

What's the matter with civil society? The declining effect of civic involvement on civic  
identity among Czech adolescents

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## **Abstract**

This study shows that the beneficial impact of adolescents' involvement in civil society on their civic identity cannot be taken for granted. Employing the case of the Czech Republic, it is shown that this effect has vanished since early post-communism to the present day. Survey data from two different generations of Czech middle adolescents were analyzed: the post-communist generation (collected in 1995; n=1,127) and the current generation (collected in 2010; n=976). While participants' associational involvement and volunteering predicted their stronger civic identity (i.e., psychological connection and sense of responsibility to fellow citizens) in 1995, no such effect was observed in 2010. Simultaneously, both associational involvement and volunteering were determined by the economic situation of adolescents' family in 2010, but not in 1995. The most likely reason for the vanishing impact of civic involvement is the advancing professionalization of civil society.

*Keywords:* adolescents, civic identity, civic involvement, civil associations, post-communism, professionalization, volunteering

## **Introduction**

A large body of research has underscored the importance of young people's involvement in voluntary activities that take place within civil associations, including churches, youth organizations, but also less formal clubs or groups. The most visible effects of voluntary activities are their practical outcomes such as helping the needy, improving living conditions in the communities, or more generally contributing to a public good. However, involvement in voluntary activities has also its less visible "extra" effects on young people's civic socialization. By associating with others and working together for communal goals, young people create psychological connections and a sense of responsibility to their fellow citizens (Atkins & Hart, 2003; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). This sense of connection and responsibility, sometimes labeled as civic identity (Youniss et al., 1997), enables young people to perceive their commonality of interest with other citizens and, in turn, boosts their further civic involvement (Atkins & Hart, 2003).

Nevertheless, the effect of participation in voluntary activities on civic identity is not unconditionally positive. Recently, a considerable amount of voluntary work has been professionalized, which means that many civil associations rely on a small professionally-trained staff, and as a result, they tend to adopt market logic, labor specialization, centralization and lower organizational democracy (van Deth & Maloney, 2012). Although these changes in the internal aspects of associational life might improve associations' ability to reach their formal goals, the effects on members' civic identities seem to be less positive. Professionalization suppresses many associational features that have been identified as beneficial for youth civic development, such as friendly interactions between members or members' equal status (Dekker, 2009; Flanagan, 2004). To say it with an exaggeration, if the work for a civil association becomes organized similar to the work for a private corporation, its impact on individuals' civic identities easily can be lost.

Post-communist central European countries provide an extraordinary opportunity to study the consequences of the professionalization of civil associations. Shortly after the transition towards liberal democracy and capitalism, the emerging civil society of the 1990s was largely informal and spontaneous. Over the next few years, however, it began catching up to western civil societies in terms of its professionalization. Together with increasing international and national funding, a large amount of voluntary work has become professionally managed and a new class of experts on issues such as fundraising or strategic planning has emerged within many civil associations (Císař, 2008; Císař & Vráblíková 2010; Frič, 2015). Hence, it might be expected that youth civil involvement in early post-communism had different socialization effects than it does today. Specifically, the conditions of civil associations in the 1990s can be expected to be more favorable for the development of young people's civic identities than the conditions of the 2010s. Even though this hypothesis can be deduced from what we know about the professionalization of civil associations and the development of post-communist civil societies, it has never been verified empirically. Therefore, employing the case of the Czech Republic, this study aims to test whether the positive effect of young people's involvement in civil society on their civic identity decreased over the last two decades. At the same time, potential confounding factors, such as socialization effects of family and school, are considered.

### **The role of civil associations in civic identity development**

Youth voluntary work within various civil associations is regarded as a way to build psychological ties to their fellow citizens. Compared to their uninvolved peers, adolescents who have been involved in such organized activities are more likely to be politically and civically active when they reach adulthood (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Quintelier, 2008; Smith, 1999; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003). One reason for this effect is that

certain psychological dispositions are developed through voluntary work (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Smith, 1999; Verba et al., 1995). Different authors put emphasis on different dispositions such as social trust (Putnam, 2000), internalized civic norm (Smith, 1999) or interest in public affairs (Verba et al., 1995). Nevertheless, all these concepts share an aspect of felt connection and responsibility to other citizens, which indicates that civic identity is being formed in young people (Atkins & Hart, 2003; Youniss et al., 1997).

The positive effect of voluntary work on civic identity has been acknowledged from different theoretical perspectives. Social capital theory posits that one's involvement in civil associations, which are formed of people from diverse social backgrounds, creates so called bridging social capital. This type of social capital manifests through persons' stronger pro-social norms and greater social trust that is not bound to one's particular social group (e.g., ethnic, religious, professional) but apply to the wider society (Putnam, 2000). Further, from a social psychological perspective, the emergence of pro-social norms and social trust can be explained in terms of the contact hypothesis (Stolle, Soroka, & Johnston, 2008; Stolle & Harell, 2013). This hypothesis assumes that, under certain conditions, direct cooperation on shared goals helps people from diverse social groups to develop a common superordinate identity, and thus to dissolve group boundaries and mitigate inter-group tensions (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Allport, 1958; Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1994; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). Hence, through voluntary work within civil associations, young people can develop broader identities that encompass various subgroups of the citizenry. Stronger helping norms and a greater social trust of fellow citizens are natural consequences of this superordinate civic identification (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013).

From the developmental perspective, civic identity is formed particularly in adolescence. During this life period, many young people explore and create their identities in

various domains (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966) and are open to external influences on their sociopolitical attitudes (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989; Sears & Levy, 2003). Consistent with this idea, previous research has confirmed that voluntary work within civil associations, similar to socialization experiences in families and schools, provides young people an important opportunity to develop their identities and relations to different aspect of civic life (Kirshner, 2009; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Hardy, Pratt, Pancer, Olsen, & Lawford, 2011; Pearce & Larson, 2006; Youniss & Yates, 1996) by exposing them to various normative civic practices and ideologies (Youniss et al., 1997).

### **Civic identity in professionally managed civil associations**

The impact of voluntary work within civil associations on adolescents' civic identity is far from universal. There are certain associational features that support the development of adolescents' identities (Flanagan, 2004). If these features are lacking, voluntary work might still have some beneficial consequences for young people (e.g., development of specific skills or meeting new people) but the positive effect on their civic identity is limited.

Professionalization's transformation of certain associational features causes this limiting impact on their capacity to produce civic identity.

First, professionalization is usually characterized by increased labor specialization and centralization (van Deth & Maloney, 2012). This means that young people in professionalized associations are assigned to specific roles and tasks, usually set by the professional management. In contrast, in non-professionalized associations, a person's status and the content of work are less prestructured and often must be negotiated with other members. The latter associational environment is more supportive of members' horizontal direct interactions and facilitates mutual friendly relationships, which help them to broaden their perspectives, better understand other people's positions, and empathize with others (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Mutz, 2002). Consequently, non-professionalized associational

contexts might create more opportunities than professionalized ones to develop the sense of connection and responsibility.

Second, a limited organizational democracy, which is typical in professionally managed associations (Dekker, 2009; van Deth & Maloney, 2012), makes the status of members more unequal. For instance, it is common for important decisions to be made by a limited circle of associational management, while other members are excluded from the decision-making process. Previous research repeatedly has shown that the development of common superordinate identities in people is much easier when they are treated equally than when their status is unequal (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Allport, 1958; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; for a study on adolescents' negative perceptions of inequality in civil associations, see Gordon & Taft, 2010). Hence, a limited development of civic identity in professionalized associations might further stem from greater inequalities in their everyday functioning.

Finally, professionalized associations tend to create more homogeneous groups in terms of members' demographic backgrounds. Generally, young people from families with a lower socioeconomic status are less involved in associations and voluntary work because they lack resources (Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1999; Lenzi et al., 2012; McNeal, 1998). This effect, however, is even more pronounced in professionalized associations because people with limited resources or skills are less desirable in organizations that value market logic and efficiency (Skocpol, 2003; 2004). As shown by the social capital research, if the associations tend to attract people with similar socioeconomic profiles, their potential for generating civic outcomes vanishes (Stolle, 1998; Stolle & Rochon, 1998).

In sum, labor specialization and centralization (implying fewer opportunities for friendly interactions among members), limited organizational democracy (implying a more unequal status of members), and unequal access to associations (implying a greater

associational homogeneity) constitute likely reasons why a greater professionalization of civil society is not beneficial for the individual development of civic identity.

### **Professionalization in the post-communist society**

The post-communist transformation in central Europe provides a remarkable opportunity to assess the impact of professionalization on the development of civic identity in adolescents. Specifically in the Czech Republic, the civil society has been evolving since 1989 toward greater professionalization without any fundamental external disturbances (e.g., compared to former Yugoslavia or some post-Soviet countries). A relatively well-developed pre-1989 informal and dissident civil society provided a basis for the civil society after 1989. Therefore, a large part of civic involvement in the early 1990s could be characterized as spontaneous informal “hobby” activities, often initiated by strong individualities (Pospíšilová, 2011). Due mostly to international and national funding, Czech civil society began to professionalize during the 1990s (Císař, 2008; Císař & Vráblíková 2010; Frič, 2015). An increasing number of professional employees, the growing popularity of project management, and a greater formalization of the associational environment are clear indicators of this trend (Frič, 2015; Šťovíčková Jantulová, 2005). Hence, adolescents’ civic involvement during early post-communism and today has taken place in two different civil contexts: the former characterized by a low and the latter by a high level of professionalization.

The changing context of Czech adolescents’ voluntary work is well illustrated by the 1999 Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001) and the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010). The rate of participation in “a group conducting voluntary activities to help the community,” which can be understood as a rough indicator of rather informal civic involvement, decreased from 22 to 13% among 14-year-olds. In contrast, there were increased rates of participation in more formal (and often probably professionalized) associations, such



as charity (18 to 29%), environmental organizations (13 to 21%), human rights organizations (2 to 9%), or political party youth and unions (1 to 4%). Consistent with these trends, current Czech youth (age 15-30) is typically involved in voluntary activities related to charity (38%), education, sport or training (36%), and environment or animal welfare (28%) (Eurobarometer, 2015). Concurrently, associations providing services (e.g., charities) and to a lower extent also associations related to the new social movements (e.g., environmental) belong to the most professionalized ones, judging by their reliance on professional employees (Frič, 2015).

### **The present study**

This study tests whether the positive effect of youth involvement in civil society on their civic identity has changed in the Czech Republic from early post-communism to the present day. Considering the advancing professionalization of Czech civil society, the presumably positive effect of civic involvement on civic identity is hypothesized to decrease from the 1990s to the present (Hypothesis 1). Because civic identity results from an active participation rather than formal membership in associations, associational involvement and voluntary work are distinguished in the analysis. It is expected that voluntary work mediates the effect of associational membership on civic identity.

The increased professionalization of civic associations should be indicated by greater socioeconomic differences between those who do and do not participate. Hence, the negative effect of family economic hardship on associational involvement and voluntary work is expected to be greater in the present than in the 1990s (Hypothesis 2).

This study will control for two other socialization influences that might affect both civic identity and associational involvement or volunteering. First, because adolescents often learn civic orientations from their parents (Pancer & Pratt, 1999), perceived pro-social parenting (i.e., parents taught adolescents pro-social values) will be considered. Second, civic identity is known to be enhanced by a democratic climate in school that puts emphasis on the

openness and respect to students (Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gallay, 2007; Lenzi et al., 2012; Wilkenfeld, 2009); hence, school democracy will be another control variable in this study. The inclusion of these two controls also will enable determining whether the expected changing effect of civic involvement on civic identity is accompanied by broader social changes, which would manifest through the changing effects of other socialization influences (i.e., family and school).

## **Method**

### **Participants and procedure**

Data comprised two samples, the first one was collected in 1995 ( $n = 1,127$ , 48% females), the second one in 2010 ( $n = 976$ , 52% females). Both samples were composed of eighth-graders (lower secondary school) and tenth-graders (higher secondary school). Mean age of participants was 16.04 ( $SD = 1.65$ ) in 1995 and 15.43 ( $SD = 1.22$ ) in 2010.

Respondents completed paper-based questionnaires capturing their personal beliefs, associational involvement, and perceptions of society, family and school. Wording of the items was identical in both samples.

Data collections were done in the South Moravian region that is typically close to the national average in terms of basic socioeconomic indicators (Czech Statistical Office, 2012, 2013). Cluster sampling of school classes was employed in 1995, questionnaires were administered in schools. Due to changes in the legislature, it was not possible to replicate the same cluster sampling procedure in 2010. Therefore, a quota sampling was used (replicating age and educational structure of the 1995 sample) with individual administration at home. Data collection was carried out by the academic institution in 1995 and by the professional research company in 2010.

### **Measures**

**Civic identity.** Three items measuring civic identity were used (Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo & Sheblanova, 1998; Flanagan et al., 1999): “When you think about your life and your future, how important is it to you personally to” (a) “help the other ones, who had been less lucky” (b) “do something to improve community” (c) “to help your own country?” Respondents answered using a five-point scale ranging from “not important at all” (=1) to “very important” (=5).

**Voluntary work.** Participants were asked whether they participated in any voluntary work beneficial to the community (a dichotomous yes (=1) / no (=0) response scale was used).

**Associational involvement.** Respondents were asked whether they were involved in any civic, school-based, extracurricular, religious, sport or music association (dichotomous yes/no response scales). Then, they were divided into two categories: those who were involved in at least one association (=1) and those were involved in no associations (=0).

**Pro-social parenting.** Parental transmission of pro-social values, reported by adolescents, was measured by three items (Flanagan & Tucker, 1999): “My parents have taught me to pay attention to other people’s needs, not just my own” “My parents have taught me to be helpful to others, especially those who are less fortunate” “My parents have taught me to be aware of other people’s feelings and needs.” A five-point response scale ranged from “completely disagree” (=1) to “completely agree” (=5).

**School democracy.** Three items measured perceived openness and responsiveness of the school environment (Flanagan et al., 1998): “Teachers want students to express their own opinions, even if they disagree with teachers” “Students are encouraged to engage in leadership and management” “Teachers listen to students’ opinions regarding the way how the hours should be improved.”

**Family economic problems.** Adolescents' perception of economic hardship in their family was measured by the item: "My parents frequently worry how to pay bills." A five-point response scale ranged from "completely disagree" (=1) to "completely agree" (=5).

**Other indicators of family socioeconomic status.** Participants indicated whether they lived together with their biological mother, stepmother, biological father or stepfather, whether their parents worked, and what the highest education of their parents was. Based on this information, two indicators of family socioeconomic status were computed: the number of employed parents living in the household (*parental employment*) and the number of parents with university degrees living in the household (*parental education*). In 1995, 3% lived with no employed parent, 25% with one employed parent, and 73% with two employed parents; 69% lived with no parent with university education, 20% with one parent with university education, and 11% with two parents with university education. In 2010, 3% lived with no employed parent, 29% with one employed parent, and 68% with two employed parents; 74% lived with no parent with university education, 18% with one parent with university education, and 8% with two parents with university education.

### **Data analysis**

A preliminary analysis was conducted to test measurement invariance of civic identity, parenting and school democracy from 1995 to 2010. A multigroup confirmatory factor model (comprising three latent variables and their indicators) showed a good fit to the data even when all factor loadings and intercepts were set to be identical in 1995 and 2010 ( $\chi^2_{60} = 149.31$ ; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .04; SRMR = .03). Standardized factor loadings of all items were higher than .50 and factor determinacy coefficients (correlations between factors and factor score estimates; Brown, 2006; Grice, 2001) were relatively high (>.80) for all variables at both times. Hence, all three variables were well represented by the items and the measurement was invariant between 1995 and 2010.

Multigroup structural equation modeling was used for the main analysis. The model presented in Figure 1 was freely estimated for the 1995 and the 2010 subsample. Civic identity, parenting and school democracy were treated as latent variables, while voluntary work, organizational involvement and family economic problems as manifest ones. The model also included four control variables (age, gender, parental employment, and parental education) that were set to predict all six variables presented in Figure 1 (inter-correlations between control variables were not allowed except the correlation between parental employment and education). Because the model included two dichotomous endogenous variables (organizational involvement and voluntary work), a mean- and variance-adjusted weighted least squares estimator (WLSMV) and theta parametrization provided by Mplus 6.1 were used. Within this estimation procedure, dichotomous variables were predicted using probit regression.

To test whether the effects between variables changed significantly from 1995 to 2010, a set of chi-square differences tests was used. For each test, the tested effect was constrained to be identical between 1995 and 2010 and the fit of the resulting model was compared with the fit of the unconstrained model. If the fit dropped (i.e., chi-square significantly increased), it indicated a significantly different effect between 1995 and 2010.

Considering a large sample size, the .01 significance level was used primarily to test all effects and differences. Indirect effects were assessed using 99% bias-corrected standardized confidence intervals obtained through bootstrapping (one thousand random samples with replacement).

## **Results**

Descriptive statistics and correlations between all variables are presented in Table 1. Absolute levels of most variables did not change substantially from 1995 to 2010. The most

obvious changes were an increase of school democracy and fewer people doing voluntary work.

The multigroup structural model (depicted in Figure 1) was an acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2_{154} = 304.97$ ; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .03; WRMR = 1.16). Standardized effects for both generations are presented directly in Figure 1. For better readability, effects of control variables are shown separately in Table 2. In Table 3, chi-square difference tests are presented. These tests indicate whether the studied effects were significantly different between 1995 and 2010.

### **Hypothesis 1: Effects of associational involvement and volunteering on civic identity**

Results suggested that the relations among civic identity, voluntary work and associational involvement changed significantly from 1995 to 2010. Whereas doing voluntary work predicted stronger civic identity in 1995, no such effect was present in 2010. Due to this change, the effect of associational involvement on civic identity changed as well. In 1995, associational involvement had a positive indirect effect on civic identity, mediated by a greater likelihood of volunteering (99% CI = [.01; .11]). Fifteen years later, volunteering was unrelated to civic identity, hence no indirect effect of associational involvement through volunteering was possible (99% CI = [-.08; .06]). These findings supported Hypothesis 1.

Results also showed that the relation between associational involvement and doing voluntary work became stronger from 1995 to 2010. While this relation was significant but weak in 1995, it became significantly stronger in 2010.

### **Hypothesis 2: Economic determination of associational involvement and voluntary work**

The effects of family economic situation on civic outcomes changed as well. Family economic hardship had no impact on adolescents' associational involvement and voluntary work in 1995. Fifteen years later, adolescents who reported more economic problems in their families were less likely to be involved in associations and do voluntary work. The effect of

economic problems on volunteering operated both directly and indirectly through adolescents' lower involvement in associations (99% CI = [-.15; -.02]). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

### **Effects of parenting and school**

Socialization experiences in families and schools predicted civic identity in both generations. Specifically, greater pro-social parenting and greater school democracy had positive direct effects on civic identity. These became even stronger from 1995 to 2010, though the change was significant only for the effect of parenting.

No substantial changes were found regarding the effects of parenting and school on associational involvement and volunteering. Pro-social parenting had stable but rather small positive effects on volunteering and associational involvement. The differences in these effects between 1995 and 2010 were non-significant. School democracy was consistently unrelated with associational involvement and had a small positive effect on voluntary work. Again, these effects were not significantly different between 1995 and 2010.

### **Effects of other control variables**

Control variables (age, sex, parental employment, and parental education) had no substantial effects on civic identity, voluntary work or organizational membership. The strongest effects in the main model were that girls were slightly less involved in organizations than boys in 1995 and children of more educated parents did slightly less voluntary work in 2010 (controlling for parental employment and family economic problems). However, small effect sizes prevent any conclusive interpretations of these results.

### **Differences between association types**

A more in-depth look at different types of associations showed that the overall profile of associational involvement remained almost unchanged from 1995 to 2010, with the exception that extracurricular involvement was to some extent replaced by school-based involvement (Table 1). Correlations between associational involvement and voluntary work

changed only for school-based ( $z = 2.60, p < .01$ ) and sport ( $z = 2.96, p < .01$ ) associations as involvement in these associations became more strongly connected with voluntary work. Correlations between associational involvement and civic identity remained generally low, suggesting that mere associational membership had no effect on civic identity. Only the correlation between school-based associations and civic identity was somewhat higher in 2010 ( $z = 2.37, p = .02$ ).

## **Discussion**

### **Interpretation of the findings**

Using data from the Czech Republic, this study raises questions about the beneficial impact of associational involvement and voluntary work on adolescents' civic identities and it calls attention to the quality of youth experience in these settings. According to the results, young people's involvement in civil society implied their stronger psychological connections and sense of responsibility to their fellow citizens in the 1990s. However, no such effect can be observed today. Similar to recent findings on cross-national differences in the correlates of youth civic involvement (Lenzi et al., 2012), this study disrupts universalistic claims, according to which civic involvement automatically generates civic identity in young people. It seems that even within a single sociocultural context, the positive psychological effect of civic involvement might disappear between two subsequent generations.

What exactly happened with the civil society in the Czech Republic? The most likely "suspect" is the advancing professionalization. By limiting the opportunities for friendly interactions, increasing inequality among members and making associations more homogeneous, professionalization creates conditions that are psychologically unfavorable for the development of civic identity. Although no direct measure of professionalization was employed in this study, there are several indirect indices suggesting the presence of this trend. A first indicator of growing professionalization is that both associational involvement and



volunteering were determined by the economic situation of adolescents' family in 2010, which was not the case in 1995 (despite there was no dramatic increase of economic inequality in Czech society from 1995 to 2010; Kahanec et al., 2012). Furthermore, while the overall level of associational involvement did not change, the level of volunteering decreased and the link between associational involvement and volunteering became stronger from 1995 to 2010. These changes suggest decreasing occurrence of less formal voluntary activities that are done beyond the associations (similar to findings by Torney-Purta et al., 2001, and Schulz et al., 2010), which can be regarded as another indicator of increasing professionalization. Although the degree of professionalization is probably different for different segments of civil society, the changes at the overall level seem to be substantial.

Thus, the results of this study expand our knowledge about the negative consequences of the professionalization of civil society. Besides more distant and formal relationships among members or organizations' lower openness to a wider public, which were described by previous studies (Císař & Vráblíková, 2010; Frič, 2015; Šťovíčková Jantulová, 2005), this study proposes that voluntary work within professionally managed associations, compared to less professionalized associations, also loses its positive impact on adolescents' civic identities. Such finding is compatible both with the social capital theory, suggesting that professionally managed associations create so called bonding rather than bridging social capital (for definitions, see Putnam, 2000), and with the contact hypothesis, suggesting that some important conditions for the development of superordinate identities (such as equality) are not met in professionally managed associations.

However, despite the vanished effect of associational involvement and volunteering on adolescents' civic identity in 2010, the average levels of civic identity did not substantially differ between the two generations. Associational involvement and volunteering, of course, are not the exclusive (and perhaps in many cases not even the primary) sources of

adolescents' civic identity. Hence, a probable explanation is that the missing effect of civic involvement was compensated for by a greater effect of other socialization influences, especially of adolescents' parents. There were also several changes taking place in schools: not only did school environment become more democratic but also school-based associational involvement started to provide more opportunities for voluntary work and civic identity development in 2010. It seems that school-based opportunities for civic development have somewhat different character and are subject to different trends than opportunities through other civil associations. Beyond the effects captured in this study, the missing effect of civic involvement on civic identity might have also been compensated for through various online activities (e.g., adolescents' membership in online communities) that were not available in 1995.

### **Alternative explanations**

Of course, professionalization of civic society is not the only possible explanation for the decreasing effect of civic involvement on civic identity. There are several alternative explanations that cannot be entirely ruled out. However, based on the present data, the professionalization story seems to be the most convincing.

First, it is possible that some contextual change within the civil society, other than professionalization, is responsible for the vanishing impact of civic involvement on adolescents' civic identity. One contextual change consists in the development of information and communication technologies that might alter the interactions in associations or among volunteers. However, despite a massive increase of online communication between 1995 and 2010, online communication per se does not seem to have a detrimental effect on one's exposure to diversity, civic involvement and other precursors of civic identity (Kahne, Middaugh, Lee, & Feezell, 2011; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). Ethnic polarization of the society or some form of radicalization could represent other kinds of

contextual changes, making civil society less inclusive and tolerant. Nevertheless, despite its transition between two different economic systems, no such contextual changes happened within Czech society by 2010, as indicated, for instance, by its lasting ethnic homogeneity (Czech Statistical Office, 2014) or a very low public support for far-right political parties (Kahanec et al., 2012). On the contrary, Czech civil society in the 21st century can be regarded as one of the most developed among other post-communist countries (Celichowski, 2008; Heinrich, 2007), which supports the assumption of increasing professionalization.

Second, people's understanding of civic identity could have changed from early post-communism to the present day. In other words, the survey items could have different meanings and measure qualitatively different constructs at 1995 and 2010. Hence, it would make no sense to talk about decreasing effects of civic involvement because the outcome variables in both generations were different. However, the data did not provide much support for this alternative explanation. Both the good measurement invariance and the similar pattern of associations between civic identity and pro-social parenting or school democracy suggested that the meaning of civic identity remained the same in both generations of adolescents, so identical construct was measured.

Finally, the data was cross-sectional, hence a reversed causal link between civic involvement and civic identity cannot be ruled out. It is possible that a stronger civic identity causes a greater involvement but not vice versa. The problem then would not be that civic involvement fails to produce civic identity but rather that civic identity fails to induce adolescent involvement in civil society. Although social capital literature often understands the relation between civic orientations and participation as a bidirectional self-reinforcing "virtuous circle" (Putnam, 2000), empirical tests suggest that the effect of participation on civic orientations is much more salient than the reverse (Shah, 1998; Quintelier & van Deth,

2014). Therefore, the causal order suggested by this study seems to be plausible, even though a longitudinal analysis would bring more stringent results.

### **Limitations and conclusions**

In connection with the above mentioned considerations, some limitations of this study and suggestions for future studies must be pointed out. First, dichotomous measures of adolescents' associational involvement and volunteering are very broad. A more fine-grained measurement, capturing their specific contents and extents, would help to clarify the processes by which professionalization negatively affects the development of civic identity. Specifically, it would be important to measure not only memberships but also voluntary work in different types of associations that vary in the degree of their professionalization. Second, longitudinal data would bring a clearer picture of the causal order between variables. Third, data from more than two generations would provide a higher certainty of the long-term trends in the impact of civic involvement on civic identity. Finally, these processes also could be better understood by a measurement of adolescents' other civic orientations such as social trust.

Despite these limitations, however, the study brings clear evidence that the positive impact of adolescents' civic involvement on their civic identity cannot be taken for granted. When promoting young people's associational involvement and their voluntary work in order to boost their civic identities, we must carefully consider in what context does their civic involvement take place. It is actually possible that civic involvement under some conditions has no formative effects on civic identity. The professionalization of civil associations and the related professional organization of voluntary work are among the most likely reasons why the current civil society has partially lost its socializing function. Some features of professionally managed associations, such as labor specialization or limited democracy, probably do not allow young people to obtain valuable experiences that help build their civic

identities. This unwanted outcome of professionalization should be taken seriously when making practical policies to encourage youth civic involvement.

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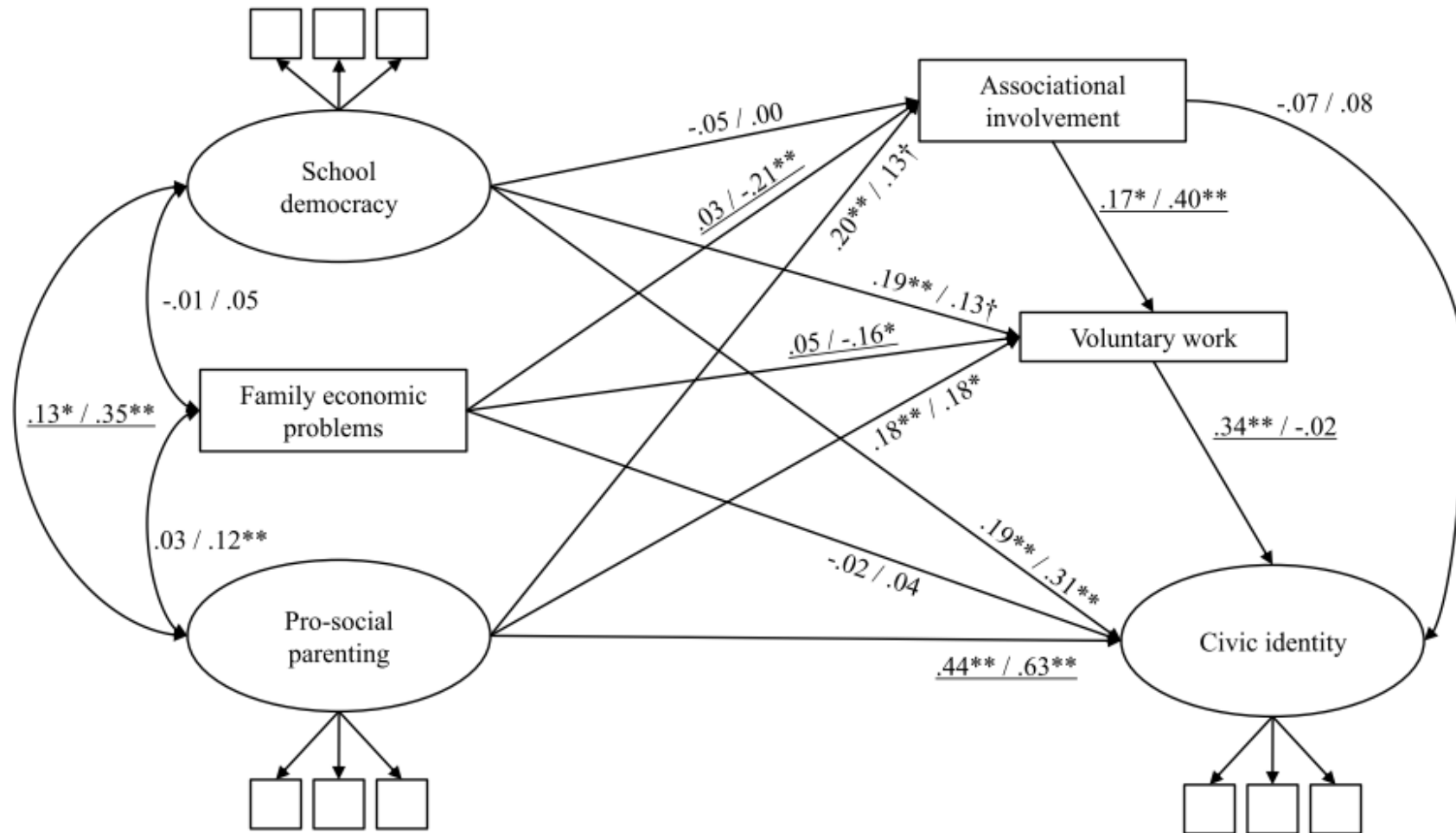
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Figure 1. Structural model predicting civic identity in 1995 and 2010.



*Note.* Standardized effects from 1995 (before the slash) and 2010 (after the slash) are presented. Underlined effects are significantly different. For greater readability, control variables are not displayed in this figure. †  $p < .02$ . \*  $p < .01$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .



Table 2. Standardized effects of control variables in 1995 and 2010.

|                        | Outcome        |                |                           |                      |                          |                  |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
|                        | Civic identity | Voluntary work | Associational involvement | Pro-social parenting | Family economic problems | School democracy |
| <b>Generation 1995</b> |                |                |                           |                      |                          |                  |
| Age                    | -.04           | -.05           | -.07                      | -.03                 | .12**                    | -.15**           |
| Sex (female)           | -.01           | .05            | -.14**                    | .15**                | .05                      | .02              |
| Parental employment    | .00            | .02            | .01                       | -.07                 | -.07                     | -.03             |
| Parental education     | -.08           | -.03           | -.01                      | .07                  | -.12**                   | .02              |
| <b>Generation 2010</b> |                |                |                           |                      |                          |                  |
| Age                    | -.03           | .00            | .00                       | -.01                 | -.09*                    | .13*             |
| Sex                    | .04            | .03            | -.07                      | .06                  | -.01                     | .08              |
| Parental employment    | -.04           | -.02           | .00                       | .07                  | -.19**                   | .07              |
| Parental education     | -.06           | -.13*          | .11                       | .12*                 | -.16**                   | .09              |

*Note.* Inter-correlations between control variables were not allowed except the correlation between parental employment and parental education ( $r_{1995} = .14^{**}$ ;  $r_{2010} = .21^{**}$ ). \*  $p < .01$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .



Table 3. Significance tests of the differences between effect in 1995 and 2010.

| Predictor                 | Outcome                   |                |                |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|
|                           | Associational involvement | Voluntary work | Civic identity |
|                           | $\Delta\chi^2$            | $\Delta\chi^2$ | $\Delta\chi^2$ |
| Voluntary work            | -                         | -              | 24.47**        |
| Associational involvement | -                         | 11.19**        | 4.43           |
| Pro-social parenting      | 1.26                      | 1.00           | 8.82*          |
| Family economic problems  | 16.05**                   | 11.25**        | 2.18           |
| School democracy          | 0.45                      | 1.02           | 1.87           |

*Note.* Degrees of freedom = 1 for all tests. \*  $p < .01$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .