
Continuity and Discontinuity. Political Change in a Czech Village After 1989

MICHAL ILLNER*

Institute of Sociology, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Prague

Abstract: Political transformation of local society in post-communist Czechoslovakia during the two years that followed November 1989 was monitored in a village near Prague. The results of this case study are presented in the paper. The restructuring of political parties, social organizations and local government as well as the 1990 parliamentary elections are described. More detailed account is given of the 1990 municipal elections and of the conflicts facing the municipality. The institutional foundations of local democracy were laid during the two years covered by the study. However, the time of real local politics is yet to come as local society becomes more differentiated, the middle class is reborn and clearly defined group interests begin to surface.

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The local scene, especially that of rural and small urban communities, deserves as much attention in the analysis of social and political change in the Czech Republic after the collapse of the Communist regime as does the macro-stage of the large urban centers.

Rural and small urban communities have always played an important role in Czech life. The importance of the small community factor is underscored by the peculiar pattern of the settlement system in the Czech Republic, which is marked by a dense net of villages and small to medium-size towns with only a few big cities.

During the last two years, the local stage has been responding to the political and social change initiated on the global-level, i.e. mostly in big urban centers, in its own way and with considerable delay. This has been caused not only by sheer physical distance, but also by the different social and cultural profile and the different mode of functioning of smaller communities in comparison with big cities.

There are different possibilities for analytically grasping this change; the author of this paper has chosen the case-study approach. Events in a village near Prague are described to document the political transformation of local society during the two years that followed November, 1989.¹ Although difficult to

*) Direct all correspondence to Michal Illner, Institute of Sociology, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Jilská 1, 110 00 Praha 1. Phone + 42 2 235 78 58, fax + 42 2 235 78 88, E-mail soc@cspgas11.bitnet.

1) The case study was part of the research project "Transformation of Local Communities in the Post-Totalitarian Era" carried out by a team of sociologists from the Institute of Sociology of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in 1990-1991. Daniel Hanšpach, Eva Heřmanová, Ondřej Hubáček, Jiří Patočka, Zdena Vajdová and the author were members of the team. The main method used was the longitudinal observation of a panel of 35 municipalities (villages and small towns) based on diaries kept by local collaborators, on periodical surveying and on analyses of written documents. In two municipalities, one of which was N., the survey

generalize, the case study offers insights not attainable by a more quantitative procedure. In a situation of rapid change this is a considerable advantage.

The Stage

N. is a semi-rural community, some 25 kilometers from Prague, easily accessible by train. It has 2500 permanent residents and 570 houses. About 50 % of the active population commutes daily to Prague, the rest are employed locally - in nearby villages and in the adjacent district center. There is a fair proportion of white-collar workers with intensive extra-local links who import urban values, life styles and social innovations. Only a small part of the active population (7 %) works in agriculture, about one third in industry. Local jobs are available in a small factory, in quarries, agricultural cooperatives and in services.

N. has an elementary school, a kindergarten, a school for handicapped children, a retirement home for the elderly, a medical center, cinema, sports hall and other sport facilities, public library, church and a hall for cultural events. An empty dilapidated castle is waiting for its new function. Residents are serviced by a modest supermarket, four shops and four unattractive pubs.

Political life in N. before November 1989

Until November 1989, the only relevant political force in N. was the local organization of the Communist Party. In addition, there were also local chapters of the satellite parties - the People's Party and the Socialist Party - the existence of which was more-or-less symbolic. All important issues of municipal life had been decided by the local or district Communist Party committees, which communicated their opinions to the chairman or secretary of the municipal council - both Communist Party members.

The local government² had an elected body, in which the majority of councillors were Communist Party members, and an administrative office with three administrators. An executive board, headed by the chairman and assisted by the secretary, was in charge of the operating management of municipal affairs. The real decision-making was mostly done by the chairman and the secretary, both paid officials. The councillors had some real chance to influence municipal affairs by

was supported by participant observation of key political events and by additional interviews. The author is indebted to his local collaborators in N. for their help.

2) The foundations of the former system of territorial government and administration in Czechoslovakia - the system of "National Committees" - were laid down in 1945, and this system has gradually been molded into a soviet-type totalitarian structure, much the same as in the other former socialist countries. The main features of this system were a) the transfer of real decision-making power within the territorial units to the Communist Party bureaucracy, b) a centralism that excluded any authentic self-government, c) the amalgamation of the state administration and of self-government functions and structures into a single system founded on the ideology of "democratic centralism", and d) the dominance of vertically organized and centrally controlled economic structures (of economic ministries and their subordinate units) over territorial government and administration, which resulted in the general subversion of the territorial system of social and political organization of the global society.

their participation in committees authorized to give opinions and to initiate action in different fields (culture, health care, etc.).

The municipal government worked with mixed success and had some moderate accomplishments in improving the ecological situation in N.

Municipal elections were held every four years, the list of candidates was formally prepared by the National Front (a convention of official political and social organizations), but in reality by the Communist Party committee. The list was pre-structured into quotas according to sex, age, social group and the political affiliation of candidates. Municipal elections used to be a purely formal affair, more a manifestation of political loyalty than decision-making by the voters. Only very seldom were any negative votes cast.

There was also a net of relatively well functioning social organizations - the sport club, the fishermen's, gardeners', gamekeepers', firemen's and animal breeders' associations and the women's league - the traditional pillars of any local social life, as well as the not-so-well functioning youth association and the union of army friends. The leadership of most social organizations was controlled by Communist Party members. N. had its own children's choir and a monthly local journal.

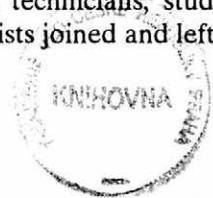
The municipality as well as individual citizens reacted to totalitarian malformations partly by bending to them, yet also by eroding and adapting them to their own benefit and by developing protective and substitutive mechanisms. As far as the citizens were concerned, these included disengagement from local political participation and flight into privacy, and the adoption of extra-legal methods and procedures - notably bribery and contempt of local politics and politicians.

The municipal government resorted to extensive lobbying for additional resources from the regional authority, to mobilizing the local Communist Party's support and to involving local enterprises and important personalities in local development. It sometimes also resorted to adopting shadowy procedures, including barter deals with potential patrons and extorting voluntary work from the citizens. The prestige of local politics had fallen, as a predominantly negative selection was taking place in the recruitment of local politicians. In fact, the term "politics" itself assumed a negative meaning.

Political change in N. after November, 1989

The events in Prague in November, 1989 were closely followed in N. and reported by the commuters. At first, no local action was taken and the local Communist Party as well as the municipal government were flexing their muscles. People sat by the TV or travelled to Prague to participate in the mass rallies but remained silent at home.

In December, 1989 the local Civic Forum was established and since that time the revolution entered N. From the outset, Civic Forum in N. was predominantly a white-collar organization, recruiting its activists mostly from intellectuals working in Prague (teachers, a philosopher, a historian, a nurse, technicians, students). There was no registered membership in Civic Forum, activists joined and left, only



the nucleus - the Coordination Center - was more-or-less stable. Popular support was measured by attendance at public meetings, which were rather frequent and stormy during the first months of 1990. As a rule, some 200-300 people came, ten times more than pre-November public meetings could have attracted. An immense surge of interest in municipal affairs was obvious.

Soon, the two former satellite parties (the People's Party and the Socialist Party) also showed new life, changing their leaders and attracting some, though not many, new members, most of which were elderly citizens. In the winter of 1990 the Social Democratic Party and later the Republican Party (extreme right) were established, again with very few members. The Communist Party has twice changed its committee and lost a number of younger members, but it has regained new people transferred from the work organizations. It has mostly operated out of public sight.

As a locally specific organization, "Society N." was established later in the year, with the aim of promoting local culture, the knowledge of local history and environmental protection. It appeals to local patriotism and tradition, stating in the preamble of its program: "Society N. is not a political association. A non-political, strictly local movement with quite concrete goals has to step in where political parties failed. While the party system divides, Society N. unites." This is the kind of argument frequently heard in Czechoslovakia during the early post-November period. It reveals a distrust of political partisanship and a belief in "non-political politics". The founders of "Society N." were a caucus of young intellectuals and a couple of skilled workers with strikingly innovative thinking. The Society initiated several successful events and became an important actor in local life.

Municipal government was reconstructed in March, 1990 to break the monopoly of the Communist Party. The change was negotiated between Civic Forum and the local Communist Party cell. Some 50 % of the councillors - mostly Communist Party members - resigned and new people were coopted into their places. The reconstructed council (45 members) consisted of 20 % communists, 20 % members of the two former satellite parties and 60 % councillors without party affiliation (including Civic Forum supporters). The chairman was a Civic Forum man, the deputy chairman and the secretary were communists. A few months later the chairman resigned after obtaining a government job. His successor was another local resident - a Prague university lecturer of mathematics.

A new chairman was elected in the local agricultural cooperative and a new director appointed in the kindergarten.

Municipal elections in November, 1990

N. witnessed two elections in 1990. During the parliamentary elections in June the festive mood of the "Velvet Revolution" was still surviving and the elections, as well as the preceding campaign, were more-or-less a demonstration of the rejection of the totalitarian system. The campaign was peaceful and the parties contested mostly by the number, size and colours of their posters. According to unverified reports, Communist Party activists tried to persuade elderly citizens with gifts and horror stories about the future under the non-communist government. Several

public rallies were held and the parties presented their programs on local broadcasting.

The turnout at the polls was 98 % and the Civic Forum scored a conspicuous victory.³

More important in the local context were the municipal elections in November 1990, which brought new life to the local scene after the sleepy summer. New local government had to be elected according to the new Act on Municipalities which renewed the democratic system of local authority in the Czech Republic.⁴ Also the elections themselves were conducted according to new democratic rules.⁵ Their official preparation began some ten weeks and the election lists had to be submitted eight weeks before election day.

³) The election results in N. (the vote for the Chamber of the People of the Federal Assembly) were as follows: Civic Forum 68.3 %, Communist Party 8.8 %, Christian Democratic Union 7.3 %, Social Democrats 4.8 %, Socialists 4.2 %.

⁴) The new Act on Municipalities (on the municipal system) was passed in September, 1990. The decentralization, deregulation and de-etatization of public administration were the dominant principles of the reform. In urban and rural municipalities, territorial self-government has been introduced. Public administration was separated from self-government. The municipality manages its property, establishes organizations and facilities, takes stands on the intentions of other organs and organizations concerning the municipality, maintains public order, administers pre-school facilities and elementary schools, fulfills certain functions in social welfare, administers and maintains local communications, public lighting, trash collection and street cleaning. It can also undertake entrepreneurial activities or participate in them and has some other discretions.

The reform has introduced a new structure of municipal organs. The highest is the municipal council (local parliament) directly elected by the citizens for a period of four years. The council has between seven and eighty members (councillors), depending on the municipality's population. The executive of the council is the municipal board headed by the mayor. The mayor and the board members are elected by the council from its membership. The board has 5-13 members. Municipal matters are managed by the municipal office consisting of the mayor (who is also the head of the office), deputy mayor(s) and administrative officers. In larger and in urban municipalities a municipal secretary is also appointed.

The municipality has its own property and resources. The revenues of the municipality consist of subsidies from the state, income from municipal property, local taxes, fees and dues, shares of taxes levied by the state and some other sources.

⁵) According to the new Election Act, permanent residents of the respective municipalities (with some specific exceptions), 18 years of age and older, can participate, both as voters and as candidates. Candidates may be nominated by "electoral parties", i.e. by registered political parties and political movements or by their coalitions, by independent candidates or by their groups. Elections are conducted by secret ballot.

The electoral system follows the rule of proportional representation. The voter can choose from three options: 1. he or she can select individual candidates from all the lists proposed; 2. he or she can select one of the party lists (electoral parties); or 3. he or she can combine both procedures.

The seats are distributed among the lists proportionately according to the number of votes received. Within an individual list candidates are ranked according to the number of votes they received - both as individuals and as members of the respective lists.

1. The actors

Seven electoral parties were registered and forty-two candidates were proposed for the posts of fifteen councillors. The highest represented social groups among the candidates were white-collar workers and professionals commuting to Prague. Seventeen of them were university educated, mostly in engineering. Their average age was 47 and eleven were female. Two types of candidates can be distinguished:

1. "Newcomers" elevated by the post-November political change, who were mostly professionals and white-collar workers who lacked previous experience in local politics. Many of them had never before occupied any managerial position. Their willingness to become local councillors was motivated more by universal abstract values (a feeling of responsibility to the community, the promotion of democracy, etc.) than by concrete locally bound interests.
2. "Old soldiers", mostly officials who held second and third-rate positions in the old establishment and were now willing (or interested), in their late fifties or sixties, to have a say in municipal affairs. They had managerial experience and expert knowledge but only to a degree corresponding to the low-level positions they occupied.

With the exception of Civic Forum and the Communist Party, all electoral parties were locally specific. Civic Forum proposed fifteen candidates, mostly "newcomers". They were young and middle-aged persons with secondary or university education, employed outside the village and without previous experience in government, but with a lot of enthusiasm. None of them had ever been a Communist Party member, a fact which was proudly stated on the Forum's poster.⁶

The Communist Party proposed seven candidates, mostly middle-aged secondary-educated people, some with earlier local government experience, many of whom were women. They were a mixture of the "old soldier" and "newcomer" types. Surprisingly, two of them had never been Communist Party members.⁷

Other political parties - the two former satellite parties (the Socialist Party and the People's Party) and the Social Democratic Party - formed a coalition which they called the Democratic Bloc. The Bloc nominated twelve candidates of the "old soldier" type. They were mostly officials (active or retired) in technical professions, all over the age of 50, with a somewhat rigid mentality. Several of them were members of the old local government or participated in other ways in the old establishment.⁸

⁶) The fifteen Civic Forum candidates were, on average, 37 years old, and three of them were women. They included one worker, three private entrepreneurs and one university student. The rest were professionals and white-collar employees (physician, architect, university lecturer, sociologist, chemist, social worker, etc.).

⁷) The seven Communist Party candidates were, on average, 42 years old, and four were female. They included one worker, one student, one pensioner, the rest were white-collar employees.

⁸) Among the twelve Democratic Bloc candidates there was only one woman and their average age was 58. Two were workers, three were retired and seven were active officials (post-office clerk, technical designers, railway technician, etc.).

A rather untypical actor in the municipal elections was Society N., whose candidates were in their late twenties (university lecturer, entrepreneur, head of a maintenance crew) and were probably the most dynamic and original "newcomer"-type personalities in the election campaign. Finally, there were the independent candidates, two of them running individually and a further three on a common list as an Association of Independent Candidates. All of them were the "old soldier" types.

2. The election campaign

Three weeks were reserved for the election campaign. Electoral parties organized public rallies, some of them jointly (six public meetings were held in N. during the four weeks preceding the elections). The series was opened at the end of October 1990 by a rally organized by the municipal government during which the election campaign was officially opened, its rules announced and the candidates and platforms of all parties introduced (about 170 citizens were present). Individual rallies attracted audiences of different sizes, with the largest number of people - some two hundred - attending the meeting organized by Civic Forum, while only about thirty visited the communists' meeting. The rallies had a similar program and did not differ much from one another. As the most successful was appreciated the joint meeting of "Society N." and the independents, where the main problems of N. were systematically discussed. Neither was there much difference between the individual election programs. The programs (they were distributed in printed form and also published in the local newspaper) contained many general, locally unspecific goals such as "To guarantee personal safety, protection of property, assistance in illness and old age for all citizens" or "To guarantee that municipal issues will be decided according to the opinion of the majority of citizens". The Civic Forum rally especially suffered from vagueness of presentation and from the inability of candidates to clearly define local problems. Its election program contained a lot of high-brow statements, non-digestible for most of the local electorate.

On the other hand, the programs also enumerated very concrete (and money-demanding) measures like "To complete construction of the new sewage system, to reconstruct public lighting, to find a new source of drinking water..." (one of the independent candidates), without specifying any idea how means and financial resources should be provided.

The most distinctly profiled was the program of "Society N." It stressed tradition and the popularization of local history, support of local businesses, urban renewal, local culture and environmental improvement. To quote a programmatic statement of one of its candidates: "My grandfather was local miller and owned the power-plant, he was a well-known local politician... My aim is to take up the tradition of my ancestors and to help remove the sediment of the last forty years... I intend to promote entrepreneurship, development of private sector... The more prosperous the local firms and local entrepreneurs are, the more affluent the municipality will be".

In general, the programs suffered either from abstractness or from exaggerated concreteness. They were marked by many moral appeals, romantic pictures of a happy community and positive references to the pre-war situation. Very little was said about how all the goals would be implemented, about municipal finances and the long-term perspectives and strategies of the municipality. Since the potentially conflictual issues were by-passed, there was little difference between what the individual election parties proclaimed. Their programs were more-or-less apolitical and it would be impossible to locate them on a left-right continuum. Rather than the programs, it was the personalities of the candidates which mattered the most. As a result, the election campaign was meek and mostly peaceful, without a confrontation of opposing goals.

Four factors contributed to the consensual, apolitical character of the election campaign in N.:

1. The immaturity of the global political scene in the Czech Republic as well as of local politics in N. one year after the revolution. Group interests were not yet clearly defined and the parties not profiled. They differed more in names than in programs, which overlapped a lot.
2. The central political parties were not able to think locally. They did not formulate locally relevant programs, nor did they translate their global goals into a language that could address the local electorate.
3. Most of the candidates in the local elections were newcomers to local politics who did not have previous experience in running local affairs nor sufficient knowledge of the local situation. They frequently were not able to define local problems and outline their solutions.
4. The community factor - the integrative influence of common local interests that tended to smooth out political cleavages and to dismiss differences among local electoral parties as something externally imputed - was very important.

3. The elections

On election day (November 24, 1990) 80 % of the voters came to the polls. When coming to the polls, most of them had already decided whom they would give their vote. Their choice was based on personalities, not on partisanship. They knew most of the candidates personally or through other persons and had clear opinions on their characters and abilities. The relatively complicated voting procedure was not perceived to be a problem. The municipality was divided into four precincts, each with one polling station (in a school, the sport hall, the motel and the training center for managers). The atmosphere during the polls was peaceful and orderly and the polls were carefully supervised by observers, ready to intervene in case of any unexpected event.⁹ About forty local citizens volunteered to be observers and organizers of the polls.

⁹ It took only fifteen minutes for a member of the research team to be reported to local police as a "suspicious foreigner", since he began interviewing voters who had left the polling station. The xenophobic instinct of local community in N., cultivated by the previous regime, has apparently survived.

The candidates of Civic Forum won by a large majority. The Democratic Bloc ranked second, Society N. third, and the Coalition of Independent Candidates and Communists fourth and fifth, respectively.

Election results in N. (for comparison percentages of votes in the Czech Republic are also indicated):

	% of votes		seats in the council
	in N.	in CR	
Civic Forum	41.0	35.6	6
Democratic Bloc	18.6	-	3
Society N.	14.7	-	2
Coalition	12.3	16.5	2
Communist Party	6.8	17.2	1
Independent cand. A	4.0	10.6	1
Independent cand. B	2.6	-	
Total	100.0		15

The quiet atmosphere of the elections was disturbed by a conflict that broke out on election day. The candidates of the coalition presented a complaint against violation of election rules. They objected to a local broadcast, wherein - two days before election day, after all campaigning according to the election act had to terminate - one senior citizen announced who were his preferred and non-preferred candidates. He also suggested that other citizens vote in the same way. This well-meant pedagogical exercise was considered to be an illegal influencing of the ballot. After several hours of negotiations with the district supervisory committee the complaint was withdrawn.

The new municipal council had 15 members, of which 6 represented Civic Forum, 3 the coalition, 3 the independent candidates, 2 "Society N." and 1 the Communist Party. Six councillors were university-educated, five had secondary education and four were skilled workers. With only two women members, the council was mostly a male affair.

In early December, after preliminary negotiations between the electoral parties represented on the council, the mayor and the remaining four members of the municipal board were elected by the municipal council. The discussions were not entirely smooth because the former partners - Civic Forum and Society N. - came to grips, both claiming for themselves the key posts on the municipal board. The new mayor was chosen from three candidates. He was aged 54, secondary-school educated and had until then worked as an administrator in the public sector. On the council he represented the coalition and was one of the typical "old soldier" characters. Of the remaining board members, three belonged to Civic Forum, one was independent.¹⁰

¹⁰) Two of them were university-educated, one had secondary education, one was a skilled worker. Their average age was 43.

N. after the elections

The municipal elections and the establishment of the new local government closed the busy period of the first post-revolutionary year. They were decisive steps in the democratization of the local political system and they meant, in a way, a return to normal business in local politics.

However, most of the other relevant issues of transformation in N. were still ahead. They included:

- the renewal of local private business;
- the privatization of the housing stock, of real estate and of some other parts of state property, including parts of the public sector;
- the restitution of private property confiscated by the Communist regime; and
- the reinstatement of municipal property, as well as other issues.

Three major issues dominated political life in N. in 1991: the conflict between the mayor and the municipal board; the split-up of Civic Forum - the winner of the municipal elections; and the first wave of the privatization of state property.

The conflict between the mayor and the municipal board's Civic Forum majority was fought over the insufficient flexibility of the former in coping with the changing environment of local development and over the running of the inner business of the council. The *casus belli* was the unbalanced municipal budget and the need to reduce municipal expenses as well as to pressure for an increase in the state grant.¹¹ The mayor was not very efficient in dealing with these issues and after a protracted conflict he had to resign. He was replaced by one of the independent board members, significantly again an "old soldier" type, an experienced technician who had worked in the municipal office for many years. Though born by the revolution, the council was quick to acknowledge the advantage of continuity and professional experience in the mayoral post.

The split of Civic Forum was the local echo of a process that was taking place on the national level. There, the movement which was the flag-bearer of the revolution quietly dissolved into two successor parties, one to the left and the other to the right of center. The issue, much discussed in N., was whether to follow this model or if, perhaps, to preserve the local Civic Forum - the symbol of the revolution and of the new local integration, irrespective of what happened in the capital. A conflict between the polarizing effects of global politics and the more integrative tendencies of local politics was taking place. The outcome was a compromise: the local Civic Forum withered away, but the councillors elected on its list stayed on the council as independents. A local chapter of one of the successor parties was founded but has not obtained many members.

Privatization was by far the most important change taking place in N. during 1991. Practically all of the shops and service centers were sold or leased to private

¹¹) Expenses of the municipality were estimated at 2,850,000 Kčs (1,140 Kčs per head), while revenues were estimated at 2,500,000 Kčs. Locally derived revenues were 600,000 Kčs (25 % of the total). The largest portion of expenses (1,600,000 Kčs) went to the local elementary school.

persons in public auctions and by other arrangements. The highest bid was obtained at the auction of a simple news-stand in front of the railway station (apparently this is where money is made). Several new private shops were opened. A considerable part of the housing stock and land that was nationalized after the communist takeover in 1948 or confiscated thereafter was returned to its former owners or to their heirs and families. The more complicated or controversial private claims are waiting for decisions by the courts. The municipality too was returned some of its original property - public buildings and some houses. Its claims concerning forest land and real estate are pending.

The symbol of N., the castle, which is depicted on all post-cards, is also changing its owners and will be returned to the church order that held it until 1949. It is a rather small order, which lacks financial means and is still deliberating what to do with its reclaimed property. In the meantime the desolate castle continues to dilapidate, while enjoying state protection as a historical monument.

All the changes in ownership rights and in the distribution of property are bound to bring about new, deeply-rooted group interests and change the social and political differentiation of the local society in N. which, no doubt, will be reflected in local political life. The time of genuine local politics is, therefore, yet to come.

The more serious tests of the new municipal government and of the municipal system in general are also yet to come. The new municipal council was endowed by law with a broad range of responsibilities, and is facing the high expectations of its electorate. Its capacity to satisfy such responsibilities and expectations is, however, seriously limited, mainly because its freedom to act in economic matters remains restricted. Until 1993, when a new fiscal system is to be introduced nationwide, the financing of local governments is provisional and the old centralized redistributive system has basically been preserved.

Conclusions - discontinuity and continuity in local development

N. is certainly no average rural village - its political and social climate has been strongly influenced by the nearby capital. In spite of that, the above picture well illustrates the character of local political transformation during the first two years after the collapse of the old regime. The story of N. demonstrates the extent and pace of the change and indicates also that these were just the first steps of a long and dramatic process.

There is no doubt that what we are witnessing on the local stage is a true revolution, albeit a non-violent one, a clear discontinuation of the previous system. Yet, at the same time, it is also possible to recognize certain elements of the continuity of pre-November patterns, suggesting that the change has not involved all dimensions of local society equally. While the formal institutions - political parties, the electoral system, local government, social organizations, ownership rights, etc. - were profoundly transformed in a relatively short time, the more informal aspects of local society - the political culture and values, social networks, the way of life, etc. - have been altered to a much lesser degree. A gap has opened between the pace of institutional and of cultural change.

There is, however, yet another element of continuity in the recent developments, though of a different historical dimension: the recent transformation of N. has sometimes been accompanied by the re-emergence of pre-war institutions, interests, values and symbols - or at least by their imitations - and by the comeback of some of the old pre-communist elites. Partial evidence of such phenomena was mentioned in the above narrative.

Several analysts of post-communist societies, generalizing on such tendencies, came to the conclusion that post-1989 developments marked the end of a historical deviation, bringing these societies back to where they had been before the communist takeover [Touraine 1990]. In our opinion, both the continuity and the discontinuity models of local development in post-communist society are one-sided. The "rectifying" forces of the revolution interact with the legacy of the old regime to produce a reality that, most probably, will be different both from the pre-November and the pre-war situations.

All in all, it can be said that the institutional foundations of local democracy - political pluralism and local self-government - have been laid since 1989. The new economic policy has opened the road for the re-birth of the middle class, local interests have begun to surface and localism as well as regionalism have spread as influential political movements.

Still, much more has to be accomplished. The following can be singled out as the most relevant barriers that have to be surmounted. None of them can be dealt with immediately, a longer span of time will be needed to do away with them:

1. The absence of a locally anchored middle class as the backbone of local political and social life. However, a still scanty group of private owners and businessmen has already originated in N. and tried to find its way into local politics. Many of them chose "Society N." as the appropriate channel.
2. The persistence of a political culture characterized by the separation of private and public spheres, by the passivity and alienation of citizens from public involvement, and by the expectation of paternalistic care from the authorities. The euphoric atmosphere of 1990 vanished after the elections and it has become again difficult to attract larger audiences to public meetings. The pool of people willing and capable to actively participate in local politics and to work in the new municipal government is modest and shrinking: eligible activists are being permanently lost to central political and administrative functions and to private business.
3. The absence of knowledge and skills concerning the operation of local government in the decentralized system and in the conditions of a market economy. The council in N. was caught unprepared when it came to formulating policies in the spheres of the municipal economy and environmental protection and was nearly helpless in matters concerning municipal property.
4. The political and administrative fragmentation of municipalities, which makes it extremely difficult for the smallest units to meet public needs and to run any

meaningful economy.¹² However, a spontaneous tendency to reintegrate on the basis of common interests can already be observed: municipalities of the region around N. founded an "Association for the Renewal of Towns, Villages and of the Landscape" focusing on recreation, environmental protection and local marketing.

5. The general weakness of municipal budgets, arising from the tension between political decentralization and the still centralized distribution of finances.

MICHAL ILLNER is acting director and head of the research project "Sociological Aspects of Local Democracy" in the Institute of Sociology, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in Prague. He also coordinates Czech participation in the international project "Local Democracy and Innovation." His research interests include social indicators, social and regional planning, urban and regional problems and local administration. He published both in Czechoslovakia and abroad.

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¹² In 1989, 96 % of the 4,104 municipalities in the Czech Republic had less than 5,000 inhabitants and 67 % less than 1,000 inhabitants. Their respective shares of the total population were 32 % and 12 %.