and wishes seemingly turned political parties in the direction of higher democratic persuasiveness. There is an abundance of evidence demonstrating that mainstream political parties, while focused on winning elections by using empty rhetoric, failed to aggregate the interests of citizens and represent their will in the political arena. As seen from Table 2, the percentage of citizens tending not to trust any political party in Croatia has exceeded 90% since 2009.

Table 2: Trust in Political Parties in Croatia

Date	Tend not to trust	Tend to trust	Don't know
10/2004	86%	7%	7%
06/2005	84%	11%	6%
10/2005	85%	8%	7%
04/2006	84%	11%	5%
09/2006	88%	7%	5%
10/2007	86%	8%	6%
04/2008	88%	9%	3%
10/2008	86%	10%	4%
06/2009	91%	7%	2%
11/2009	92%	4%	4%
06/2010	88%	8%	4%
11/2011	90%	6%	4%
05/2012	86%	12%	2%
11/2012	89%	7%	4%
05/2013	90%	9%	1%

Source: Eurostat, 2013.

As we argue in this paper, a space opened for some new actors to jump in and take a slice of the political cake as a result of dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties, their unresponsiveness and the high level of political corruption. However, despite achieving record-low levels of trust in political parties in May 2013, the crisis of democracy in Croatia is hardly a recent phenomenon, with figures holding well above 80% at least since 2004.[20] Even if the crisis of democracy provided good conditions for the emergence of new political parties, this factor alone cannot explain the rise of participatory democratic parties in recent years.

A high level of trust in the CSOs provides an alternative explanation (still not incompatible with the previously presented argument). Given the origins of the new participatory democratic political parties in the civil society, it is reasonable to assume the connection between the two factors. Indeed, while the mainstream political parties suffered from the decreasing levels of trust, recent trends show rising levels of trust in the CSOs. The high EU-fund absorption capacities of CSOs,[21] employment growth of 13.3% within the civil sector[22] and the CSOs' activities, which are open for wide participation of citizens, have resulted in positive attitudes within society. Research on the support for CSOs in Croatia (Table 3.) suggests that almost three quarters of the population have a positive or very positive attitude - especially among the younger generation, employed citizens and the urban population.[23] Furthermore, support rose more than 5% from 2007 to 2012 (a substantial growth even with the margin of error of around 3%). However, the increase in support has been to some extent cancelled out by the 1% increase in negative attitudes.

Table 3: Support for Civil Society Organizations 2007-2012

	2007	2012
CSO work is very beneficiary for a society	33%	38,3%
CSO work is somewhat beneficiary for a society	38,5%	37,4%
CSOs are neither harmful, nor beneficiary for a society	25,7%	21,5
CSO work is harmful for a society	0,7%	1,6%
CSO work is very harmful for a society	0,2%	1%
No answer	1,9%	0,3%
N	1000	1004

Source: Franc, Renata / Sučić, Ines / Međugorac, Vanja and Stanko Rihtar. 2012. *Vidljivost i javna percepcija udruga u Hrvatskoj 2012*. Zagreb: TACSO.

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[20] Even though there are no sound empirical data on the trust in parties before 2004, there are some indicators that this trend is from an even earlier date, as for instance in Rimac, Ivan. 2000. Neke determinante povjerenja u institucije političkog sustava u Hrvatskoj. *Bogoslovska smotra* 70(2), 471-84.
[21] Ured za udruge Vlade RH. 2010. <u>Izvješće s dana udruga</u>. (accessed: 11. February 2015).
[22] Ponoš, Tihomir. 2012. <u>Bijeg s burze: Udruge u godinu dana zaposlile oko tisuću ljudi</u>. *Novi list*. 09. August 2012. (accessed: 11. February 2015).
[23] Franc, Renata / Sučić, Ines / Međugorac, Vanja and Stanko Rihtar. 2012. *Vidljivost i javna percepcija udruga u Hrvatskoj 2012*. Zagreb: TACSO, 31.

However, even if this sheds more light on the space created for the emergence
of new participatory democratic parties, it still does not explain the
mechanisms of the newly emerging trend. What was the actual motivation of
the actors in switching from civil society to formal politics? How can we
construct a macro-micro link when interpreting this phenomenon? In order to
explain this, as we demonstrate in the following section, it is necessary to take
into account the dynamics of the cooperation between civil society and political
authorities and the resulting disappointment of the activists. This can be
demonstrated through the case of the civic initiative 'Right to the City'.

3.2   Right to the City (2005-2010): Failures and Lessons Learned
'Right to the City' (RTC) was created in 2005 by various Zagreb-based
organizations dealing with non-institutional culture, environmental issues and
the youth. As described by Teodor Celakoski, one of the leaders, "RTC is an
initiative aimed against the management of space that goes against public
interest and excludes citizens from the decision making process in planning the
urban development in Zagreb."[24] This initiative, together with the CSO 'Green
Action,' later became the most important actor in one of the biggest organized
activities of civil society in Croatia – the movement for the preservation of
Varšavska Street. This street, part of the pedestrian area in the city centre,
was supposed to be transformed into an access area for the underground
garage of a private shopping mall after a series of favouring.

A number of activities (protests, petition signing, performances and advocacy
events) took place between 2006 and 2010, with the climax of these efforts
occurring in 2010 with a series of protests. The "We won't give Varšavska
away!" protest gathered thousands of people in the centre of Zagreb to protest
against the co-modification of the public space. Civil society activists believed
that all permits for the intervention in that public space were issued illegally
and at the harm of citizens of Zagreb. Mass rallies were organized that
protested the plans to start with the construction. The events culminated in
May 2010 when the activists tore down security fencing around the
construction site, just as the work was about to start. For more than two
months, the activists refused to leave the construction site and held a 24h/day
vigil, which lasted until special police forces arrested almost 130 activists and
allowed the construction work to continue.

The failure of the RTC to protect the pedestrian zone and to prevent the
construction of the shopping mall and the public garage had a profound effect
on the members of the Croatian CSOs. For if a civic initiative, which enjoyed
massive public support, had after five years of constant efforts succeeded in
neither catching the authorities' attention nor earning a position in the
decision-making process, then what is the purpose of civic engagement? If the
most organized and most numerous of initiatives could not win against corrupt
political elites, could this mean that the idea of civic organization had lost its
raison d'etre? Finally, what is there left to do, but enter the political arena and

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[24] Pulska grupa. 2012. *Javni prostor mora biti dostupan bez komercijalnih barijera.* (accessed: 11.
February 2015).

fight against those elites using their own weapons? Even though the leaders of the initiative had not themselves become politically engaged, the RTC served as a safe indicator – and a bitter reminder – of the scope of possibilities of civic organization in Croatian politics.

Certainly, the deliberate turn in Croatian local politics cannot fully be clarified by the history of the RTC. Due to the polycentric development of the five parties explored in the paper, an aim to explain their emergence as a direct consequence of the events related to RTC would be somewhat misleading. Even if 'Srđ is Ours' in Dubrovnik was directly influenced by the RTC activists,[25] and the members of Zagreb-based 'For the City' were actively involved in the events organized by the RTC, this had less of an impact in the other three cities. Furthermore, the causal sequence appears to be far from unambiguous. Although most members of 'For the City' participated in the RTC, the party was not founded after the failure of the project in 2010 – despite the disappointment with political elites. Some activists then founded the 'Cyclists' Union,' which was transformed two years later into the political party. As for the 'Smart City' and 'For Rijeka' parties, they were founded a few years before the RTC experienced its final failure. However, even if the development of the five parties was polycentric, and not the result of one single, causal chain of events, the history of the RTC can still be considered as illustrative for the pattern through which the CSOs felt motivated to enter the political arena, adding a crucial part of the puzzle of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

In the cases of 'For the City' and 'For Rijeka,' which developed from interest-based organizations ('The Cyclists' Union' and 'The Free State of Rijeka'), disappointment grew from the fact that despite years of dedicated work, structured advocacy strategies, quality analyses and strong popular support – similar to the case of the RTC – local governance failed to take these organizations as serious policy actors. In the cases of 'Smart City' and 'Srđ is Ours,' which emerged from grassroots movements fighting against a new building project that would irreversibly destroy the urban and environmental potential of the city ('Srđ') and demanding a new elementary school in the neighbourhood ('Smart City'), the interest aggregation was articulated through informal civic initiatives, whose members became frustrated by the lack of responsiveness of their local governments. However, despite the differences in the initial level of institutionalization, all of these parties[26] shared one crucial factor. They all emerged as a result of the dissatisfaction with civic groups and the level of dialogue they led with respective political authorities.

Even though the crisis of trust in political parties opened up space for new political actors, and although a high degree of trust in CSOs by itself made

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[25] When the plans for the building project in Dubrovnik hinterland became visible, Dubrovnik activists drew on the experiences and advice from RTC activists in Zagreb, who regularly visited Dubrovnik to share their know-how with fellow activists (this was especially facilitated thanks to the fact that some of them were born and raised in Dubrovnik and maintained connection to the town).

[26] The 'Osijek Civic Initiative' stands out from the pattern somewhat, as it was not developed from a CSO like the other four parties. However, given that members of the party participated in different CSOs and that local authorities in all parts of the country showed a similar lack of interest for the contributions of civil society, our hypothesis can still hold.

these organizations suitable candidates for filling the void, in the previous
paragraphs we showed that the disappointment over the failed communication
with authorities acted as a trigger for the transition from the civic to the
political sphere. However, what allowed them to transfer to politics with
success? In the final part of this section, we address this issue by focusing on
three properties they inherited from their civil society habitus: proactivity,
adaptability and mobilization.

3.3   Proactivity, Adaptability and Mobilization: Civil Society Going Political

The development of CSOs in Eastern Europe since the 1990s has been a topic
of much debate among social scientists, many of whose remarks have been
unambiguously disapproving. Among other things, CSOs in post-socialist
societies were criticized for their weak mobilization capacities,[27] poor
organizational structures[28] and their lack of grassroots organizing potential.[29]
The CSOs in Croatia, however, appeared to have avoided these pitfalls and, on
the contrary, demonstrated a series of successes in setting relevant issues on
the public and political agendas.

To name only a few examples, 'GONG' has played an important role in
campaigning for fair and free elections since its foundation in 1998. The
'Franak' association won much support through its efforts to protect small
debtors who were jeopardized by the depreciation of the euro in 2011 (similar
cases of Swiss franc debtors' associations can be found in Hungary, Serbia and
Bosnia and Herzegovina). Also, branches of numerous international
organizations successfully advocated for the rights and interests of various
social groups ('Human Rights House,' 'Step by Step Foundation,' 'Friends of the
Earth' and 'Transparency International'). These achievements helped raise the
profile of the CSOs in the public sphere, which resulted in increasing levels of
recognition among the citizens, as demonstrated in the first part of this section.
The success of such activities on behalf of Croatian CSOs helped build a
reputation, which quite likely served as important symbolic capital for the
newly established parties. However, the civil sector background had an
additional impact on the trajectory of the five parties analysed in this paper.

Proactivity played an important role in gaining the public's support for the
newly established parties. The importance of proactive management has been
addressed as a staple characteristic of CSOs by several authors. The five
parties continued to use this method even after they switched to party politics,
thanks to which they began to open up topics that were later taken over by the
mainstream parties. For example, both 'For the City' and 'Smart City' built a
large part of their election campaign on the topic of empty and unused spaces
owned by the local municipalities (in their case, the City of Zagreb and the City
of Split). The two parties advocated for the distribution of the vast spaces in
public ownership (which was itself a relict of the state-socialist social and

[27] Macijewski, Witold. 2002. *The Baltic Sea Region: Culture, Politics, Societies*. Uppsala: The Baltic
University Press.
[28] Sloat, Amanda. 2005. The Rebirth of Civil Society The Growth of Women's NGOs in Central and
Eastern Europe. *European journal of women's studies* 12(4), 437-52.
[29] Bernhard, Michael. 1996. Civil Society after the First Transition: Dilemmas of Postcommunist
Democratization in Poland and Beyond. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 29, 309-30.

economic structure) to the local entrepreneurs (the making of the so-called entrepreneurial incubators), organizations and craftsmen, as a way of fostering local production capacities and social economy.[30] In contrast to mainstream politicians, civic activists have been held in high regard regardless of their respective political backgrounds for their proactive attitudes in putting new topics on the political agenda.

Proactive attitudes were crucially associated with another important characteristic of the CSO: its adaptability to different circumstances. Due to intensive communication with citizens, largely enabled by the usage of social media and other contemporary communication technologies, the civil society in Croatia has been characterized by timely reactions to current issues. Closely related to the previous pattern, this was achieved by focusing on the small-scale issues relevant to ordinary people. This feature was especially present in almost all of the analysed parties. Unlike mainstream political parties, which remained focused on ideological left-right divides that largely corresponded with historical, political and ethnic divides, the topics addressed by the CSOs appeared to be more understandable to the average voter, whether this concerned the construction of a school in a remote city neighbourhood in the case of 'Smart City' or the protection of the urban landscape in the case of 'Srđ is Ours.'

Finally, citizen mobilization is key for successful CSO campaigns. In contrast to mainstream political parties, which could easily survive the elections by counting on a steady base of loyal party voters, the CSOs typically needed broad citizen support. This allowed them to lead battles with the government officials on equal footing. In order to achieve this, the CSOs were forced to stay more open to the broader public than mainstream political parties, and to create a sense of community ownership over the corresponding sets of ideas and the means of their implementation. As a consequence, the notion of a common challenge created solidarity among their members, which led to the feeling of commitment in conducting a collective action.[31] This was not necessarily only in the field of social movements, as proposed by Tarrow, but also in civil society in general.

Civil society is according to Putnam's idea[32] a factory of social capital. However, besides the macro level of analysis – a sum of micro social relations that are beneficial for democracy at large, as opposed to the societies where one 'bowls alone' – this notion can also be easily interpreted on the micro level of social analysis. Through engagement in civil society, activists learn social skills and the sense of community management necessary for mobilizing broader groups of people. This can be seen in the experiences of the activists from the five analysed parties. Even though a great majority of the activists involved in the

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[30] However, despite the relative simplicity of the implementation of this project, the mainstream parties, in this case the Social Democratic Party of Croatia in power throughout the previous decade, took over the idea and introduced it into their electoral platform.
[31] Tarrow Sidney. 1998. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
[32] Putnam, Robert D. 1993. *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press; Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

parties had little or no political experience, their CSO background provided them with positive predispositions for coping with their most serious challenge: how to gather disappointed voters and convince them to trust them. At the same time, thanks to their involvement in grassroots initiatives – including acquaintanceships and friendships obtained during years spent working, talking and meeting with members of their community – some of the parties we analyse had a head start.

Years of unsuccessful dialogue between politicians and civil society, which in the previous section we presented with the example of the social movement 'Right to the City,' surely played an important role in the transformation of CSOs into political parties. The protests, where more than 130 peaceful protesters were arrested, must have left great doubt and a deep impression on many Croatian activists, even if the impact of the RTC has been less immediate. In this sense, the disappointment of the civil activists with the government's lack of response provided a link between the macro level (crisis of democracy, low degree of trust in political parties, high level of trust in CSOs) and micro level of analysis (the motivation of the actors). However, in this section we turned to the additional features that allowed the CSO actors to take over this role, rounding up the scheme of the opportunity structure,[33] which created a new social and political landscape. In the following paragraphs we move to the concluding remarks.

Conclusion

The concept of active citizenship is in many ways crucial for the principles of civil society. Conscientious citizens seeking to express their social and political beliefs, and thereby to work on solving problems in their community, typically tend to assemble in formal or informal groups with the aim to be heard and represented. Such non-state organizations represent an inevitable part of democratic societies worldwide, whose political spheres, in a narrow meaning, are supplemented by all kinds of civil society initiatives. They thereby fulfil the 'watchdog' function. However, according to Rosanvallon's theory described in the theoretical framework, the counter-democratic reform is to be achieved precisely by (re-)introducing properties that are traditionally associated with civil society to the political field, in a narrower sense. How is this to be accomplished? In order to present one empirical possibility of such a proposal, we have in this paper focused on the recent trends in Croatian local politics.

In our analysis, we described new political initiatives that advocate closer contact with their constituencies and two-way communication with the voters. This enabled them to endorse the wishes and needs of the citizens, all of whom, to a greater or lesser extent, originated from CSOs. Transition from civil society to formal politics is surely not an entirely uncontroversial step. Civil society organizations are by definition supposed to be non-governmental and apolitical. They are part of a sector that seeks to promote its ideas as a partner of the democratically elected government. Direct political engagement – and this is only one part of the problem – brings risk to the very same goals that were meant to be achieved. Indeed, for Croatian CSOs, it took years of broken

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[33] Tarrow, *Power*, 85.

promises and being ignored by the authorities before they decided to act. However, in the case of the participatory democratic parties analysed in this paper, there was a move to formal politics. What has led to this? Why did the CSO actors decide to enter a new field of political action that, in several respects (habitus, political perspective), is quite opposite from the type of action that they were used to in their previous careers?

The crisis of democracy presented the usual suspects. According to this hypothesis, low levels of trust in the political parties and high support for the civil sector motivated the CSOs to engage in party politics. However, an additional trigger was needed. In this paper, we described how this process took place. We demonstrated how disappointment with the non-transparency of policy-making, suspicious priorities on the political agenda and simply not being taken seriously caused these actors to considered their further actions in the CSO sector unfeasible. They instead decided to enter the political arena. At the same time, besides the aspect of motivation, we addressed three additional properties – proactivity, adaptability and the mobilization capacity – demonstrating how the organizational culture of the Croatian CSOs proved important for shaping this political movement. Rather than leading to a solution, we argue that the crisis of political legitimacy merely opened an empty space that was filled by the actors with the best strategic positions. As a result, the arena of formal politics was penetrated by a new sort of political actor with an explicit aim to participate in the political game. Instead of being a mere stakeholder in the policy-making process, this new actor's goal was to govern. This established a new mode of political activity in Croatian politics based on the participatory democracy modus operandi.

Apart from being a relatively recent phenomenon, the parties discussed in this research still do not represent key players on the Croatian political scene. At this moment in time, we cannot know if they will continue to grow and achieve better results in the next elections, or if they will stagnate and perhaps fall apart. Perhaps the five parties will merge, creating a strong alternative for the national level. Alternatively, the trend will remain polycentric, with a further proliferation of parties with a similar profile. Furthermore, we cannot be sure if similar trends will appear in political contexts similar to the Croatian one. Will other countries from CEE follow these footsteps or will this remain a lonely trend? The sequel of this story indeed remains to be seen. However, in this paper we have demonstrated a trend that, despite the focus on one single country case, can serve to provide an interesting comparative perspective for any future improvements in democracy. This holds especially true in the aspect of participatory reforms of political parties, which still represent the main tool of representative democracy. Even if the "golden era" of civil society in CEE is indeed behind us,[34] this case brings forth innovative ways in which civil society continues to play a progressive role in the development of post-socialist societies after several decades of democratic transformations.

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[34] Merkel, *Plausible Theory*.

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