

Rudolf Kučera

BKVGE

Abstract for the GRACEH conference 2007: New Histories of Politics - Topics, Theories, and Methods in the History of Politics beyond Great Events and Great Men

„Promoting a model-citizen. Cultural dimension of the ennoblements in the 19th century Central Europe“

In 19th century Central Europe, it was still the nobility, which retained a high amount of symbolic capital and therefore even the elite status in the society. The ennoblements represented a significant political tool, by which the state could influence the cultural picture of elite, but on the other hand they also were a strong instrument for showing the state preferences of how the social elite should look like and for incorporating such views into the society. In the 19th century Central Europe the claim of the state to ennoble was never disputed, however the patterns of behaviour and the appropriate virtues, which were accepted by the state as qualifying for ennoblement, were changing significantly.

The paper will thus follow precisely the development of such patterns of behaviour in a comparative perspective. Using the example of two main Central European states of the 19th century, the Habsburg monarchy and Prussia, concrete regional probes will try to decode the state notions of a model citizen. The main theoretical framework is at the same time the concept of a civil society and social capital.

Although they have different academic origins and concerns, social capital and civil society theories are close relatives.¹ Both argue very often that stable pluralistic societies rest on strong formal and informal social networks and both emphasize the importance of underlying social foundations. The central points common to civil society and social capital theories are shared values and civic engagement. Shared

¹ For the following see: NEWTON, Kenneth, *Support for Democracy. Social Capital, Civil Society and Political Performance*, Berlin 2005, p. 5 – 10.

values, the theorists argue, which are based upon generalized trust and understanding of rights and duties of an individual, enable peaceful and cooperative relations between citizens in private, economic, and public life. Engagement in informal social life and formally organized associations provide important foundations of social existence, and at the same time, promote understanding of, involvement with and engagement in common affairs of the society. Both social capital and civil society are built around the importance of voluntary associations and actions that link individuals to the society, bind the society together, and constitute a stable form of social life.

It is also often argued, that civil society and social capital are very much top-down, government lead phenomena because forms and practices of government can encourage trustworthy behaviour and emergence of the civil society.² The design of government institutions and their representative procedures can stimulate individuals to behave in ways that increase social capital or cultivate civil society patterns of behaviour.³

In this respect, the paper argues, ennoblement is a symbolic state tool for supporting and promoting a certain set of virtues and patterns of behaviour by public honours for those individuals, who were embodying them. The state hereby tried to politically inspire a wider public to follow such cultural value patterns. The central focus of the paper thus will be whether the state incorporated some components of civil society or some stimulating factors for the emergence of a social capital into these pictures of model citizen.

Although there are still certain discussions about the polysemy of the civil society concept in the academic debate, the social capital theory seems to be even

² PUTNAM, Robert, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York 2000, p. 138; LEVI, Margaret, *A state of trust*, in: Valerie Braithwaite / Margaret Levi (eds.), *Trust and Governance*. New York 1998, p. 77-101; NEWTON, Kenneth, *Trust, social capital, civil society, and democracy*, *International Political Science Review* 2/2001, p. 201 – 214; EDWARDS Robert, FOLEY Michael W., DIANI Mario, *Social capital reconsidered*, in: Robert Edwards/ Michael W. Foley/ Mario Diani (eds.), *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective*, Hanover 2001, p. 266-80.

³ WEATHERFORT, Stephen M., *Measuring political legitimacy*, *American Political Science Review* 1/1992, p. 149-160.

more unclear, as at least two different notions of the term have to be distinguished.⁴ The paper will therefore concentrate on the notion proposed at most by Robert Putnam. Here, social capital is understood as the patterns and the quality of social relations among individuals or groups. The term describes mutual expectations, commitments or standards, which emerge from reciprocal interactions and which are embodied in such cultural scripts like, for example, friendship relations or social networks.⁵

In such a theoretical frame, the paper will try to uncover the state attitudes towards the civil society, which started to emerge just in the 19th century. And the very fact, that it was in the 19th century, when some basic potentials for the civil society formation were founded and cultivated, has never been seriously contested in related debates. However, the state position toward different patterns of behaviour connected with civil society was rather overlooked by the historiography of the Central Europe in the 19th century.

Using the analysis of argumentative strategies, which were used by candidates for ennoblement in order to achieve their goal as well as of those used by respective state representatives while granting it, the paper will on the empirical level concentrate on concrete civil society patterns of behaviour present in the arguments for obtaining or - from the side of the state - granting the affiliation to the nobility. It will be examined, if there were such patterns of behaviour present in the argumentation used for the ennoblements, which contained the practices of civil society (e.g. charity, support of voluntarily associations and other forms of civic engagement etc.), and what place they could have had in the set of criteria for granting the ennoblement.

⁴ BOURDIEU, Pierre: Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital, in: Kreckel, Reinhard (Hrsg.): Soziale Ungleichheiten, Göttingen 1983, p. 183-198; PUTNAM, Robert, Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital, The Journal of Democracy 6/1995, p. 65 – 78.

⁵ SCHULLER, Tom, BARON, Stephen, FIELD, John: *Social Capital: A Review and Critique*, in: -----. (Ed.): *Social Capital. Critical Perspectives*, Oxford 2000, p. 1-38; HOOGHE, Marc, STOLLE, Dietlind, *Generating Social Capital. Civil Society and Institutions in Comparative Perspective*. New York 2003; REICHHARDT, Sven, Soziales Kapital „im Zeitalter materieller Interessen“. Konzeptionelle Überlegungen zum Vertrauen in der Zivil- und Marktgesellschaft des langen 19. Jahrhunderts (1780-1914), Berlin 2003, p. 13 – 14; ROTBERG, Robert I. (Ed.): *Patterns of Social Capital. Stability and Change in Historical Perspective*. Cambridge 2001; LIN, Nan: *Social Capital. A Theory of Social Structure and Action*. Cambridge 2001; DASGPUTA, Partha, SERAGELDIN, Ismail (Ed.): *Social Capital. A Multifaceted Perspective*, Washington 2000.

This perspective allows the correct judgement about the relation between the state and the society in the 19th century Central Europe and about the place of the civil society practices within. Without marking it as the main goal, the utilization of the comparative perspective can also either question or confirm the presumptive unity of the Central European space as one of homogenous European regions, which is the starting point of many historical writings about Europe.