

## Civil activism and altered reciprocity enabling social innovation

### Abstract

The civil society players' dynamism possesses enhanced transformational capacity what feeds back with the volunteers' activism providing the capability of agency. The feed backing constructs of such transformational dynamism offer explanation how civil society organizations can enable and sustain cooperation in competitive environments. The mutually catalytic institutional, relational, communicational alterations impacting multiple fields affect simultaneously the volunteering members, their interactions and relations, as well as the communities and their environment. These changes feedback also with and are constitutive of transformations of the very cooperation. This growingly inclusive and un-fragmented collaboration that volunteering participants of self-organizing collective efforts carry out interplays with asynchronous, asymmetric, open ended, multi-party pattern of reciprocity. The enhanced cooperative dynamism of networking interactions among members of various civil society entities interplay with - are important drivers of and capitalize on various - social innovations. The social and technological innovations exhibit mutual impacts and their interplay has growing broader effects what requires further explorations - the study assumes.

**Keywords:** transformational dynamism, trust, social capital, activism, reciprocity

### Introduction

A global associational revolution (Salamon et al. 2003) and a more recent associational counter-revolution (Casey 2015) are unfolding simultaneously. Both are emerging phenomena with significant and increasing effects however frequently receiving rather limited public and also research attention. Their low visibility in the mainstream and also in the social media contributes to depict the civil society not only as third but rather as tertiary, resource-less and completely dependent on the market and public sectors. Due to such relative, mostly perceived and constructed insignificance of the civil society (organizations) their (often robust) impact on the broader socio-economic environment remains unnoticed and without (due) appreciation of their significant transformational potential.

The broadening of research analyses the civil society's key importance also for the market and public sectors and for smooth operation of the entire socio-economic constellation as unique source of social capital and trust. Moreover, it indicates the interplay between the growing importance of the civil society and its members' activism and the ongoing changes aggregating into robust, overarching transformations that can facilitate the emergence of a new, cooperative and sharing post-industrial era (Toffler 1995; Perlas, 2000; Boyle, 2002; Benkler 2006, 2011; Hess and Ostrom, 2007; Bollier, 2007; Rifkin, 2004, 2011; Reichel, 2012; Chase, 2012; Rowe and Bollier 2016; Della Porta, 2018; Fenton, 2018). The research on the robust and increasing role of globalization and digitalization nevertheless mainly continue to focus on the markets by giving limited attention to the public sector while mainly ignoring the civil society. The civil society players the mainstream Economics continue to perceive in best case as consumers. They are seen mostly as objects of growingly sophisticated marketing efforts. These aim to manipulate them in order to generate and sustain artificially produced and amplified demand for rapidly growing volume of goods and services. The growth measured mainly in short term GDP increase remains to be seen as the ultimate task taking precedence over anything else including the danger this approach generates for the mere long-term human survival.

This broader context explains why the role and significance of the civil society, its robust transformational dynamism must be re-considered even by the dominant mainstream Economics “erected into the queen of all sciences” (Cobb, 2007). Historically the civic activism played key role in enabling and shaping the emergence of both the industrial society and the civil society through continuous efforts to turn into daily practice the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity (currently called as solidarity). The civil society as the domain of reciprocity simultaneously facilitated the emergence and growing dominance of the exchange (of equal values - at least nominally) among the market players and the redistribution carried out by the public sector. This interplay enabled the (acceptable timing of the) feed backing institutional changes (Benkler 2018) generative and constitutive of the Great Transformation (Polányi, 1944) bringing about the markets’ current dominance.

The current activism can capitalize on the civil society’s robust transformational dynamism allowing facilitating social innovations and their aggregation into broader feed backing changes. The mobilization of this dynamism enables to affect and (re-)shape the dominant market focused patterns of globalization and digitalization currently driving the emergence of the knowledge economies and societies. The more fine-grained exploration of the related interplaying multidimensional changes presupposes and requires considering findings of the previous research (Veress 2016) on sources, mechanisms, and outcomes of the civil society’s dynamism and its transformational capacity - the paper assumes.

### Data and Methods

The research of the civil society organizations’ (CSOs) transformational dynamism in context of the knowledge-driven society’s emergence collected empirical data in Finland acting as a forerunner of the European knowledge society and in Hungary demonstrating oscillating performance in this aspect therefore serving also as control case. The collection of empirical data combined research interviews with (participative) observation and archival research. The sources primary, quantitative scrutiny<sup>1</sup> indicated the necessity to focus on qualitative methods to elicit, identify and describe constructs explaining causes and mechanisms of the civil society dynamism.

The analytic work progressed through continuous triangulation among the empirical data, literature and the emerging constructs. The analysis followed process approach (and ontology), capitalized on an extended realist view of science (Bhaskar 1987, Tsoukas 1992) (Table 1), and deployed mixed research design<sup>2</sup> by capitalizing on methodological pluralism (Van de Ven and Poole, 2005). This constellation enabled to examine the empirical domain by using narrative description of diverse change tendencies (Van de Ven and Poole, 2005). It was followed by exploration of the actual domain deploying subsequently case study driven concept creation (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Tsoukas, 1989) and resource driven approach (Veress 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> It also allowed identifying five clusters of 21 case-communities (Table 2 -below) representing broad array of civil society organizations - by comparing 25 attributes (Table 3 - below).

<sup>2</sup> “Mixed methods research ...combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e. g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (Johnson et al. 2007:123).



This pluralist approach allowed exploring also links and feedbacks among changes unfolding in various dimensions such as the interplay between institutional alterations and modifications in resourcing. The primary quantitative scrutiny and the subsequent in-depth analysis of the empirical data equally indicated the presence and importance of non-typical patterns of resourcing in civil society organizations. Therefore, the research also developed an innovative resource driven approach<sup>6</sup>, which facilitates to analyse how (i) participants of the volunteer collaborative efforts can mutually improve, increase, and sustain their (collective) capability to enact resources more effectively; and how (ii) these altered patterns of resourcing can extend and upgrade the (collective) resource base. It also helps to shed light on how (iii) collaborative resourcing contributes to empowering social agency and (iv.) volunteer cooperation can generate associational (rather than competitive) advantage. The resource-driven approach pays special attention to four inter-related sources: namely (i) relation-specific assets; (ii) knowledge-sharing routines; (iii) complementary resources and capabilities; and (iv.) enhanced effectiveness of self-organizing processes in context of resource mobilization. This method emphasizes and capitalizes on the resources' relational, transformational, and process character (Sewell, 1992). This approach facilitates to analyse resourcing in civil society organizations where (i) the interacting agents, (ii) the patterns of resource enactment, and (iii) the 'enacted' resources (Orlikowski, 1992, 2000) interplay and mutually shape each other. The resource-driven approach enables to explore also a broader interplay among alterations in (the effectiveness of) resourcing and the enhanced association-prone dynamics at field level. The proposed mixed research design by deploying various qualitative methods in diverse domains enabled effectively analyse the civil society organizations' transformational dynamism, its drivers, mechanisms, and outcomes. The emerging (set of) interconnected, feed backing constructs aggregation allowed carrying out simulations discussed in the next section.

## Results

The interviews recursive processing enabled to identify and cluster a set of case-communities as well as a sample-case. The latter case-community provided ample empirical data of diverse changes and their aggregation into transformations affecting simultaneously the agents, their relationships and communities, as well as the broader environment taking place in empirical domain. The 5 clusters of the 21 case-communities (Table 2) served as effective control group, their exploration indicted the presence or absence of similar feed backing changes.

The in-depth analysis of the volunteers' activities in the sample-case allowed identifying a set of feed backing changes unfolding in the actual domain. These alterations affect the volunteers (empowerment and individuation), their relationships (power relations and institutional aspects) and interactions (work, competition, value creation, resourcing, change making), and the entire community and its broader environment (networking self-upgrading and new dialectics of cooperation) (Table 3).

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<sup>6</sup> The proposed resource-driven approach capitalizes on complementary concepts of resource based view (Wernerfelt, 1984; Rumelt, 1984; Penrose, 1959) and relational view (Dyer and Singh, 1998). According to the "relational view" the units of analysis are networks and dyads of firms. These concepts focus, however, on (1) generation of competitive advantage and (ii) follow economic capital accumulation logic. This constellation is characterized by the institutional twin-primacy of (iii) zero-sum paradigm; and (iv.) resource scarcity view. The (v) dominance-seeking attitude generates (vi.) zero sum, domination powers; and (vii) colliding relational dynamism. (Despite its focal role the competitive advantage remains relative and temporally since the dominant colliding powers can mutually descend one another and their resultants by generating a "competition trap" with lose-lose or multiple-lose outcomes.)

The analysis of the underlying causal interplay taking place in real domain capitalized on the deployment of structuration theory as analytic tool<sup>7</sup>. It enabled to describe both (i) the association-prone transformation of structuration (Figure 1 and 2) characterizing the civil society and its organizations and its interplay with (ii) continuous mass self-organizing. The feed backing constructs' enactment enabled simulating the permanent patterned (re-)emergence of the civil society organizations taking place as self-organizing.

CASE-COMMUNITIES		CLUSTERS	
1 Active Seniors' Community		Life sharing	
2 Care TV users' community	LL	Life sharing	
3 Artist community		Life sharing	1
4 Life-sharing in Silvia koti		Life sharing	
5 Neighbourhood Association, professional enabler		Life sharing - EXTENDED!	
6 Arabianranta - a XXI century virtual village	LL	Local enabling	professional
7 Helsinki as Living laboratory	LL	Local enabling	professional
8 Oulu - innovation ecosystem development	LL	Local enabling	professional 2
9 Open-innovation of farmers – Mórahalom	LL	Local enabling	professional
10 Open innovation of farmers – Turku	LL	Local enabling	professional
11 Networking through social media		Social networking and self-communication	3
12 e-Democracy network – Finland		Participation and agency	
13 Legislative change initiated locally – Turku	LL	Participation and agency	4

<sup>7</sup> “While Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration is posed at the level of society, his structuration processes, describing the reciprocal interaction of social actors and institutional properties, are relevant at multiple levels of analysis. The structural model...allows us to conceive and examine the interaction...at interorganizational, organizational, group, and individual levels of analysis. This overcomes the problem of levels of analysis raised by a number of commentators (Kling 1987; Leifer 1988; Markus and Robey, 1988; Rousseau 1985)” - points out Orlikowski (1992:423). As Stillman (2006:136) indicates: “...a meso level can also be considered, something between the level of institutional analysis and the analysis of personal and interpersonal behaviour. The meso level could be represented, for example, by community organisations ...which operate at the boundaries of the personal and societal, and the macro level could represent the networked effects of such organisations at a larger social scale”.

14	Local e-Democracy – Aba	Participation and agency	
15	Civil society enhancement in Veresegyház	Participation and agency	
16	Networking communities in company ecosystems	Sharing transformations	
17	Open source communities	Sharing transformations	
18	Sharing and transformation in Living Laboratories	Sharing transformations	5
19	Changes in economic value creation	Sharing transformations	
20	Intra-company community enhancement	Sharing transformations	
21	Transformations toward knowledge economy	Sharing transformations	

Table 2: Five clusters of case-communities selected for qualitative cross-case analysis

Changes affecting the community members':	
Personal context:	Empowerment Individuation
Relationships:	Institutional changes Power relations
Activities:	Self-communication Work Competition Value creation Resourcing Social agency
Alterations constituting the communities' self-transformation:	Networking self-upgrading New dialectics of cooperation

Table 3: Transformational impacts affecting the volunteers, their relationships, activities and communities

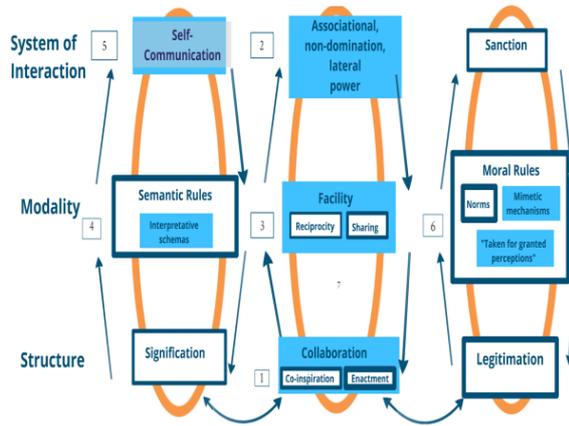


Figure1: Modified dimensions of the Modalities of Structuration – based on Stillman (2006: 150)

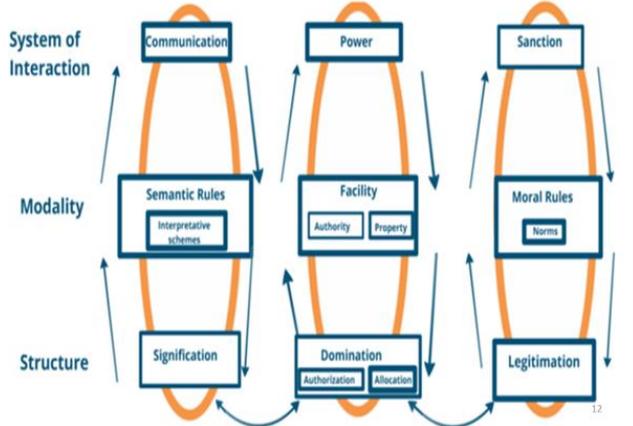


Figure2: Dimensions of the Modalities of Structuration - Stillman (2006: 150)

Using methodological pluralism (Van de Ven and Poole, 2005) in frame of mixed research design enabled to carry out iterative analysis of the emerging constructs and their feed backs and identify their catalytic effects, i.e. to (re-)describe various layers of the civil society organizations' dynamism and its transformational capability. The exploration of the mechanisms and effects of the civil society organizations' transformational dynamism contributes to shed light on its interplay with civic activism promoting active citizenship and social change as well as facilitating social innovation.

## Discussions

In historic context the very existence of the civil society is intertwined with the emergence of the industrial society. Both were enabled and shared by the volunteers' activism aiming to consequently implement the "glorious triad" of freedom, equality and fraternity (currently coined as solidarity) in everyday life. The activity and self-reproduction of the civil society is driven by (the principle of) reciprocity as Polányi (1944) emphasizes (Table 4).

In the civil society the volunteers are ready to mutually advance trust what enables the interplay of their self-communication providing enhanced autonomy (Castells 2009) and enabling (the aggregation of their) communicative interactions (Habermas 1974, 1987, 1995). Their vivid self-communication and communicative interactions - which aggregate into continuous patterned (re-)emergence of their communities - simultaneously (re-)generate and amplify trust, i.e. the mutual expectation that other interacting agents are ready and willing to collaborate (Veress 2016). The volunteers' intertwined inter- and intra-personal dialogues carrying out sense- and decision making (Stacey 2000, 2010) enact institutional settings characterized by dual primacy of no-zero-sum approach and interdependence<sup>8</sup>. These association-prone institutional settings serve simultaneously as (i) active platforms enabling the communicative

<sup>8</sup> In institutional dimension the volunteers overcome the twin-dominance of zero-sum paradigm and resource scarcity view which in relational aspect generate and amplify dominance-seeking competition. This institutional shift (Veress 2016) enables volunteers to bring and sustain cooperation into competitive environments (Benkler 2011).

interactions' aggregation into continuous self-organizing. These operate also as (ii) social capital which (re-)generates trust and establishes its radius (Fukuyama 1999). The civil society organizations are domains of trustful cooperation which feeds back with accumulation bringing about the abundance of social capital. The trustful relationships and atmosphere can facilitate cooperative interactions also with non-members - it enables collaboration among members of different civil society players. Consequently, the radius of trust can cross over and reach beyond organizational boundaries.

Principles of economic integration	Reciprocity	Redistribution	Householding	Market
Type of interdependence	Instituted complementarity	Instituted centrality	Varying (instituted complementarity or centrality or other)	Mechanical competition
Type of institutional structure	Horizontal (e.g. symmetric)	Vertical (e.g. hierarchical)	Domestic group, in some cases autarkic	Market system
Logic of action	Obligations among peers	Obligations in a (personal of functional) centralized system	Sharing production and work for satisfying the needs of a group	Bargaining in one's own interest

Table 4. Polanyi's principles of economic integration as modalities of interdependence in production, financing, exchange or transfer, and consumption (Hillenkamp et al. 2014)

The longer becomes the radius of trust the more frequent can be the inter-organizational interactions, the networking collaboration among members of diverse entities. The more vivid is such networking the more elusive the organizational boundaries can become. Such networking self-upgrading of the particular organizations can generate the emergence of a quasi-field characterized by enhanced, inclusive and non-fragmented cooperation. This elevated, higher quality cooperation feeds back with changing, growingly participative character of competition and their interplay brings about as synthesis an altered dialectics (Figure N4).

The volunteers cooperate with their peers in diverse fields by contributing to collective efforts improving life quality. This setup turns the civil society into domain of voluntary cooperation in diverse fields including civic activism. The volunteers contribute to various activities because they are willing and ready to 'participate for the sake of participation'. This enables their individuation (Grenier 2006)<sup>9</sup> and (mutual) empowerment although they can partly or fully

<sup>9</sup> "...There is an important distinction between...- what could be called selfish individualism - and what is sometimes referred to as individuation ...Beck and Giddens...argue. Individuation is the freeing up of people from their traditional roles and deference to hierarchical authority, and their growing capacity to draw on wider pools of information and expertise and actively chose what sort of life they lead. Individuation is... about the

remain unaware of that. Their enhanced, growingly inclusive and non-fragmented cooperation feeds back with power sharing. The volunteers perceive power as non-zero sum and horizontal that enables mutual empowerment. “Researchers and practitioners call this ...power "relational power"(Lappe & DuBois, 1994), generative power (Korten, 1987), "integrative power," and "power with" (Kreisberg, 1992). This ...means that gaining power actually strengthens the power of others rather than diminishing it such as occurs with domination/power. ...It is this definition of power, as a process that occurs in relationships, that gives us the possibility of empowerment” - point out Page and Czuba (1999:3) at the relational and process character of power. Indeed, the power transforms when reciprocity becomes the fundamental relational pattern by replacing authority and “command over persons” through hierarchies. The integrative power or ‘power with’ - as Kreisberg (1992) coins it - follows non-zero-sum approach in contrast to traditional “power over others”. The latter follows zero-sum approach and generates attempts to establish and maintain dominance over others and the resources perceived as per definition scarce.

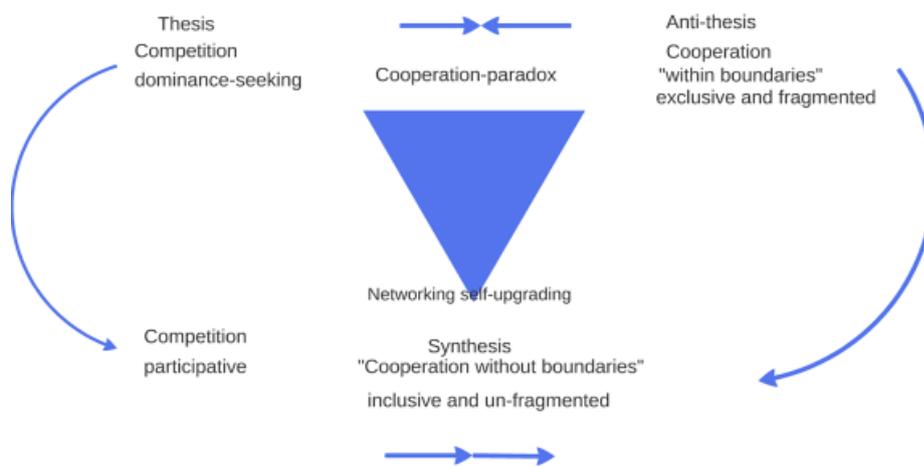


Figure 4: New dialectics of cooperation (and participative competition)

The volunteers’ power sharing interplays with - it is enabled by and simultaneously re-generates - an altered pattern of reciprocity, which is asynchronous, asymmetric, open ended, multi-party. Rather than attempting to achieve exchanging equal (market explained in financial terms) values characterizing the market and public players the volunteers are ready to provide unilateral contributions. They exercise in everyday life what Bruni and Zamagni (2007) coin as “generalized reciprocity” enabling alternative (patterns of) value creation and facilitating these local innovative attempts as well as their aggregation into a genuinely sustainable civil economy. The transformational dynamism of the civil society players, which is important source and driver of (the aggregation of) multidimensional changes, provides their capacity to facilitate - and also capitalise on - social innovations what creates their capability of agency.

## Conclusions

The civil society and its organizations’ dynamism possesses significant transformational character and effects. The mainstream Economics depicts competition and dominance seeking as natural characteristics of the human beings perceived as Homo Economicus which follows

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politicization of day-to-day life; the hard choices people face ...in crafting personal identities and choosing how to relate to issues such as race, gender, the environment, local culture, and diversity” (Grenier, 2006:124-125).

(short term) self-interest through permanent collisions. This perception questions the rational and even the possibility of collaboration despite recent findings in evolutionary theory pointing out at the crucial importance of natural cooperation (Nowak, 2006)<sup>10</sup>. The dominant economic views emphasize the focal importance and unquestioned rationality of competition seen and exhibited as a self-serving „value“. This approach depicts (resource) scarcity as fundamental and unalterable phenomena. Moreover, the firms' profitable operation often requires establishing scarcity artificially for example through (at least temporally) monopolies as DeLong and Summers (2001) explain.

Current attempts to provide and aggregate genuinely sustainable alternative patterns of value creation by capitalizing on (primarily digital) technologies (Bauwens and Kostakis 2016) indicate the necessity to promote cooperation rather than competition (Benkler, 2011, 2018). The proposed business models enable to fit together sustainability and the firms' profitability while capitalizing on the robust dynamism that new technologies are capable to provide (Kostakis and Roos 2018). The viability and sustainability of the various (local) efforts feeds back with the effectiveness of the civil activism, its capability to shape the technology related choices (Benkler 2018), the resultant primary patterns of their enactment Orlikowski (1992, 2000).

Such activism is a core characteristic and competence of the civil society that feeds back with significant transformational capacity of its dynamism (Veress 2016). Due to this dynamism the reciprocity, which is the fundamental principle of the economic integration in the civil society (Polányi 1944), as well as the cooperation that exhibits the underlying relational dynamism of the participants co-creating the civil society, have a tendency to transformation. The reciprocity among the volunteering members becomes growingly asynchronous, asymmetric, open ended, and multi-party what enables and capitalizes on unilateral contributions. It feeds back with the cooperation's increasingly inclusive and un-fragmented character and qualitative self-transformation. This change prevents its potential self-alienation through transforming from intra-organizational collaboration into inter-organizational competition with colliding (often conflicting and even confronting) relationships.

This dynamism feeds back with the underlying institutional shift to dual primacy of the non-zero-sum approach and the interdependence enabling to bring, sustain and amplify cooperation also in competitive environments (Nowak 2006, Benkler 2011). These multidimensional changes are mutually catalytic what facilitates their aggregation into broader transformations. Consequently, these interplay with the civil society's capability of agency and capacity of facilitating (and also capitalizing on) social innovations. These tendencies are of crucial importance for and also constitutive of the civil society's self-empowerment. Whether the global participative revolution (Salamon et al. 2003) or the recent participative counter-revolution (Casey 2015) proves to be trendsetting for longer run it is too early to judge. At significant degree the outcome depends on the readiness of the civil society organizations' volunteering participants to carry out, contribute to civil activism capable to (re-)shape the societal dynamics by preferring and enhancing its cooperative rather than competitive patterns.

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<sup>10</sup> "Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of evolution is its ability to generate cooperation in a competitive world. Thus, we might add "natural cooperation" as a third fundamental principle of evolution beside mutation and natural selection" - points out Nowak (2006).

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