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THERE IS NO TABULA RASA – THE EFFECT OF VARIETIES OF COMMUNISM ON ORGANIZATIONAL FORMATION RATES IN PRE- TRANSITION INTEREST GROUP POPULATIONS

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1 Introduction

To what extent did organized interests operate in totalitarian societies? How do interest group populations existing before the democratic transition affect later interest group evolution? Is there a clean slate after totalitarianism, as Olson (1982) suggested? Or are organizations able to survive enormous political, social and economic transformations? On the one hand, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) experienced a gargantuan simultaneous economic, political and (in many cases, such as Slovenia) national “triple transition” 30 years ago (Offe & Adler, 1991). This undoubtedly unique historical experience was accompanied by a deep economic and societal crisis. Following the assumption of Olson (1982) of an organizational “tabula rasa” precisely after such events, one might contend that interest groups started out with a clean slate after 1989. On the other hand, communist regimes varied with respect to their level of oppressiveness and strategies towards civil society, while undergoing periods of relative openness and closure. Thus, there are grounds to assume that communist regimes did not fully oppress and perhaps may have even facilitated the mobilization of civic organizations. While communist regimes promoted a variety of civic organizations – from sports associations, labour unions, to youth movements – participation in these organizations was often mandatory and highly regulated by state authorities. Other independent alternatives were either marginalized or outlawed. As a result, the transition countries suffered from constrained “civic infrastructure”, including the healthy system of interest intermediation (Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2013). In either case, in the symbolic year of 1989, civic society was transformed on the ruins of the communist past. Yet to what extent did legacies shape the evolutionary trajectory of societal organizations during and after transition?

In order to explore communist legacies and their implications for the associational life after 1989, we look at interest organization populations and densities during the pre-transition phase in CEE. In doing so, we deliberately take issue with Kopecký and Mudde (2003), who caution against focusing on organizational density as a reflection of civil society mobilization. While their advice should be headed by students of civil society understood broadly, for those studying organized interests the foundation and mortality rates of interest group populations and their density are among the theoretically most important variables. After all, organizational density, the number of associations and civil society activity are widely seen by social scientists as decisive factors determining economic growth, good governance and democratization in general (Olson, 1965, 1982; Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993). Thus, they have been addressed by many scholars as key factors driving post-communist democratization (Bruszt, Campus, Fidrmuc, & Roland, 2010; Ekiert & Kubik, 1998; Kopecký & Mudde, 2003). However, it is surprising that in contrast to a plethora of studies on civil society and industrial relations in post-communist CEE (e.g. Avdagic, 2005, 2006; Crowley, 2004; Crowley & Ost, 2001; Greskovits, 1998; Krzywdzinski, 2008; Ost, 2005), little attention has been devoted to organizational populations and the influence of specific organized interest groups, particularly in a comparative setting.

To address this gap, we draw on our dataset of interest organizations operating in the healthcare, energy and higher education sectors of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. We show that variations in pre-transitional authoritarian governance and the nature of the breakdown of communism significantly impacted organized interest populations throughout the 20th century. In particular, we highlight how sizable organizational populations were already present when communism crumbled, which substantially varied in size across policy fields and countries though. Moreover, we show that not only a considerable organizational density was present during transition, but that organizations existing under communism constitute a sizable share of contemporary interest group populations. This observation goes against the assumption of a *tabula rasa* after precisely such historical events (Olson, 1982) and also has serious consequences for two major population ecology approaches to interest organizations: the theory of density-dependent vital rates (Hannan & Carroll, 1992) (see Chapter 3) and the energy-stability-area (ESA) model of interest organization density (Gray & Lowery, 1995, 1996; Lowery & Gray, 1995).

We first take a closer look at the assumptions regarding organizational density after a fundamental change in a given polity, such as foreign occupation or the collapse of a political and economic system in Olson (1982) and in the ESA model (Lowery & Gray, 1995). Then, we introduce a theoretical framework for the varieties of communist regimes based on Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski and Tóka (1999), which helps us to hypothesize how the differences in communist regimes and consequently in democratic transitions affect pre-transition interest organization density. In Section 4, we introduce the dataset, analyse the data and explain the differences based on the model. Looking at the Hungarian

sub-sample, we also explore the long-term effects of the pre-transition interest group density and diversity. The last section summarizes our findings and paves the way for some of the upcoming chapters.

2 The density of new interest organization populations

In his classic book, *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities*, Mancur Olson states that “Stable societies with unchanged boundaries tend to accumulate more collusions and organizations for collective action over time” (Olson, 1982, p. 80). He contends that the accumulation of organized interests follows an exponential growth curve since the last major disruption in a country. That is, the number of interest groups is determined by the time since the formation of the political system, foreign occupation or some other fundamental political change. Lowery and Gray (1995) equate this view with the huge asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs along with three-quarters of all life on Earth. A fundamental extinction-level change to a political system “resets the clock and group formation begins anew” (Lowery & Gray, 1995, pp. 3–4). Indeed, Olson (1982) lays out this argument analysing the differences between Britain, a country which did not experience any disruption to its political system since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and continental Europe, where foreign occupation and radical political change occurred time and time again since the early modern age until the end of World War II. Olson (1982) considers totalitarianism a particularly disruptive force. His two examples, Germany and Japan, both experienced institutional change imposed violently by totalitarian governments and then by the occupying Allied forces. Olson cites from another study supporting his argument that while 51% of all associations existing in the UK in 1973 were founded before 1939, the corresponding numbers were 24% in West Germany, 19% in Japan and 37% in France, which also experienced foreign occupation and a fascist puppet government during World War II (Olson, 1982, p. 173). The question never arises, however, whether these numbers are as low as his theory would assume – namely a *tabula rasa* more or less – and what could this mean for interest group density and diversity.

As Lowery and Gray (1995) point out, despite the central importance of the number of interest groups for Olson’s theory of economic growth, his 1982 book includes no direct measure of it. In contrast, Lowery and Gray (1995) and Gray and Lowery (1995, 1996) introduced a theoretical model of interest group density. The energy–stability–area (ESA) model of population density builds on the population ecology studies in biology. That is, instead of looking at organizational-level variables in explaining organizational diversity and density, it sees these as being determined by the carrying capacity of the organizations’ environment. The model posits that “the diversity of a population is a summed function of how the environmental forces specified in the ESA model separately influence carrying capacities for each species or organization type” (Gray & Lowery, 1996, p. 105). The underlying theoretical assumption of the population ecology approach is

that the number of organizations is constrained by “the availability of organizational resources, relatively independent of mobilization rates and dependent on the pre-existing density of organizations” (Berkhout et al., 2015, p. 465).

In studies drawing on the population ecology approach to interest organization populations, the focus is usually on the energy and area terms of the model. The number of potential constituents corresponds to the latter, the “habitat” of the interest organization population, that is, the size of the potential constituency. In many studies, habitat is labelled as the supply side (population/membership environment). It is important to note that the existing density of organizations in a population itself is a supply side, membership environmental factor. Existing density is also of central importance in population ecology studies on the growth and mortality rates of interest groups (Hannan & Carroll, 1992; Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1989). On the energy – or “demand” – side of the model are the interests of the constituents regarding the actual and potential government actions affecting them, as well as issue certainty, that is, the likelihood of policy change. These are “vital resources that interest organization entrepreneurs employ to secure sponsorship” (Gray & Lowery, 1996, p. 106). The stability term, that is, fundamental political, economic and institutional change of a polity, usually is only controlled for or left out completely though.¹

Our data on national-level interest group formation and dissolution in energy policy, healthcare and higher education in four post-communist countries, three of which were also under foreign occupation for 40 years, offer an opportunity to analyse formal organizational activities through the patterns of organizational formation and density. In other words, our data enable us to directly explore the stability term. We move beyond simply treating it as the time since the last major political disruption or the age of the political system. First, we theorize and systematically analyse the causes for the variance in density of pre-transition interest group populations. Then, in a second step, we examine the mortality rate of pre-transition organizations between 1990 and 2019.

3 Organizational density and varieties of communism in CEE

Several former studies on civil society during communism challenged the view of these societies as being bereft of genuine civil society activities (Bruszt et al., 2010; Ekiert & Foa, 2011; Ekiert & Kubik, 1998; Kopecký & Mudde, 2003). Ekiert and Foa (2011) emphasized that in CEE, there was more to civil society than forced mobilization by the state or their function as “transmission belt” between the society and the party state. They argue that even mass organizations underwent significant transformation towards genuine interest representation during the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in Poland and Hungary. Ekiert and Foa (2011) call communist countries “incomplete civil societies” with a large number of associations and a dense structure of organizations without “autonomy, a legally defined public space and enforceable rights and liberties” (2011, p. 12). These studies, however, do not deal with specific interest organizations.

Ekiert and Kubik (1998) and Bruszt et al. (2010) instead explore the size of civil society and dissident activity (demonstrations, strikes, etc.) between 1989–1993 and 1985–1989, respectively.² The authors reveal large differences between the different communist regimes regarding civil society and social movement activities during communism. East-Central Europe and Yugoslavia had a more robust and vibrant civil society than the Soviet Union or Romania and Bulgaria. Yet none of these studies theorize how the different communist regimes affect civil society development in general, and interest group density in particular.³ After all, these communist regimes differed in many important respects for organizational development: their level of openness to non-command economic activity, the opportunities for formal interest representation in decision-making, and the nature of their opposition and transition processes varied significantly.

In line with this non-homogeneity thesis, we opt for a comparative approach enabling the identification of main similarities and differences among the post-communist CEE interest organizations, representing an important part of civil society. We recognize that instead of a single, homogenous CEE civil society shaped by a shared communist past, civil societies in the region are largely determined by different national political contexts (Navrátil & Kluknavská, 2020), which along with the transition process itself created both conditions and the necessary impetus for the development of interest groups and other civil society organizations. As we will show, the differences between the respective communist regimes – the changes in their relative openness to societal interest articulation and intermediation – and the resulting transition processes – the level and nature of societal and political mobilization – are reflected in the pre-transition organizational formation rates.

All countries under the rule of Marxist–Leninist parties were indeed totalitarian societies. From a systemic point of view, communist rule, or as Kornai (2000) put it, “the socialist system” as the empirically existent political-economic system, just like the capitalist system shared common characteristics. All 26 countries that experienced communist rule had five common, observable traits: (1) undivided power of the Marxist–Leninist party, (2) dominant position of state and quasi-state ownership, (3) preponderance of bureaucratic coordination, (4) soft budget constraint; weak responsiveness to prices; plan bargaining; quantity drive, (5) chronic shortage economy; sellers’ market; labour shortage; “unemployment on the job”⁴ (Kornai, 2000, p. 29). However, just as there are varieties of capitalism (Hall & Soskice, 2001) or welfare capitalism (Esping-Andersen, 1990), there were varieties of “existing socialism”. Kitschelt et al. (1999) constructed a model describing this variety, which distinguished three regime archetypes: the bureaucratic-authoritarian, national-accommodative and patrimonial regimes.

Bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes evolved in countries characterized by already high industrialization, early secularization and a socioeconomic class divide (a strong and organized working class), as well as experiences with democracy in the interwar period, such as Czechoslovakia and East Germany. In these countries, communist parties had a strong base among organized industrial workers.

After the forced merger with the broader social democratic camp (with the help of Soviet pressure and outright violence), communists did not have to accommodate their opponents. Nevertheless, they were always aware of the threat of social democratic and “bourgeois” (Christian-democratic, conservative, liberal, religious) revival. These characteristics explain their repressive, orthodox Marxist nature, which relied on a professional and effective bureaucratic machine. In these regimes, the transition process came suddenly and they collapsed in weeks under the pressure of a unified anti-communist opposition movement and mass demonstrations.

In *national-accommodative regimes*, such as Hungary and Poland, the communists came to power in countries with a large agricultural sector, an influential Catholic Church, and in Hungary also a reformed (Calvinist) Church. There was considerable industrialization, but it was confined to a number of metropolitan and mining areas. Democratic legacies were weak or non-existent, but both countries experienced some form of a political pluralism in the interwar years (even if constrained and authoritarian). During this period, the communists did not play any significant role and the social democrats were only strong in the industrialized areas.⁵ After the Stalinist period, the communists in both countries eventually had to accommodate large segments of a hostile population. For example, in Hungary, the industrial workers were the base of the armed revolution against the Stalinists and the Soviet Army in October–November 1956. The opposition movement in Poland during the 1970s and 1980s led by Lech Wałęsa – a shipyard electrician – was similarly driven by industrial workers (Grodsky, 2017). Consequently, the communist regimes of these countries were characterized by technocratic experimentation with economic reform, and co-optation rather than full-blown repression. As János Kádár, Chairman of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party and father of “Goulash-communism”⁶ famously described this *modus vivendi*: “those who are not against us are with us”. These countries were characterized by a negotiated transition process between the communist party and the anti-communist opposition (Kitschelt et al., 1999, pp. 64–67).

Patrimonial regimes evolved in overwhelmingly agrarian countries with weak industrialization and secularization, such as Bulgaria and Romania. These regimes were characterized by a corrupt and unprofessional communist party state penetrated by clientelist networks, and a weak, disorganized, fragmented opposition, without any historical appeal to another form of modernization than communism. These regimes collapsed suddenly under popular pressure (and in case of Romania – armed struggle with the army siding with the revolutionaries against communist security forces). However, the transition was managed by the intransigent ruling parties with pre-emptive (partial) reform⁷ (Crowther & Suci, 2013; Karasimeonov & Lyubenov, 2013; Kitschelt et al., 1999, pp. 67–69).

While Kitschelt et al. (1999) applied this model of communist regime diversity to trace differences in post-communist party systems, we argue that their classifications are also relevant for our study of pre-transition interest group populations. Accordingly, we would expect the lowest level of interest group density in

the bureaucratic-authoritarian and patrimonial variety of communist rule, which is closest to the assumption of Olson (1982) about the effect of authoritarianism. However, in the bureaucratic-authoritarian regime, as it evolved in highly developed countries, we would expect a number of pre-communist-era organizations to be present and “survive” communist rule. We anticipate the highest interest group density in national-accommodative regimes, such as Hungary and Poland. Here, we expect to find a high share of communist-era organizational formation as the communist parties had to co-opt and accommodate large segments of society (see Figure 2.1). Although Kitschelt et al. (1999) did not include any former Yugoslav countries in their sample, Yugoslavia is categorized as a mixture of the national-accommodative and patrimonial variety in the literature, with Slovenia being rather the former (Meyer-Sahling, 2009).

However, there are also significant differences between the respective communist systems of the countries in our sample belonging to the *national-accommodative regime*: Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. Specifically, they differed in the relative and formal openness of the political system to social interests and the level of political and societal mobilization during the run-up to transition (1988–1989). We start by comparing Hungary and Poland, as these countries were in a very different situation – namely, under Soviet occupation, but with varying degrees of Soviet control and influence during communist rule – then Slovenia, which was a constituent republic of non-aligned Yugoslavia.

First, the outcome of the October 1956 protests, the starting point for moving away from Stalinism to the eventual national-accommodative model, was very different in Hungary and Poland. Whereas in Poland the moderate communist leader, Władysław Gomułka, was eventually tolerated in power by the Soviets and able to keep popular demands for reform at bay and implement relatively

		Prevalence of interest groups founded before communist takeover	Prevalence of interest groups founded after communist takeover
Interest group density in 1989 as a proportion of all interest group formations until 2019	High		National-accommodative regime (e.g. Hungary, Poland, Slovenia)
	Low	Bureaucratic-authoritarian regime (e.g. Czechia)	Patrimonial regime (e.g. Romania)

FIGURE 2.1 The expected effect of communist regime types (Kitschelt et al., 1999) on pre-transition interest group density in CEE.

incremental changes, in Hungary the events led to an armed uprising against Soviet occupation. Poland experimented with limited pluralism as early as 1957, allowing the participation of groups such as the United Peasant Party, the Democratic Party or the Catholic organization, Znak (Colomer & Pascual, 1994, pp. 277–278). In Hungary, mass imprisonment and hundreds of executions took place during this phase, and such experiments with pluralism were never even considered. The two countries, however, soon converged, and from the 1960s on both regimes implemented several waves of economic reform (Lutz & Krueger, 1995; Przeworski, 1993). After the 1963 amnesty, the Hungarian regime “consolidated” its rule and the communists tried to co-opt and accommodate Hungarian society (with success).

However, by the 1980s, the two countries diverged again: Poland was home to the only truly independent mass movement of the Eastern Bloc, the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity movement (*Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Solidarność*). Even after the implementation of martial law in December 1981, Solidarity was able to retain its 10 million members (Ost, 2005). Unable to solve the country’s deep economic crisis and having lost their legitimacy, the communist government entered into negotiations with Solidarity leaders in January 1989, which led to semi-free elections held in June 1989. The election marked the end of the regime, as all but one of the contested Senate seats were won by the opposition (Millard, 2010; Rose & Munro, 2009), whereas in the Sejm (the lower chamber of the Polish parliament) the democratic opposition won all 35% of the seats, which were subject to competitive electoral process, as the remaining 65% were guaranteed for the PZPR (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* – Polish United Workers’ Party) and its satellites. In Hungary, however, there was no mass opposition movement or protest until 1988–1989. The communist government had a firm grip on power until 1988, and the country did not experience the same level of shortages as in Poland (although the economic crisis also rapidly accelerated in Hungary). There were indeed organized dissident groups, but they were sharply divided along ideological lines. Moreover, in Hungary, there was never any unified front against the communists. During the 1989 Roundtable Negotiations with the communists, all opposition parties and “societal organizations” (both independent and loyal unions and interest groups) had their own representatives. By 1989, the Hungarian opposition was relying more on mobilization and confrontation. As Bruszt and Stark (1991) argue, this outcome can be explained precisely by the fragmentation and relative weakness of the Hungarian opposition. As there was no powerful, unified anti-communist movement, the reform faction of the communist party also had an incentive for confrontation and partisan competition. Eventually, the split in the opposition became official, when the liberal and agrarian parties refused to sign the September 1989 agreement with the communists and initiated a referendum on the four most important points they disagreed with (and won).⁸

Yugoslavia, which Slovenia was part of, was very different from both Hungary and Poland. As Stanojević (1999) emphasizes, communism resulted from the

military victory of the popular partisan movement over the German occupiers and the simultaneous civil war against their domestic allies. Hence, in contrast to Poland and Hungary, Yugoslav communism was endogenous (Stanojević, 1999, p. 42). Yugoslavia was never under Soviet military occupation, and after Tito's 1948 break with Stalin, it already embarked on a deregulation and decentralization process in 1951. Yugoslavia implemented industrial democracy with the so-called self-management of its enterprises: the elected workers' council was the highest decision-making body, which also nominated and fired directors. Thus, management was responsible for the workers of a company (Stanojević, 1999, p. 46).

Yet self-management did not stop at the company level. Based on social ownership, Yugoslavia had a unique socialist-corporatist system, a kind of social partnership that permeated the formal legislative structures of every republic (Lukšič, 1997). As Lukšič (1997) argues, this elaborate system of corporatism provided genuine interest intermediation mechanisms. The parliament in every republic comprised three chambers: the Chamber of Communes, the Chamber of Associated Labor and the Socio-Political Chamber. In addition, Self-Management Interest Communities were organized for important social interests with equal representation for consumers and producers. These communities also had the right to participate in parliamentary sessions on matters of importance to them. In the Chamber of Associated Labor, representatives of workers and managers were elected for different branches of the economy and social services. Through their respective trade union delegations, they also had the right to speak in the Socio-Political Chamber (Lukšič, 1997, pp. 106–107).

However, the Yugoslav system of self-management was in crisis by the late 1980s. The country could not continue to provide a high level of social security to the entire workforce. The restructuring and downsizing of Yugoslav companies were imminent, and the work councils increasingly lost power. Hence, the coalition between the communist party elite and industrial workers disintegrated (Stanojević, 1999, p. 46). In Slovenia, the reformist wing took over the communist party in 1986. First, there was political mobilization inside existing socio-political organizations, such as the Alliance of Socialist Youth (which later became the Liberal Democratic Party, the dominant party of the country during the 1990s) (Fink Hafner, 1997a). As Fink Hafner (1997a) describes, such "embryonic" political parties were first established in spring 1988. "Multi-partyism" was also legalized at the end of the 1980s, however, within the existing one-party framework (1997a, p. 142). Regime change in Slovenia was also a national question. After the Slovenian communists broke with their Yugoslav comrades in January 1991 by walking out of the 14th Congress of the Yugoslav League of Communists, the army was the only federal Yugoslav institution left in the country (Fink Hafner, 1997a, pp. 140–141).

Summing up the differences between the three national-accommodative regimes, we can conclude that the Yugoslav regime was the most open to social interests – at least in the formal decision-making process – and the Hungarian for

the most part the least open, although between 1981 and 1988, the Polish regime was more repressive than the Hungarian. Regime change also played out differently in the three countries. As Bruszt and Stark (1991) argued, the Hungarian regime change eventually relied more on political and societal mobilization than the Polish one, where the opposition struck an early compromise with the communists. The Slovenian regime change was also a much more managed process than the Hungarian, as the communists already allowed some form of pluralism within the one-party model, and the Slovenian regime was in general the least repressive of the three. It is equally important that in Hungary, there was true pluralism within the opposition. The opposition was fragmented and divided along ideological lines. Party competition already started during the round-table talks with the communists directly affecting the regime change process. Altogether, we expect these systemic differences – both among the national-accommodative regimes and with the bureaucratic-authoritarian Czech(oslovak) regime – to explain the relative importance of the different periods of communist rule for pre-transition interest organization formations.

4 Exploring the density and diversity of pre-transition interest group populations

To explore the expectation outlined above, we draw on our complete sample of active and dissolved Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovenian interest groups operating at the state level in three policy fields, energy, healthcare and higher education. As a rule, we collected data from public registries of civil society organizations. We cross-checked the data with Internet searches, lists from parliaments and different ministries that invited organizations to various committees, meetings and interest intermediation bodies. We used the same set of keywords in all four languages. As in healthcare and higher education there are highly specialized professional, patient and student groups, we also made a standardized list of medical professions and higher education disciplines to improve comparability. For Poland, we used the State Court Registry (*Krajowy Rejestr Sądowy* – KRS) as a starting point. Since the KRS database only indicates registrations from 2001 on, we checked for each organization whether it was founded before this period and systematically searched for organizations founded before 2001. Our main source for the Hungarian data was the court registry of civil society organizations. The Hungarian court registry starts in 1989; that is, organizations founded before nonetheless have 1989 as their founding date. In each case though, we checked for the actual foundation date. For Slovenia, our primary source was AJPES registry (Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services). Our main source for the Czech data was the registry of the Czech Statistical Office.

With the exception of Hungary, these registries do not contain information on dissolutions.⁹ Therefore, we systematically checked whether organizations were active or inactive with Web searches and even by contacting them. In many

TABLE 2.1 The number of pre-transition interest groups per country (total: energy policy, healthcare and higher education)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Czechia	33	12.50
Hungary	95	35.98
Poland	83	31.44
Slovenia	53	20.08
Total	264	100.00

cases, we could not determine the exact date of dissolution, only the last date of activity or that the organization was active/inactive at the time of data collection (2019). The information on dissolutions in the Hungarian registry also has limitations. The unified court registry was established in 2011, and the courts started to dissolve inactive organizations effectively as of 2014. As a result, there has been a “mass dissolution” of civil society organizations since then, even though most of these organizations have been inactive for years if not decades (Sebestény, 2017). We followed Sebestény (2017) in considering any organization as still existent, which was listed in the record as existent, did not have any addition in its name field that indicated a dissolution procedure (e.g. under liquidation), and had at least one financial report in the records since 2011. In addition, we conducted Web searches for every Hungarian organization in the dataset.

We included 1,590 organizations in our sample from the four countries in the three policy areas, of which 264 (16.6%) were founded before 1990. As shown in Table 2.1, with 95 interest groups in total, Hungary has the highest number of pre-transition organizations, followed by 83 in Poland, 53 in Slovenia and 33 in Czechia (Czechoslovakia until 1992).

4.1 Explaining the founding rates and density of pre-transition interest groups

The order of the relative size of the 1989 density of the three populations as a proportion of all formations as of 2019 seems to be independent of regime type. With a 5.25% average across the four countries, the formations in the energy policy population up to 1989 constitute the smallest share of all formations. The corresponding proportions are 24.9% and 20.8% in higher education and healthcare organizational formations, respectively. However, among higher education and healthcare policy interest groups, the variance in formations is greater between countries than among populations across countries (see Figures 2.1–2.4). To test the differences between the bureaucratic-authoritarian Czech, and the national-accommodative Hungarian, Polish and Slovenian regimes, we sorted the organizations into three groups based on foundation period: organizations founded before 1946, between 1947 and 1987, and in 1988–1989.

FIGURE 2.2 Percentage of organizations founded before 1990.

FIGURE 2.3 Percentage of organizations founded before 1990 – energy policy.

FIGURE 2.4 Percentage of organizations founded before 1990 – healthcare.

As we expected from our theoretical model, Czechia has by far the smallest pre-transition density: as of 2019, a mere 8.1% of active interest organizations in the three policy areas were founded before 1990 (generally as Czechoslovak federal organizations, which we counted as Czech organizations). This is less than half of the other three countries. The corresponding number is the highest in Hungary (22.5%), followed by Poland and Slovenia (18% and 17.8%, respectively). Czechia has also the highest proportion of pre-transition organizations that were founded before the communist takeover (48.5%), followed by Poland (37.3%) and Hungary (28.4%) (in Slovenia we found no such organizations) (Figure 2.2). A small number of professional and scientific organizations as well as unions were incorporated into the communist party state, but no genuine interest intermediation was possible in an orthodox Marxist–Leninist regime.

Differences between the accommodative regimes are also clearly visible in the data. Among pre-transition organizations, Slovenia has the highest share of interest groups founded during the communist era (i.e. between the communist takeover and 1988), namely 90.6% of all organizations in 1989, which is expected considering the Yugoslav system of socialist corporatism. The share of such organizations among pre-transition interest group formations is less than 50% in the other two countries: 49.4% in Poland and 35.8% in Hungary. The almost 15 percentage point difference between Poland and Hungary is, however, indicative of the relatively more pluralist nature of communist rule in Poland (i.e. between 1957 and 1981). With 35.8%, Hungary has the highest proportion of organizations

founded in 1988–1989 among its pre-transition organizations compared to only 13.3% in Poland, and a mere 9.4% in Slovenia (Figure 2.2). This again reflects that Hungary had the most dynamic process of regime change with an opposition strategy of increasing mobilization and confrontation (Bruszt & Stark, 1991). In absence of a united, anti-communist mass movement, with a fragmented, but rapidly growing anti-communist opposition characterized by partisan competition and increasing political mobilization, interest organizations proliferated along ideological and professional lines in Hungary in the last two years of communist rule. This finding is also predicted by population ecology theory. In the ESA model of organizational density, the level of issue certainty, that is, the likelihood of policy change, is part of the energy term, i.e. the demand side of the model. Constituent interest and issue certainty are perceived as “vital resources that interest organization entrepreneurs employ to secure sponsorship” in the model (Gray & Lowery, 1996, p. 106). Political mobilization, the dynamic political confrontation and competition between various opposition parties, the reform communists and the hardliners, as well as the withering away of the party state in a rapidly worsening economic situation is certainly such a resource-rich environment for organizational formations.¹⁰ The first truly independent organizations were founded already in 1988 (e.g. the Democratic Union of Teachers in November 1988 or an independent youth movement in March 1988 called the Alliance of Young Democrats, better known by its Hungarian abbreviation FIDESZ). The initial high fragmentation of the Hungarian interest group landscape was already observed by scholars of industrial relations (Avdagic, 2005, 2006), whereas in Poland there was a sharp initial ideological divide between Solidarity and the successor union confederation, OPZZ. However, after 1989, the union landscape also became increasingly fragmented in Poland too (Guardiancich, 2013, p. 149).

Our finding that Slovenia has by far the most organizations founded during the communist era is also supported by Fink-Hafner (1997b). Although we had a much narrower definition by only including national-level interest groups in three policy fields, whereas she included all organizations (voluntary, social and self-management organizations with no restriction to specific policy fields), we found similar patterns. As she shows, organizational foundations boomed during the 1980s, but slowed down in 1988 and 1989 (Fink-Hafner, 1997b, p. 115).¹¹ In our sample of Slovenian pre-transition interest organizations, 56.6% of organizations were founded before 1980, 34% between 1980 and 1987, and 9.4% in 1988 and 1989, which is similar to the patterns observed by Fink-Hafner (1997b).

Regarding the three policy fields, we find roughly the same patterns, with Hungary having the largest proportion of pre-transition organizations except for energy policy, where Slovenia has a slightly larger share of 8.7% compared to 6.7% in Hungary (Figures 2.3–2.5). The ranking based on the periods when pre-transition organizations were founded also stays the same, with the exception of energy policy, in which pre-transition population in Poland has more organizational formations in 1988–1989 (60%) than in Hungary (50%) (Figure 2.3). However, energy policy interest groups comprise just a fraction of the sample.

FIGURE 2.5 Percentage of organizations founded before 1990 – higher education.

Our model explaining the variance in organizational formation rates in communist dictatorships can be summed up and formalized as follows:

- In general, more accommodative regimes are more open to societal interest representation and intermediation. In such regimes, a higher number of communist-era interest organizations outside the formal party state structure (i.e. typically professional, scientific and leisure in nature) are expected.
- However, even in more accommodative regimes, there is a variance in formation rates over time. Periods of technocratic experimentation with economic reforms (economic liberalization) and/or of political accommodation (political liberalization) are associated with higher organizational formation rates. Periods of increasing political repression are associated with lower formation rates.
- The nature of regime change makes a difference in formation rates during this period. Whether a transition process is negotiated, or it is the “Velvet Revolution” type (when street protests and civil disobedience force the communists to abandon power in a matter of weeks) does not seem to matter. The decisive factor is the level of political mobilization. An environment of political fragmentation, partisan competition and increasing political mobilization (e.g. Hungary) is associated with higher formation rates than either a managed transition process (e.g. Slovenia) or when a united opposition faces the communist party (e.g. Poland).

4.2 *Analysing the vital rates of Hungarian pre-transition interest groups after democratic transition*

How did pre-transition organizations fare after the democratic and economic transition? We already analysed the proportion of pre-transition organizations among active organizations (as of 2019) in our sample of four countries (Figure 2.2). However, the proportion of pre-transition organizations among active interest groups in 2019 is not necessarily indicative of their survival rates. Did these organizations dissolve during the years after the first democratic elections because they could not cope with the new political and economic context? A recent survey of Hungarian national-level interest organizations found that this might not be the case. On the contrary, organizations founded during the communist era can enjoy an advantage over newer organizations. Gallai, Döme, Molnár and Reich (2015) determined that there is a difference in the frequency of advocacy strategies used by organizations based on the period of founding. Formation during communism had a significant and positive effect on governmental and civil relations over pre-communist-era and post-communist-era organizations. Interest groups founded before 1948 tend to resort to mobilization, demonstrations and non-conventional instruments less frequently than those founded later (Gallai et al., 2015, p. 1474).

As already noted, the Hungarian court registry of civil society organizations is the only one that contains every organization founded before and after 1989, including the dissolved ones. Therefore, for illustration, we restrict our analysis of the mortality rates of pre-transition organizations to the Hungarian sub-sample. It turns out that such pre-existing organizations have a much lower mortality rate than those founded after 1990 in the three policy areas. On average, only 6.3% of pre-transition groups dissolved as of 2019 compared with 27.8% of interest groups founded after 1990. Among the pre-transition organizations, those founded in 1988–1989 have the highest mortality rate (11.8%), followed by organizations founded between 1947 and 1987 (5.9%). The organizations founded before the communist takeover exhibited the highest degree of longevity and were all still active in 2019 (Figure 2.6). The latter are mostly renowned – historic – organizations in higher education and healthcare, representing large and influential professional groups. There are also differences between dissolved organizations based on both their policy area and founding period. 56.8% of the dissolved organizations that were founded after 1990 are energy interest groups, 27.3% healthcare policy groups and 15.8% higher education organizations. The order is different, however, among the dissolved organizations founded before 1990: 50% are higher education groups, whereas energy and healthcare policy groups are both 25%, respectively.

5 Conclusion

This study is the first to our knowledge to explore interest group populations in the communist era and their post-communist survival rates. While exploring three salient policy areas, we showed that pre-transition organizations constitute

FIGURE 2.6 Percentage of active and dissolved organizations among Hungarian interest groups.

a significant proportion of contemporary interest group populations in four CEE countries. However, the relative size of pre-transition densities and their share among organizations still active in 2019 varies significantly: they comprise 22.5% of the three contemporary policy-specific populations in Hungary, 18% and 17.8% in Poland and Slovenia, respectively, but only 8.1% in Czechia (Figure 2.2). The respective size of pre-transition density (Table 2.1) also reflects the same order. We linked these differences in organizational density between the four countries to differences in their respective communist regime types: the orthodox Marxist–Leninist and repressive bureaucratic–authoritarian type in Czechoslovakia, and the national-accommodative type in Hungary, Poland and Slovenia (Figure 2.1). However, we also found considerable variation between the major foundation periods of the latter three countries: the Slovenian pre-transition populations are dominated by communist-era interest groups, whereas the Polish ones are more balanced, and Hungary has the most interest groups founded in the immediate run-up to transformation (1988–1989). We explained this variance among the three formerly national-accommodative communist regimes by their relative openness to societal interests in the formal decision-making process and the nature of the opposition and regime change. Regarding the sub-sample of Hungarian interest groups – for which we fortunately have data on organizational dissolutions – we found that a much lower proportion of pre-transition organizations dissolved (6.1%) than organizations founded after 1990 (27.8%). This gives credence to the argument that organizational longevity and organizational survival under vastly different political and economic circumstances may be correlated.

The results, which point to at least a moderate level of organizational activity under communism and organizational longevity after communism, contrast with Olson’s assumption (1982) on the effect of totalitarianism on organizational density and development. It is beyond dispute that a totalitarian dictatorship (which

in three of our cases was combined with four decades of military occupation) is hostile towards any independent organizations, even if they are as harmless as a choir. However, the view that the development of interest organizations starts mostly anew after the crumbling of a totalitarian regime is oversimplified. The relative size of pre-transition organizations is a factor in the political and societal developments during the totalitarian regime and varies significantly between countries. As we showed, even communist regimes, which all shared a number of fundamental characteristics and most of which were under Soviet control, exhibited a significant degree of variance.

Returning to the energy–stability–area model of organizational density, our analysis also draws attention to the importance of the proper conceptualization of the stability term (Lowery & Gray, 1995). The stability term, that is, a fundamental disruption of the political system, is usually neglected in the literature, which even today mostly has a US focus. As far as the post-communist countries are concerned, where the democratic transitions are relatively recent, we believe that the pre-transition density should be explored in quantitative or qualitative analysis alike, as legacies are essential for understanding the development of interest organizations in the present.

Moving beyond population ecology analysis, the question also emerges whether pre-existing organized interests are more influential nowadays than those founded in the post-communist era (see Horváthová & Dobbins in this volume), as organizational longevity may impact organizational resources (financial, personnel and logistical) in the present. Moreover, the degree to which the organizational population “survived” or was “de-communized” after 1989 also may affect the position of individual groups in interest intermediation systems as well as their ability to forge alliances with other interest groups.

Our findings are also relevant for the debate on the legacy of communism on civil society development and democratization. The scholarly consensus is that in post-communist countries, civic society revival still lags in many respects due to the erosion of civic norms and low social capital due to communist rule. As Putnam et al. (1993) wrote

(...) the formerly Communist societies had weak civic traditions before the advent of Communism, and totalitarian rule abused even that limited stock of social capital. Without norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement (...) amoral familism, clientelism, lawlessness, ineffective government, and economic stagnation – seems likelier than successful democratization (...).

(1993, p. 183)

Other scholars, however, question the weakness of post-communist civil society thesis. They assert that the CEE civic societies are not as feeble as assumed. In their opinion, many post-communist societies possess vigorous public spheres and active civic society organizations, strongly connected to transnational civic networks

able to shape domestic policies (Foa & Ekiert, 2017, p. 419). Communist regimes accordingly did not simply repress independent social and political organizations, but actively built their own associational structures, which are relevant for the following development of civic life. This perspective on civic organizations as mechanisms of democratic socialization, where citizens are socialized into the basic democratic norms of “debate, negotiation, compromise or consensus” dates back to Alexis de Tocqueville. Whereas communist systems were indisputably deeply repressive, the micro-level of associational life can be treated as offering some space for civic engagement. Foa and Ekiert (2017) argue that the associational structures of the communist era have indeed somewhat weakened, but they are still there, and they are being supplemented by new organizations, networks and ties.

In the light of our findings, future studies should explore the effects of communist-era interest organization density and diversity, and interest intermediation structures on post-communist civil society and interest intermediation development. Building on our work and Gallai et al. (2015), the differences between the vital rates and strategies of communist-era and post-communist interest organizations should be examined comparatively across interest group populations and countries. Whether and how these legacies affected democratization could be re-examined based on such empirical work.

The considerations above pave the way for the upcoming chapters. In Chapter 3, we explore how individual organizational populations developed in the post-communist period with a focus on major reform activity and processes of Europeanization, while also introducing the concept of density dependence. We then move on to empirical analyses of the influence of interest groups, in which we also assess the viability of pre-transitional organizations in the policy process.

Notes

- 1 Lowery and Gray (1995) include in their study on US state-level interest group density a control for the interest-group-system age following Olson (1982). However, they note that Olson’s hypothesis probably does not apply to the USA, “unless one assumes that there is a century-long time lag in reaching equilibrium or that population growth is open-ended and unconstrained” (Lowery & Gray, 1995, p. 12).
- 2 The terminology used by Ekiert and Foa (2011) is somewhat unclear: they explicitly write about individual organizations, but then also add civil society networks and social movements to their analysis.
- 3 Bruszt et al. (2010) include the distance from Vienna as a control variable in their regression analysis of the average number of dissident activities per year in communist countries between 1985 and 1989.
- 4 That is, superfluously employed people.
- 5 In Hungary, there was a 100-day communist rule in 1919, but it was eventually crushed by Romanian and Czech forces, and a restorationist right-wing authoritarian regime was imposed by the Entente powers.
- 6 Or the “happiest barrack” as Hungarians used to refer to their own country’s relatively less oppressive (after the 1963 amnesty, that is) “welfare communist” regime.
- 7 More so in Romania than in Bulgaria, where the opposition was stronger and the communist party more divided (e.g. in Bulgaria one of the main players of the regime change was an independent trade union movement, see Iankova (2002)).

- 8 For an analysis of the differences in the strategies of the opposition and the reform communists in Poland and Hungary (with a focus on the latter case), see Bruszt and Stark (1991).
- 9 The Slovenian registry only contains active organizations, whereas in the Czech and Polish registries one cannot be sure whether the organizations listed there are still active.
- 10 Furthermore, the last communist government introduced significant economic and social policy reforms between 1987 and 1989 (e.g. price liberalization, privatization, establishment of a two-tier banking system, easing of wage regulation and introduction of unemployment benefits) (OECD Hungary, 1991).
- 11 Fink-Hafner (1997b) also included profit-oriented enterprises in her organizational count. On this measure, again, Hungary would fare better than Czechoslovakia or Poland, as the Hungarian economy was the most liberalized by 1989 among communist countries except for Yugoslavia. Private activity in the agriculture and small private enterprises mostly in the service sector were tolerated (these entrepreneurs were called “maszek” in Hungarian, an abbreviation of “magán szektor”, private sector).

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