Transnational Policies of Emancipation or Colonization?
Civil society promotion in post-communist Albania

Luisa Chiodi

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of
Doctor of Political and Social Sciences of the European University Institute

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Abstract

The thesis discusses whether the western aid policy of Civil Society Promotion (CSP) in post-communist Albania constituted a policy of colonization with its direct penetration of the local public sphere or one of emancipation that pluralized the local and the international public spheres and created opportunities of transnational redistribution. It confronts the academic analysis of CSP with the debates emerged in the Albanian public sphere and looks at the reasons why the three different strands of denunciation of CSP as colonization identified (the problem of control, that of the technocracy and finally at the heuristic value of western categories) do not reflect the reception of the policy in the Albanian public sphere.

The dissertation reconstructs the different phases of CSP’s policy making in Albania and discusses why, after the initial welcoming of the policy, its outcomes in terms of growth of local NGOs have been widely considered unsatisfactory. What emerged from my inquiry was that the main criticism towards CSP that was raised in the Albanian public sphere was that its real beneficiaries turned out to be local NGO representatives themselves while society at large did not really benefit from the foreign support in the field due to its standardized way of dealing with the recipient’s context.

The thesis discusses the reformulation of the western policy making by local NGOs in connection to the post-communist troubled transformation. It confronts the different critiques to CSP with the efforts done by Albanian NGO to emerge and be recognized as civil society experts, civic innovators, and cultural mediators. The work concludes that CSP faces a circular problem: it requires a functioning local public sphere to be critically appropriated by the recipient public sphere but when it is mostly needed it is unlikely to work.
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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the implications of Civil Society Promotion (CSP) in the social context of post-communist Albania. CSP is the academic term used to refer to all those policies aimed at sustaining democratisation and reducing economic hardship of aid-recipient countries from the bottom-up by directly targeting local civil societies (Schmitter 1997). This policy has captured and channelled a certain post-cold-war spirit of transnational civil society: thanks to CSP many forms of transnational cooperation between civil society organizations of different countries are supported by western donors all over the world.

The conflicts in the Balkans constituted a serious blow to iredic hopes, yet at the same time they motivated thousands of ordinary western people to become directly involved in the region, in various capacities and for various purposes: relief operation, election monitoring, cultural exchanges, etc (Kaldor 2003).

Many people believed that it was possible to supersede the paralysis of nation-states and western governments during the various conflicts and worked to create social networks across borders demonstrating concrete solidarity with people in trouble. Local groups and associations fundraised at home and chez international organizations to organize direct support for neighbouring civil societies and contributed to relieving them from war, economic strife, the hardship of radical economic reforms and troubled democratic transformations.

Most western governmental donors and international organizations responded to this mobilization and supported this transborder civil society cooperation logistically and financially. Many donors, from small municipalities to large foundations, appeared for the first time in the international arena participating in the birth of the so-called ‘transnational governance’.

A central feature of the decade following the end of the cold war has been the increased transnationalisation of all spheres of economic, political and social life: local resources, decision-making processes and political opportunities have become more and more connected with dynamics.

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1 The term ‘governance’ is generally used to discuss the issues of power diffusion beyond representative bodies. In the case of policies of transborder cooperation, it includes the “decentralized cooperation”, that is to say the cooperation supported by local governments. I apply the term ‘transnational’ in opposition to the idea of ‘international’. The latter is the realm of nation-state and concerns problem such as that of sovereignty and security etc. The disciplines that study them are International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis.
across nation-states. As a consequence we have witnessed an explosion of literature addressing
globalisation, trans-nationalism, and the like.

While theories of globalisation have focused on the withering away of the nation-state, scholars
studying transnational dynamics have analysed corporations, migrant communities, and religious
identities. For the most part this literature explored identity relations while only few exploratory
works examined the idea of the creation of plural transborder publics beyond the single
homogeneous public of the nation-state (e.g Guidry J.A., Kennedy M.D., Zald M.N. 2000; Nanz P.
2003; Sackmann R., Peters B., Faist T. 2003). The debates around multi-level governance in the
EU, instead, introduced the issue of the decentralization and heterogenisation of polities.

In the 1990s, the vast literature on democratisation that traditionally focused mainly on domestic processes started to scrutinize the influence of international factors. Expressions such as ‘contagion’ or ‘export of models’ or the ‘international dimension’ of democratisation became popular, as did studies on western foreign policies in the field of democracy promotion and civil society promotion. Yet, for the great part this literature concluded that promoting democracy and civil society made a limited difference as democracy and civil society are properties of the nation-state and result from dynamics between local actors and institutions (e.g. Pridham 1991, 2000; Whitehead 1996; Schmitter 1997).

While most scholars are ready to acknowledge the diminished power of the nation-state, a few are convinced of the existence of transnational public spheres2 within which transnational policies can emerge. Yet, today an ever growing number of institutions such as INGOs, foundations, universities, municipalities, citizens associations and the like are involved in some kind of cooperation across borders, are active in initiatives in favour of victims of conflicts and economic hardship abroad and contribute to the formulation of transnational aid policies. In many cases, diplomatic or governmental interventions are not prerequisites for establishing contacts, formulating projects and carrying out initiatives. For the most part, state institutions intervene to coordinate, approve and authorize initiatives of cooperation that emerged elsewhere. Especially when the aid-recipient country is facing emergency crisis it can easily occur that transnational initiatives are established without any institutionalised consultation.

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2 A public sphere is commonly intended as the social space where citizens of democratic polities discuss matters of common interest, organize and form their own opinions, identities and preferences, and provide legitimacy to the decision-making of political authorities. The public sphere is mostly seen as the domain of communication and contestation that comes prior to civil society. Civil society refers instead to more specific forms of organization, mobilization, participation. Originally seen as one of the properties of the nation-state (Habermas, 1989), the idea of the public sphere today finds applications in the study of transnational phenomena.
The aid industry that emerged after the Second World War was framed in a nation-state perspective, both on the side of western countries, former colonizers exercising power and influence with their development expertise, and on side of ‘southern’ governments receiving credits, grants and technical assistance to modernize their newly independent countries (Cooper & Packard, 1997). In this respect, emerged from the 80s onwards, CSP constitutes a new form of aid policy that offers the opportunity to explore the transnationalisation of policy-making beyond the borders of the EU polity. CSP can be conceptualised as a transnational phenomena rather than a foreign policy as it foresees support to social actors in aid-recipient contexts and it mostly involves other social actors in donating countries below the governmental level. Either the formulation, the implementation and/or verification of the transnational policy is done by actors belonging to different polities and/or that are not part of governmental bodies.

When I initiated my project the literature on Civil Society Promotion in post-communist countries was scarce. The available academic and non-academic works were enthusiastically celebrating the idea of the promotion of intermediary groups in aid-recipient countries. Civil society was no longer the site of resistance against dictatorships, as it was conceived by Eastern European dissidents, but had transformed into the agent of democratisation and required support. Agencies of international cooperation of various kinds responding to social mobilization among western citizens, and contributing to generate it, extended aid-policy experiences acquired in the rest of the world to post-communist countries.

The scarcity of field research on the non-western side of the relationship contributed to spread a kind of myth around the idea of civil society and its promotion. The available critical approaches to CSP came from Development Studies with a longer experience in the field of western aid-policies. Gradually, critical approaches emerged in western public sphere and then tended to simply demolish what was previously enthusiastically celebrated. Today, what seems to prevail at the level of western public opinion is a dismissal of CSP and of its advocates as naïve, or worse as opportunists. In some cases this 180° turn was made by the same people who, having engaged in the field, ended up disillusioned.

As for post-communist countries, the initial welcoming of any form of cooperation with the west was gradually replaced by caution. Disillusion and cynicism, east and west, today seems a

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3 I apply the term ‘Eastern Europe’ mainly to refer to the cold war period. During the cold war the struggle for emancipation from communist regimes was also carried out with reference to geographical labels and dissidents claimed back the term Central Europe to refer to their own countries. Today central Europe is a part of the EU while the term Eastern Europe is used to refer to Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).
reaction to betrayed idealism and expectations. On their side, western donors and liberal democratic scholars, instead, continue to argue in favour of CSP, while incorporating part of the critiques that emerged in the meantime.

Indeed, the first literature was misleading when it proclaimed the dawning of a global or transnational civil society as signalled by the exponential growth of NGOs all over the world (Civil Society Yearbook). The explosion of NGOs, which has occurred since the 90s, has been widely related to the increased availability of resources from western institutions. International organizations, forced to respond to an ever more mediatised world politics with decreasing resources, frequently subcontract to private, non-profit organizations their projects. In this context it is frequently the case that NGOs are little more than donors’ implementing agencies nationally and internationally (Keane 2003) (Smith 1997).

This relationship with donors, has led INGOs to experience a process of institutionalisation and professionalisation that increases their visibility at international level, but which did not necessarily contribute to the development of transnational civil society (Pouligny 2000). Debates around transnational networks dealing with peace issues, ecology or human rights, highlighted, on occasion, how often NGOs in aid-recipient countries are western initiated or western financed and how often they simply pursue donors’ national interests (Clark et al 1998). This is not to speak of the emphasis on ‘beyond borders’ of part of the literature celebrating transnational civil society which hides the extent to which only western citizens have the privilege of freely moving across state-borders and restrictive visa regimes (Gruglel 1999)

The expectation of a ‘peace dividend’ after the end of the cold war, that is to say the hope that the decrease in military expenditure would allow the increase of budgets for international aid, was disappointed. The financial resources saved were used to rebalance state budgets in strain such as that of the USA, and while the Official Development Aid (ODA) did not increase, with the fall of the Berlin wall the ‘second-world’ countries became competitors with old ‘third-world’ aid recipient countries. What is worse, the humanitarian crises attracted a growing portion of resources available for transnational cooperation, showing a tendency to abandon policy-making in favour of relief work.

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4 The term ODA is used by the OCSE, among others, to define financial disbursements from rich to poor countries that it is supposed to reach the 0.7 GDP of the donating country. Concepts such as “third world” or “developing countries” are quite obsolete, since the disappearance of Soviet Union has cancelled the second world and its alternative development strategies, while many amongst the so-called ‘developing countries’ experience no economic growth at all. Alternative conceptual taxonomies currently in use are based on: the level of GDP per capita, the human development index, the civilization cleavages, the North-South divide, etc.
Despite the disappearance of the post-cold war enthusiasm, there are currently still various debates going on at different levels, from philosophical perspectives to purely sociological ones around the enlarged space of civil society beyond borders. Some more or less explicitly refer to CSP as a way to increase participation at a global scale but to my knowledge very little of this work has an empirical orientation, with the exception of migration studies (eg. Soysal 1994).

The idea of a public sphere beyond state borders is gradually being accepted when referring to the European integration process but it is not taken into account when studying foreign aid. Yet there are many instances of virtual and real cross border arenas of communication and debates around aid policies and beyond.

The discussion around CSP instead polarised around two positions: liberal democratic scholars support CSP for its positive contribution to help the societies under strain; they see western NGOs strengthening their southern counterparts bringing experiences, resources, and support, even though, as donating establishes a power relation between who gives and who receives, this relation does not occur in a power-free context (e.g. Van Rooy 1998; Grugel 1999:20). The detractor of CSP instead variously denounce it as forms of control and domination as it allows the penetration of the recipient countries’ public sphere, it forces already impoverished countries to reduce public expenditures in the welfare field, it worsens their problem of governance, and the like (e.g. Duffield 1996; Stubbs 2000; Pandolfi 2003).

Lately, the denunciation of CSP in the case of post-communist countries has been weakened by the EU integration process, a perspective that after 1999 has become real for South East European countries too. In this regard, Albania represents an interesting case-study as it allows the scrutiny of transnational policies in a country that is currently in the position of an ordinary aid-recipient but has the potential to be included in the polity of the donors in the near future.

My critical inquiry of the implication of CSP in Albania, contrary to today’s trend, does not suggest the dismissal of civil society as a concept or CPS as a policy, nor does it exclude the potential of such transnational policy-making. Certainly, as observed by Guilhot (2001), CSP is situated at the convergence between the antagonistic discourse of civil society and western foreign policy but, as I argue, it cannot be reduced to a policy of domination nor to one of emancipation (Hemment 1998).

What I contend is that CSP is enmeshed in a network of transnational social dynamics that require explorations beyond the limits of Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations. As much literature on transnationalism does, it is important even in this field to acknowledge the pluralisation of actors in the field and the hybrid nature of situations under scrutiny such as when
western donors dominate the public sphere of aid-recipient countries, IOs are run by ‘local’ personnel, and INGOs are in the frontline of ‘local’ democratic struggle.

My thesis explores the inter-subjective relations generated by CSP between on one side the promoters, namely “western” donors that donate, and on the other side the promoted, namely the recipient country. The empirical study of such relations is undertaken from the recipient side, considering for the great part the reception of the transnational policy in the Albanian public sphere, and especially among the first beneficiary of the policy, that is to say local NGOs in charge of developing a local civil society.

I apply the terminology used by development studies well aware of their limitation. In particular, by western donors I mean international organizations, western governments, western NGOs, foundations, etc. I do not put quotation marks around the notions of west and western donors, even though I highlight the controversial nature of these concepts and the oversimplification that they imply.5 I consider international organizations in the category of western donors since western countries have a major share in their decision-making.

As I look at such inter-subjective relation from the perspective of the recipient, that is to say the poorly studied Albanian public sphere, where western donors are perceived as similar to one another in their idea of Civil Society Promotion, I neglect the nuances in their approach and I focus on their common conceptual apparatus. Only occasionally, I unpack the notion of donor and discuss more accurately the differences in their CSP policy-making in the transnational public sphere.

Finally, I refer to western donors to distinguish them from the rest of the donors that are active in the field of international cooperation. In particular I do not deal here with the governments of Arab countries and the various Islamic foundations even though they are present in Albania and have been relevant actors in the debates around transnational issues. This choice derives form the observation, they do not conceptualise their policies in terms similar to CSP and should be the objects of a different study (e.g Bougarel & Clayer 2001).

The second subject, of the relation that I study, is the country that receives aid, notably Albania. Clearly the term ‘recipient’ used by development studies is questionable as it reveals an idea of the

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5 I could not find valid alternatives to these terms. I could not use, for obvious reasons, the least problematic of the alternatives that is to say ‘North’ and ‘South’, where the north is constituted by countries donating and the south by those receiving aid. The idea of East has been widely contested by dissidents in communist Europe struggling to be considered Central European against the division created by iron curtain. Now many in South East Europe many reject the term ‘Balkans’ as geographical definition that they consider derogatory. See Todorova (1997) and her criticism to the famous piece on the three regions of Europe by Jeno Szucs (1988) where she observes that central European intellectuals ended up trapped in the centre-periphery narratives. See as well Bianchini (2004) highlighting the main aspects of this debate.

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‘other’ as merely receiving aid. Yet, I apply it once again out of necessity acknowledging its problematic core and endeavouring to acknowledge in the recipient inner plurality, the variety of experiences that it contains.

Looking at CSP as the relationship between the two bounded but complex subjects, that is to say acknowledging their inner plurality, I meant to explore the relevance of transnational dynamics while keeping in mind their existence as bounded entities and located social realms. The available literature, instead, either takes the juridical fiction of the state as basic unit of analysis hiding the current turbulent changes in the international arena (e.g. Botticci 2002). Or in the case of post-colonial scholarship, focusing on diasporas, hybridity and translocalities and transnational phenomena, it neglects the role of bounded polities and disregards the urgency of transnational redistributions between them. In my view, acknowledging the transformation of the nation-state should not push us to neglect space and time as dimensions of lived experience as much as identity politics should not hide structural inequalities.

My ‘hidden agenda’ is to see whether spaces for transnational redistribution are being carved out. That is to say if CSP is just foreign policy closer than ever to colonial practices due to its penetration to the recipient public sphere, as some scholars argue, or instead if transnational public spaces are created and chances of resource redistributions beyond the nation-state exist. What my research identified as central is the role of inter-subjective relations in transnational policy-making. My inquiry into CSP shows that the problem of redistribution is tightly connected to that of recognition in the transnational arena, an observation well in line with the social theory debated during the last decade for nation-state settings.\(^6\) Redistribution requires recognition among actors within polities as well as among them. The connection and the tension between redistribution and recognition in transnational public spheres exist under much greater imbalance of power between subjects as compared to democratic polities.

The thesis is organized as follows: the first part that is constituted by two theoretical chapters introducing the object of my study that is to say the policy of promoting civil society in aid recipient countries. I present the main puzzle around which my theoretical discussion is organized; whether CSP is transnational policy of emancipation or a project of colonization. Here I discuss the main issues at stake in the literature and I anticipate how I come to the conclusion that CSP does indeed produce epistemological colonization.

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\(^6\) I refer here to the important debate around these two issues that involved political theorists and sociologists such as Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser, Alessandro Pizzorno, etc. Cf. for a recent appraisal of this debate Lash & Featherstone (2002) and della Porta & al (2000).
Due to the trans-disciplinarity of the work I deemed necessary to introduce terms such as hegemony, transnational arenas of communications, and the locality before I apply them in the analysis of my empirical material. The dynamic interaction between the empirical and theoretical inquiry has been for me the most stimulating part of the work but it is also the most difficult to organize in a coherent narration. Thus the second chapter concludes presenting the map of the identifying explanations that I drew in order to frame my analysis.

The second part of my dissertation is devoted to analyse the case-study in the light of the emancipation-colonization debate. I discuss the reception of CPS in the Albanian public sphere, for its rhetoric and practical implications. I look at what happens in Albania with the emergence of ‘local’ NGOs as result of the transnational social policy under scrutiny. I reconstruct the main phases of CSP in Albania looking at the emergence, growth and activities of local NGOs, their space in the local public sphere, and their relationship with the donors, the state and the society.

Finally I consider closely the issue of the enlarged social space where Albanian NGOs move and identities are constructed. As my ethnography of transnational relations was carried out in a post-communist context where deep restructuring state-society relations was taking place but also where a number of crises occurred, I refer to one of them in extended detail: that is to say the Kosovo refugee crisis of 1999. This part of my work gives me the chance to conduct a more detailed discussion of the limits and potentials of transnational civil society development and that of redistribution in the transnational spaces.

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7 ‘Local’ is a term often used to refer to everything related with the recipient country and it is opposed to the ‘international’ that pertains to every subject which is not local and that is active in the aid recipient context. This way a foreign NGO representative is named ‘international’ or alternatively, an ‘expatriate’ when his belonging to a place is taken into account. Let me observe here that it is often the case that a western NGO only established in one western country is called an international NGO. In order to qualify as INGOs for the UN an organization is required to operate in at least in three countries. However, a consensus has not emerged and those organizations working in a foreign country are considered commonly as belonging to the group of INGOs. From here onwards I will not use brackets when introducing these terms.
Chapter 1: Debating Civil Society Promotion

1.1 At the origins of CSP

Behind the concept of civil society there is an entire body of western political theory and it is important to recall that in different historical periods this theory had different normative and analytic uses. Looking at the meanings that the idea of civil society has taken up in the last few decades, one finds out that not only time matters but also space. Before the collapse of the communist regimes dissidents applying the term civil society in Eastern Europe referred to domination-free lives, autonomy, emancipation (Kumar 2001; Kennedy 2002; Falk 2004), while activists in 'developing countries' conceived civil society within a radical-democratic framework concerned with participation, self-management and redistribution of power to the grassroots (Alvarez et al. 1998; Yashar 1998; Taylor 1999).

Since the ‘90s, at global level, all other interpretations of the idea of civil society have been overshadowed by that of intermediary bodies between the individual and the state that contribute positively to the consolidation of democracy. Intermediary bodies have been considered as those institutions, distinct from political society, that develop around the state and are also distinct from ascriptive local-level social forces, but that engage with them to structure the society. They do not seek to replace political power, but act within established legal rules. Finally, they are capable of collective action in the promotion or defence of the interests of their members. Yet these structures are seen as trustee organizations that can transmit people's needs to their governments, thus avoiding the risk of high social mobilization (Schmitter 1997).

According to Ehremberg (1999), the predominant contemporary way of thinking of civil society in this period dis-embedded civil society from the political and economic sphere and created a neo-tocquevillian orthodoxy. On his side, Baker (1999) observed that the political theory of civil society has commonly been replaced with a ‘scientific’ theory of civil society with an instrumental meaning as a support structure for liberal democracy.

Nevertheless, one could conclude with Kumar’s (2001) history of idea of civil society, that due to the multiplication of usages of the term overtime, in open contradiction with each other, the remaining reason to study the idea of civil society in post-communist Europe and elsewhere now is in the field of international intervention.

Undoubtedly, the fortune of this idea of civil society in the 90s as analytic category in the social sciences and as tool of policy-making was exceptional. Academic literature, western governmental
donors, international organizations (IOs), and most international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), one way or another, referred to the same three or four academic books published at the turn of the 80s and that became the source of inspiration and the theoretical justification for CSP.8

In the context of aid-policies, the shift in meaning of civil society had both analytical and practical implications. The idea of civil society has been translated into projects aimed at sustaining intermediary groups, or creating them from scratch where absent, in aid-recipient countries, since they were seen as crucial for the stabilization of state-society relations and therefore for market and democracy to flourish. In practical terms, it implied that, for a period, western donors showed a growing tendency to conflate the concept of civil society with that of non-profit, or Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the latter received support to perform activities that range from civic initiatives to social work. Each donor developed its CSP approach but they share the idea that local organizations should be non-profit and distinguishable from political and state institutions.

By NGO I refer here to the most common definition of a non governmental organization as any non-profit organization. In practice in aid recipient countries, as NGOs are identified as one of the main components of civil society, they become one of the chief recipients of aid. Confessional charities and other grassroots networks receive western aid as well but it is NGOs that have its bigger share. Political parties, instead, are excluded from civil society and receive external financial support that qualifies as democracy assistance and not as civil society promotion (Carothers 1999b).9

Supporting NGOs in aid recipient countries implies reinforcing intermediate bodies between the family and the state; hence socializing people into democratic values and behaviour. The donors’ most common arguments when funding them are respectively that: first, NGOs articulate people’s interests and facilitate communication with state institutions. They are a tool for promoting stability in the recipient country, institutionalizing pluralism and collective action and limiting disruptive forms of social conflicts; second, in relation to the state, NGOs can be donors’ allies in the fight against practices such as cronyism or corruption that undermine development aid projects. They are,
in fact, expected to play a ‘disciplinary role’ by enhancing public accountability and the performance of politicians and administrators; third, NGOs can be an alternative service deliverer to the population developing a welfare from bottom up, closer to the people. In turn, NGOs can then boost public support for donors’ policies in the recipient country (Luckham and White 1996) INTRAC (2002).

It is important to stress that the practice of directly channelling aid to civil societies has only recently entered the agenda’s of the main western donors and constitutes an important paradigmatic shift. There is still no comprehensive history of CSP in the academic literature, but what is clear is that by the end of the 1980s, most International Organizations (IOs) and the main western governments active in the international arena agreed that liberal democracy plus liberalization of the market was the new strategy for development. For many years, instead, it was assumed that democracy was the result of the modernization process. Therefore, aid to developing countries aimed at generating economic development. Moreover, authoritarian regimes seemed more suitable in generating development because they control the social instability produced by economic transformations. Yet, this view was outdated by the political developments in a number of so-called third world countries from the 80s onwards when ‘third wave of democratization’ took place.

Moreover, for the first three decades of their economic assistance to the ex-colonial world, western donors had channelled aid solely through governments. In the 1980s, the unsuccessful results in terms of economic growth were attributed to the excessive presence of inefficient, when not corrupt, states in the economy. Since then, economic performance has been associated with the reduction of the role of the state and with the integration of local markets into the global economy. Structural adjustment programs (SAP) have been formulated to create a state that depends on the resources generated within the economy and avoid the manipulation of the economy by state patronage. Since these programs were accompanied by political instability, producing the impoverishment of large sections of the populations, poverty reduction strategies were introduced to support these societies under stress.10 Moreover, they were elaborated with a new focus on the need for people’s participation in the implementation of development projects, as a strategic tool to stimulate economic growth.11

10 This summary clearly suffers of oversimplification: ILO and the UNDP, for instance, had been following a different approach from the WB for a long period. Their concern over the satisfaction of people’s basic needs emerged earlier than IFI’s ‘safety nets’ and they still have a broader interest in the welfare provision than the IFI’s residual view of social policies. See: Mkandawire (2004).

11 See, for example, the conclusion of a World Bank study on participation and its effects in project implementation: Isham et al. (1995). Some authors view the rolling back of the state as a new possibility for civil society to express its spirit of initiative. It was particularly influential the work by De Soto (1989) who argued about the creativity of the Peruvian poor in dealing with the informal market in a declining state and advocated that the informal economy be given legitimacy and space
After decades of failed attempts to achieve development through autocratic regimes, donors came to the conclusion that it was not necessary to wait for development to bring democracy and they started to conceive of economic efficiency and a democratic government as mutually sustaining. With the beginning of 1990s, after many developing countries and countries in the former socialist block had undertaken a democratization process, the idea of promoting development from the bottom up was reformulated with a wider scope. Funding local actors for developmental purposes was thereafter associated with the idea of promoting civil society. The new developmental discourse stressed the need to promote civil society, conceived as intermediary groups, with the purpose of enhancing good governance (and/or democratization, depending on the donor).\(^\text{12}\)

Today civil society is a crucial target of donors’ projects of assistance to aid recipient countries because it is seen as a partner in the promotion of both democracy and good governance. A number of programs were introduced to address the weak points of the recipient countries' socio-political structures, and to put in place institutions that could help them move towards democratization or the consolidation of democracy (Schmitter and Brower, 1999). In practice, donors have been adjusting their approach all the time, since democracy promotion and civil society promotion are in fact works in progress, transforming incrementally (Carothers, 1999). At the beginning the attention was concentrated on election monitoring and civil education programs, but quickly shifted to broader strategies like NGOs monitoring state institution and then to the creation of a non-profit sector. As for recipients organizations, very often the same NGO that was financed for democracy promotion projects also received financing to carry out projects in the welfare field, especially in post-communist context where the situation has been particularly fluid and local NGOs avoided specialization to be able to bid to more donors in different fields.

CSP does not attract a great deal of financial backing since it is a relatively cheap enterprise compared to projects that finance the construction of infrastructures, for instance. According to World Bank estimates, about 15% of total Overseas Development Aid (ODA) provided by donors is channelled through NGOs. The problem with trying to define precisely flows of money to support the creation of civil society is that budget lines are compiled following different criteria. An NGO

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\(^{12}\) Given that, according to their mandate, the IFIs should not deal with political issues, they introduced the narrow technical notion of *good governance promotion* to define their policies of enhancing systems of public administration that would be open, transparent, efficient and accountable in developing countries. By contrast, the UN and the other Western donors preferred to define their new development cooperation in terms of democracy promotion. The relationship that these different donors have established between governance, democracy and development is not the same, but in their discourses these differences lie more in the emphasis given to one aspect over the other than on the underlying goal of promoting democratic good governance. Cf. (Leftwich 1993).
might receive money to carry out projects that have to do with social services, civic participation, anti-corruption campaigns etc and that are accounted under different budget lines.

The EU, for instance, calculates the Democracy and Civil Society Promotion as 0.5% of total aid to post-communist countries. In this case it is difficult to discern between financing addressed exclusively to local NGOs, and those for democracy building and the like. Moreover, part of financing to local NGOs has been addressing problems of governance and is therefore accounted under institutional reforms programs and budget lines (Ruli, 2002).

Yet, civil society is a key-word in donors' agendas and it is rare to find an IO document that does not refer it. Beyond that, civil society, NGOs, and CSP have been buzzwords in western media and in post-communist public spheres throughout the decade. The spread of interest in the issues was visible in many different ways, including the growing number of students enrolling in university programs dealing with democratisation.

Clearly CSP is not the only policy carried out by western donors, and this is especially true of Albania, one of the highest per-capita aid-recipients. There, local politics have largely come to terms with the foreign interferences. ‘High politics’ is constantly monitored in Albania and increasingly more so today due to the very first steps in the process of EU integration. At ‘middle level’ politics is also concerned with donors’ interference with the advising over university reforms or the protection of archaeological sites, to give just simple examples. But the lower level of influence is also considerable with CSP targeting society straightforwardly and exercising the most of direct form of interference in the local public sphere.

1.2 The problem with mainstream approaches to CSP

The enthusiasm for the 'third wave of democratisation' in the South and the collapse of the communist regimes in the East certainly contributed to build a consensus in western public opinion and academia around policies to support civil society. A cursory glance at academic studies, policy papers or newspaper articles reveals multiple references to civil society, its role and responsibility for democracy and the importance of solidarity and cooperation across borders. The predominance of the ‘Democratic Peace’ theory among IR in coincidence with to the end of the cold war; and the defeat of the competitive model to that of liberal democracy and market economy more generally within the social sciences has meant that academic ranks have converged on the idea of supporting civil society. Not least, the process of EU integration contributed to spread enthusiasm for bottom-
up integration and raised hopes for transnational resource redistribution (e.g. De Swaan 1997; Kaldor 2003b).

Thus, CSP policy became an important object of study in western academia during the 90s. In light of the popularity of the idea of civil society in the 1990s and the amount of studies financed by donors in order to assess the efficacy of the policy of promoting it, it is difficult to cover the whole range of names of scholars who have written about CSP. Despite the ubiquity of the topic of civil society and the need for its promotion, the initial research on CSP, particularly in the case of post-communist countries, focused on the type of donors’ policies, their disbursements, the role international NGOs.13 Very little was available in terms of impact of CSP in aid-recipient countries in the east when I initiated my inquiry.

In the last few years a few research groups endeavoured to invert the trend and also began to examine the recipient side. In most cases the goal was to see whether CSP made a difference and thus studies focused on the relationship between NGOs and the state, the beneficiaries and the donors (e.g. Mendelson 2002). Typologies of organizations and their capacity for penetration of the local social realm elaborated by these studies did not bring surprising results for development studies, nor for the studies of democratisation. The conclusions reached by most of this literature have been that CSP could not make a difference as the result was the growth of local NGOs, often uncooperative with state institutions, detached from their beneficiaries and dependent upon donors (e.g. Hulme & Edwards; 1997; Bebbington & Riddel 1997; Luckham & White 1996; Van Rooy 1998).

Among the innovative attempts at studying the impact on recipient countries there has been that of the research group at the EUI around Schmitter (2000). Drawing from recent trends within institutionalism, this group worked out a research design for the purpose. Considering CSP as a form of institutional transfer they identified two relevant dimensions when studying CSP: the instrumental and the cognitive. In this way they conceived CSP in its own terms since donors see CSP as a way to transfer an institutional model, with its organisational aspects, but also with its value transfer to sustain it. In addition, they stressed that it was important to consider the recipient of aid as actively adapting the transfer.

My own first attempts to study CSP in Albania were not distant from these but, after the first inquiry during the field-work I noted that the results of CSP in Albania were very similar to those in

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13 Cf. the bibliography compiled by Gbikpi (2000) in the framework of a project on democracy and civil society promotion together with Schmitter, Abele, Brower, and Guilhot. In this context, the paper by Brower (2000:5) on CSP observed as well: ‘Academics who have researched democracy assistance and produced a limited body of evaluation literature have not had much interest in looking extensively at the recipients’ perspective.’
most other aid-recipient countries in the world. No matter the background of the aid recipient the issues at stake were the same. CSP generates a spread of NGOs, that is to say as Hemment (1998) puts it, highly formalized bodies that appear in the public sphere and start operating under the constraints imposed by donors and governments.

In all contexts one of the main problems for NGOs is their relationship with donors, the external provider of resources and legitimacy. Some variation can be found in the performance of local NGOs according to strength of local institutions and the policies of government in power. In some cases, foreign funded NGOs become embroiled in local power struggles, particularly where violent conflicts emerge.

Finally, the origins of the organization can make a difference in the relationship with beneficiaries. Experiences of high and protracted social mobilization generally give the emerging organizations a legitimacy that newly introduced NGOs tend to lack. Yet, even in those countries where civil society had proven strong in the struggle for democratisation in the 80s, the period following the collapse of an authoritarian regime produced a generalized transformation of available organizations into formalized and highly professionalised structures (e.g. Taylor 1999; Flam 2001).

It is interesting to observe that one can find foreign funded NGOs in aid-recipient countries, often with the same name and type of project making. If one takes for granted donors assumptions and only looks at their local reception in Albania, as in most other aid-recipient countries, there appears a hugely disproportionate number of women and environmental NGOs; he/she will find out that local NGOs are severely donors’ dependent in terms of finance as well as ideas; that they compete with INGOs for funds; he/she will discover that the so-called ‘grassroots’ do not really join enthusiastically their activities even if this had been common practice before donors cooptation; he/she will see that NGOs entertain complex relations with political elites and are often in competition with state apparatus. All these results can be found in the literature that adopt donors’ parameters and look for outcomes of their policy-making. As a consequence, my decision was to explore the role of local NGOs only as a point of departure.

The issues discussed in the literature are similar all over the world, however this cannot be attributed to the homogenizing force of globalisation. Rather, it is donors’ standardized policy-

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14 Among the earliest book discussing the issue in third world setting is the book by Hulme & Edwards (1997) *NGOs, State and Donors: Too Close to Comfort*, whose title is already quite revealing.

15 My inquiry among Albanian NGOs in Macedonia, for instance, showed a context in which foreign financed intermediary bodies turned into actors of violent ethno-politics. In this case, among the supporters of the violent solution to the political conflict in 2000 were one youth and one women local NGOs (Chiodi: 2001). However, the observation that donors employ their resources to empower some actors against others is nothing particularly new for development studies. See among the many possible scholars discussing such case Chabal & Daloz (1999) in Africa.
making in the field of civil society that produce similar outcomes in all recipient countries. What I realized was that dominant approaches to the empirical analysis of NGOs’ role in aid-recipient societies, tell us a lot about donors’ involvement, but also hide many of the social configurations under analysis. Moving the interests from donors’ disbursement to the implication of their policies in the field, is like moving standing still. It is donors that envision the type of projects as much as it is in Brussels and Washington where one can find the answer to the question why women NGOs or environmental NGOs are so numerous in aid recipient countries.

For years, instead, discussions around transition to democracy considered foreign funded local NGOs as the main indicators of civil society growth. A few anthropologists raised critical voices asking “whose society is the one that donors promote?” (e.g. Hann 1996). Finally, by the end of the 1990s the mainstream literature around CSP incorporated the critique and questioned the equivalence between NGO and civil society arguing instead that they should be considered two different things and that it was a mistake of the past or of some other donors to imagine that they coincided.

In an issue of Third World Quarterly, Fowler (2000) suggested to cease dealing with NGOs as civil society representatives and argued that the assumption about CSP generating by itself a civil society was wrong. What foreign funded NGOs should become is instead civic innovators. The “tyranny of participation” imposed by donors on local NGOs irrespective of their competence and context tends to homogenize all their efforts. The alternative for Fowler is that local NGOs are no longer considered synonymous with civil society or as users and distributors of subsidies, but instead occupy a fourth position, alongside civil society, the market and the state.

The solution found by Fowler was a dignified way out for both donors and recipients. Donors’ ideas would continue to make sense. That which scholars questioned was simply that which, just few years before, could not be debated: the realisation that counting NGOs is not the most valid indicator for civil society development. Roughly fifteen years after the first official CSP programs, there was a growing perception that NGOs’ comparative advantages have withered away. Fowler’s analysis, appearing in one of the most important journal of development studies, pointed at issues such as NGOs vulnerability to aid trends, limited autonomy from donors, loss of public trust and civic roots, etc (-would also consider replacing ‘and the like’ with ‘etc’-). In this respect, it the

16 See as example how Freedom House measured the transition to democracy and the development of civil society in the 90s.
17 See for instance the discussion on the specialized web site where an IO representative claims to have an understanding of civil society as distinct from NGOs: “Many Western aid donors equate civil society with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).” http://www.advocacynet.org/news_view/news_232.html

Chiogi, Luisa (2007), Transnational Policies of Emancipation or Colonization?: civil society promotion in post-communist Albania
European University Institute
10.2870/25233
spread of a new lexicon was finally acknowledged, within aid-recipient countries, departing from the acronym NGO and revealing their scarce public recognition: there are DONGOs (donor-driven NGOs), MONGOs (money-making NGOs), MANGOs (mafia-led NGOs), FANGOs (fake NGOs), etc.  

While the outcomes of CSP are considered disappointing all over the world, western public opinion seems to remain interested in supporting local NGOs abroad. This would in itself be an interesting aspect to study. If intermediary bodies are supposed to be historical in nature and to be shaped by, as much as shape, values and meanings in a given social context, then the social context where to which local NGOs belong should be studied as transnational one. The growth and activities of NGOs result from standardized policies conceived by donors for all aid recipients and thus are revealing of transnational, rather than local dynamics.

1.3 Post-communist civil society: a ‘false friend’?

Highlighting the transnational links connecting recipients’ local NGOs and western donors should not serve to encourage neglect of the debates around civil society in many non western countries during the cold war. As already mentioned, this period saw Central European intellectuals at the forefront of bringing the concept of civil society back onto the international agenda. Their normative discourse of civil society pitted against the 'totalitarian' state suffocating the social body was specific to their historical experience and social context. After the failures of revisionism in 1956 and 1968, it was clear that these socialist systems could not be reformed from within. The promise ‘of making then normal out of the unprecedented and aberrant’, to use a powerful expression of Michael Kennedy (1994:44), was then located in civil society and its capacity to carve out spaces of autonomy from the ‘totalitarian’ state. These spaces were conceptualized as spaces of resistance and ethics against illegitimate regimes.

The anti-statist core of dissidents’ utopian conception of civil society to resonated in tune with most western donors’ ears, contributing to its success. Thus, one could wonder if the term civil society constituted a kind of a lexical ‘false friend’ between donors and central European

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18 It is worth underlining that these acronyms are used commonly to analyze the NGO sector in the west as well as central Europe or elsewhere and are not a prerogative of the Balkans or third world settings. Interestingly, Third World Quarterly discussed such issues thinking of a “beyond aid” scenario. In the Balkans the shrinking of aid is not a current worry. Rather, the region might see a substantial increase of financial support if the EU integration process continues.
dissidents. The latter’s idea of reducing the role of the state in society did not coincide with the neo-liberal agenda of foreign agencies in the post-communist period (e.g. Falk 2003). Dissidents’ idea of civil society addressed the challenges of a life-world under authoritarian regimes and for what concerned the future their “eutopic utopia” of returning to Europe, according to Kennedy (2002:50), was based on the idea of re-introducing what existed in their countries before communism and continued to exist elsewhere in the western world.

Many of the former dissidents successfully led the processes of post-communist transformation taking up political or public roles and came to terms with the constraints of economic transformation (e.g. Falk 2003: cap 8). Eastern European societies instead found themselves generally unprepared to face the consequences of the collapse of their regimes. In the first few years of post-communist transformation the opportunities to make informed decisions were strictly limited. As Janos (2000: 379) observed, frequently people supported given policies unaware of the consequences these might have at a personal level as it was unpredictable their future social location.

If it did not surprise anyone that the so-called transition implied the painful curtailing of welfare service provision by the state as budget restrictions were necessary to overcome economic crisis, in most cases the reformed communist parties were elected back to power in the second electoral competition showing public opinion impatience with economic hardship. A common donors’ narrative in this field was that post-communist citizens should get used to the idea that the state is no longer taking care of their needs from the cradle to the grave and that their atomized civil society should be revitalized after the regime experience.

The western donors’ idea of recovering post-communist societies from the past totalitarian experience that dominated the ‘90s originated in the cold war ideological struggles between the two blocks (Traverso 2002:87-102; 129-158). What emerged later instead was that rather than the lack of civil society, the most important negative legacy of the regimes was a negative relation to state institutions. Many critics of western interventions observed then that what remained in post-communist societies of original dissidents’ idea of the ‘civil society pitted against the state’ was the widespread confrontational relationship that citizens entertained with their institutions. If during the regime most dissidents had welcomed this as a sign of strength of society, in post-communism it seemed to constitute a drawback. In particular dissidents’ interpretation of the spread of the

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19 See par.1.4 for the other ‘false-friend’ in the lexicon used in the field.
20 In contrast, in the so-called developing countries, democratizing in the same period, it was said that people misinterpreted democratic transitions as a way of achieving social justice.
informal economy radically changed its meaning: from sign of resistance to the authoritarian regime to that of incivility (Böröcz 2000).

The relationship that post-communist citizens entertained with the state after the regime collapsed did indeed relate to the experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat (Holmes 1997). As in the party-state system the party was entrenched within the state, the rejection of one equalled the rejection of the other: the dismissal of one conception of the political made people equally hostile to any other institution around which the polity is organized.

However, the post-communist transformations played a role in strengthening this negative relation with state institutions. Not only the weakest among post-communist economies, but the same successful central European countries, faced serious problems, for instance in the privatization process since. This was because well placed people used their social networks to appropriate these processes (Bojcic 2004). Today many argue that the core problem of post-communism, that is to say reducing the role of the state in society, was superficially dealt with and institutional weakness turned into a problematic and unintended outcome of the post-communist transformation. Thus, the second round of donors’ policies and academic publications widely re-evaluated the role of the state often contra civil society, this time presented as rent-seeking, uncivil and parochial.21 In various cases scholars came to the conclusion that the emphasis of civil society made donors neglect the role of public institutions in granting the basic standards of citizenship rights and enforcing the new rules democratically adopted (Kaldor & Vejvoda 1998).22

Notwithstanding, post-communist transformation into liberal democracies and market economies have been accompanied with considerable engagement of western donors in post-communist Europe with policies of promotion of civil society, in the way that I sketched above. As a consequence there was a proliferation of NGOs spread in the region as was also the case of projects sponsored by donors in various fields: from civic education to social work.

All over post-communist countries, the dissidents’ emancipatory idea of civil society was transformed into an idea of ‘expertise’ and into a newly born semi-professional environment that

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21 It is interesting how the title of a conference sponsored in the spring of 2003 by the Open Society Foundation questioning the disciplinary role of NGOs: *Is civil society a cause or cure for corruption in Central and Eastern Europe?* [www.eumap.org](http://www.eumap.org) EUMAP is the website of the Open Society Institute's EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program. What is even more interesting is that, while underlining that corruption is one of the most serious problems in post-communist Europe, EUMAP’s call for papers suggested that there could be a contagion from eastern to western Europe. See Kopecký & Mudde (2003) for a discussion in political terms. Once again, third world studies were more advanced as compared to post-communist studies in this realm: Alvarez (1998) for instance pointed to the problem of parochialism of grassroots adding that they are often themselves in need of democratization.

22 The above mentioned change in approach does not apply to the welfare realm that remains neglected by western donors and that the same Central European countries saw radically curtailed see Waughan-Whitehead (2003).
came to be defined ‘third sector’ or ‘NGO sector’. This transformation of the meaning of civil
society, and the disappointments in front of CSP results, generated important debates around the
role and implications of the western donors’ interference in the post-communist public spheres. Let
me then examine in detail the critiques to CSP that emerged in the literature considering in
particular the problem of sovereignty in relation with transnational policy making.

1.4 CSP as transnational policy of emancipation or colonization?

The so-called aid-industry grew out of the experiment of the Marshall Plan and institutionalized
with the aim to support the economies of the new countries emerging from decolonization. The
denunciation of donors’ aid as a form of control or exploitation has accompanied all forms of aid-
policy since its inception. While supporters of the aid-industry would speak of necessity and
responsibility of wealthy countries to help the others, detractors observed that colonialism itself was
based on the idea of responsibility: that of the ‘white’s man burden’ (Karagiannis 2004).

The policy of promoting civil society in aid-recipient countries constituted a new paradigmatic
shift that made the debates accompanying the history of the aid industry continue. The inception of
CSP in post-communist countries, as well described by Hemment (1998), once again saw the
emergence of the two polarised narratives: the first one presenting the policy as a tool for
emancipation, the second considering the results disappointing and arguing that CSP merely covers
a renewed form of “colonial” project.

However, as Eastern Europe was interested by the dynamics of the aid industry only with the
collapse of the communist regimes, area studies were consequently slower to respond.23 In the last
few years scholarly contaminations have been undertaken and post-communist studies have been
enriching themselves with discussions emerged in “southern” contexts and have been contributing
to the debates taking place. Yet when I started my research area-study scholars thought it bizarre
that I look into the development field for inspiration.24 I was facilitated by the choice of Albania as

23 Although from the 70s onwards some of the “People’s Republics” borrowed money from the west to finance the
importation of technologies, during the cold war most communist countries were donors to third world countries. During the
cold war, however, Albania was always only a beneficiary of foreign aid that came as a result of “socialist solidarity” from
USSR or from China..

24 In 1998-9 only a few scholars timidly incorporated post-communist countries into development studies suggesting,
for example, that the East Asian experiences might have suited the post-communist economic transformation better than the
lessons drawn from the experiences of Anglo-Saxon countries. The trend is described by Ma (1998, p.349) who proposed one
of the first few articles combining the two fields, eastern European and development studies.
a case-study since, together with a few other ex-communist states, it had moved straight from the second to the “third world” and was listed among the Low Income Countries (LIC).25

For their side western donors that engaged in the promotion of market economy and liberal democracy in the post-communist world moved with the experiences accumulated in the third world during the previous decades. In particular, Bretton Wood institutions took the lead in financially assiting their transformations.26 This expansion of activities by IFI and UN agencies, together with western foundations and NGOs, from the post-colonial to the post-communist field is one of the explanations of the similarity of experiences with CSP all over the world.27

What I analyze in the next paragraphs then are some of main strands of the debate around CSP and generally around the nature of current forms of foreign interference in the local public sphere generated by western aid. Three are the main issues that I have identified in the discussions emerging especially from the literature dealing with the third world: the problem of control; that of technocracy and finally that of the heuristic value of western categories.

It is interesting to observe how some of the third world critiques to CSP found the opposite type of public in post-communist public spheres. Generally those that questioned western donors’ interference in the recipient public spheres located in the “south” expressed the concerns of local democratic forces struggling to democratize their countries, instead, as noted by Hemment (1998), in the “east” the detractors of CSP have been mainly anti-democratic forces, the underdog of CSP resource redistribution, and generally those that have remained marginalized by the post-communist transformations. What is more, these discussions in post-communist Europe are characterised by the fact that the intellectual underpinning of the policy has not been questioned.28 In the following paragraphs I scrutinize the three strands of the debate and discuss their validity for the post-communist contexts.

25 According to international statistics, LIC are the poorest countries in the world in term of GNP per capita. In 1995 a LIC’s GNP per capita was $765 or below. See e.g. UNDP (1998, p.225). Among the former second world countries listed as low income, there were in 1998: Afghanistan, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia Herzegovina, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Tajikistan. Currently, Albania is listed as a Lower-middle-income economy by the World Bank.

26 The role of EBRD in contributing the post-communist transition is debatable. Susan Strange (1998) calls it: ‘a pathetically, small, self-serving regional development Bank […] pretending that what was needed was a profit-making merchant bank.’ In any case, EBRD in Albania has always had a very marginal role in financial terms.

27 This is true for IFI, the UN, a few national governments and during the emergency crisis for the EU as well. Otherwise the EU established its specific budget lines and programs for post-communist countries such as PHARE and now CARDS.

28 In a similar way Janos (2000) describes the main political forces in post-communism as systemic and anti-systemic, meaning in favour or against liberal democracy. As the scholar observes, the latter does not propose a real political alternative to liberal democracy but rather they are seen as elites driven by desire of power preservation.
1.4.1 The problem of control

The problem of control is the main concern of critical theorists such as Robinson (1996) who looks for the political and strategic reason that motivated western government to change strategy from supporting authoritarian regimes to promoting civil society and liberal democracy. The donors’ paradigmatic shift is seen here as primarily driven by the desire to impose unpopular measures, the structural adjustment programs, on recalcitrant populations.

In this regards, scholars such as Hearn (1999) identify in the local NGOs supported by western donors a small but influential section of society that contributes to shape the local understanding of democracy in liberal democratic terms and to accept neo-liberal economic policies. These key actors are seen as the western donors’ tool for the penetration of the local public sphere, with limited financial investments, the former guarantee to themselves the most successful way to discipline their third world interlocutors.

Furthermore, in contrast to the mainstream literature on democracy promotion, critical theorists underline that the west, being more interested in stability than democracy, very often hinders chances for social organization and true democratization in the South.29 What it is generally argued is that western donors promote low intensity democracies to relieve pressure from subordinate groups that seek for more fundamental political, social and economic changes. Thus, they oppose a conceptualization of civil society drawn from Gramsci, who viewed the latter as the realm in which the existing social order is grounded, but also underlined its emancipatory potential. Critical theorists endorse this double connotation and consider civil society as the arena of oppression but also the site of struggle and resistance.30

Basically the confrontation between liberal democrats and critical theorists around CSP reproduces the old debate on formal versus substantive democracy. However, in post-communist Europe this debate could hardly re-emerge. For decades Communist regimes celebrated their

29 The neo-gramscian Robinson (1996) undertakes an extensive research, with numerous empirical data and different case studies, on how the USA governments undermined mass aspiration for democratization in a number of countries in the implementation of their policies of democracy and civil society promotion.

30 Among the most important Cox (1999) underlines then that civil society from the bottom up is the realm where those who are disadvantaged by globalization of world economy can mount their protests and seek for alternatives; while in the top down sense instead it is the agent for the stabilization of the status quo. Again in Gramsci’s terms, Cox envisages a war of position, such as a long term construction of self-conscious social groups into a concerted emancipatory block within the society.
achievements, stressing how they assured the social rights that capitalism denied; conversely, the dissidents that long struggled for political and civil rights under the authoritarian regimes could not underestimate the importance of democratic procedures.

Today formal democracy is widely viewed by democratic forces in the region as the first indispensable step necessary to enjoy social rights as well. Rather the problem of formal democracy versus substantive democracy is often seen as that of going beyond the simple introduction of new democratic provisions and achieving their full implementation (Kaldor & Vejvoda 1998). Moreover what dominated the post-communist decade was a widespread aspiration to reintroduce the market seen as better in allocating resources than any other form of organization of economy, while painful economic reforms were generally seen as an inevitable step to achieve western-style prosperity (Janos 2000).

With the idea of “returning to Europe” dominating post-communist public spheres the debates that emerged concerned rather the ambiguity of western donors when privileging stability to democracy, but initially did not look specifically at CSP, nor were they active in the denunciation of the domination it might entail. Rather, what was criticized initially was the lack of interest on the side of western countries engaging wholeheartedly in helping post-communist recovery (Wedel 2000). Such discussions intensified in particular during the war of dissolution in former Yugoslavia for the lack of western intervention (Woodward 1995).

With the NATO involvement in the Kosovo conflict in 1999 debates changed direction and the issue of the political use of humanitarian crisis came to the fore. After years of celebration of transnational activism beyond borders, the debate returned to the problem of western vested interests. Liberal scholars had stressed for years the positive historical antecedents to current transnational struggles such as that of abolitionist movement (Keck & Sikkin, 1998). The scrutiny of the humanitarian interventions in the XIX century, though, highlighted how the latter originated in western elites mobilization, required lobbies able to mobilize the press to persuade governments to intervene and easily became tools in the hands of the foreign policy of western countries. However, as there is no historia magistrate vitae there was no determinism in considering social

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31 This opposition of social rights defended by socialist regimes versus the political and civil rights of the capitalist systems dominated the debates during the cold war especially around the 70s when the CSCE reached the Helsinki Agreements. Albania did not participate in this international Conference and yet the propaganda argued in a similar fashion.

32 Kaldor (1998:200) recalls how difficult the transnational dialogue between east and west in the 80s was. For many activists in the west regarded the discourse of human rights as merely the rhetorical tool of the Cold Warriors, the hypocritical language of leaders like Thatcher and Regan used to justify ever more armaments. In Central Europe instead dissidents carried out legalistic struggles in the countries for the respect of the civil and political rights that they were denied.

33 On this point, I thank Davide Rodogno who is working on a research project at the LSE on historical precedents of humanitarian intervention.
mobilization across borders as deemed to become tool of domination, with the exception of those scholars who argued about structural determinants of such detours (Guilhot 2001).34

Along these lines, a group of western scholars contended that CSP constituted a problematic breach of sovereignty that by advocating civil society allowed the curtailing of the welfare state in the region. For the main western donors, they stressed, involved the state was to be curbed well beyond the privatization of the main economic sector, with the significant downsizing of social protection. In addition to this it these scholars argued that western neoliberal agendas worsened the legacy of socialist state organisation in this field with foreign funded NGOs by-passing local institutions and contributing to the further weakening of state capacity (Duffield 1996); (Beacon and Stubbs 1998); (Stubbs, 2000) (Pandolfi 2002).35

However, the problem faced by these critiques has been that in most post-communist countries public opinions have largely been appreciative of western donors’ advice and the need for restructuring social protection was widely endorsed in the post-communist public spheres (e.g. Nelson 2001). While on the other side, the denouncers of local NGOs as Trojan horses of western interests have often been local anti-democratic forces, populist, nationalist or national-communist.36

Among the scholars that debated the emancipation/colonization dichotomy, the anthropologist Sampson (1996; 2002) provided a popular scholarly-wise definition of CSP as a ‘world of project’. His focus originally was upon the local reconfiguration of the various resources - material, organizational, human and symbolic - made available by donors’ projects and how local actors learn to master CSP language and symbols. His insights resulted from the combination of his academic background as anthropologist and the long field experience as a practitioner in the Balkans starting from Albania.37 Sampson’s central idea is that, in situations of profound uncertainty such as that of the post-communist transformation, CSP make money available to replicate models of western experiences. The projects that donors finance give a concrete existence to concepts such as social capital or civil society a concrete existence, or in Sampson’s terminology these activities called

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34 This is what Guilhot (2001) does in the case of his sociology of ‘democracy experts’. In his account of the personal trajectory of activists that defended democracy and pleaded for western donors engagement in its support, he traces how they reached top-decision levels, in governments or in international institutions remaining trapped in ‘structural logic’ of capitalism. Guilhot connects his work to that of Boltanski and Chiappello on the new spirit of capitalism (1999). Other attempts to provide structural explanation include Duffield (1996) and his emphasis on the new wars and globalization.

35 Originally the argument around state sovereignty was brought up by Africanists who observed that the deficit of legitimacy of many African states was worsened by foreign aid policies aimed at reducing the role of the state in society. See Bayart (1996); Chapham, (1996).

36 Ideas of the nation-state as the only locus of democratic struggle in post-communist Europe are often ethno-nationalist conceptions of the polity where one group imposes itself over the other. See later on this point.

37 Sampson’s analysis should not be taken as the sign of Albanian peculiarity rather according to Hann (1996), the editor of the widely quoted book in which Sampson’s first article on the issue was published, the Albanian situation is perhaps the most extreme variant of a pattern that is general throughout Eastern Europe.
projects give civil society a “social life”. Disposable wealth –notes Sampson- derives from foreign donors but it ‘requires strange jargon, and a host of rituals and ceremonies in which inequality between west and east masquerades as “partnership” or “coordination”’ (Sampson, 1996).

Despite his interests in unveiling the unbalanced power-relation in the CSP field Sampson later on concluded that this “world of project” is about “benevolent colonialism” (2002:32). Jumping into the emancipation or colonization debate, the latter introduced this oxymoron to observe that the aim of CSP is not exploitative in that power is exercised in a well-intentioned way ‘to provide a climate of security and stability in the Balkans’. However, for Sampson, the implication of power-relations created by CSP are not only of a political but also of a cultural nature. For the anthropologist in the context of extreme insecurity in which CSP takes place, despite the good intention, the relationship is disruptive. Yet, this is to be connected with the difficult experience with the post-communist transformation.

If the issue of control established by CSP in post-communist contexts was balanced by the aspiration to be integrated in the western political space, there are two more aspects raised by the discussion on emancipation and colonization that are of interest for this work and that require careful examination.

### 1.4.2 Politics or anti-politics

The second critique to CSP points to the problem of technocracy. In this case there emerges a second lexical ‘false-friend’ that allows me to discuss further the problem of emancipation versus colonization. A synonym to the term civil society introduced by the polish dissident Konrad was that of ‘anti-politics’. Once again, this phrase had a positive meaning as it defined the strategy of resistance against the oppressive communist states.

What it is interesting to note is that the same term anti-politics was applied by scholars belonging to the Anti-Development School\(^\text{38}\) to articulate a radical critique to aid-policies. The term, made popular by Ferguson’s seminal book ‘the anti-politics machine’ (1990), had a negative connotation and questioned donors’ transformation of recipient countries’ political struggles into

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\(^{38}\) This critical school emerged from within Development Studies. Their core criticism is that concept of development should be interpreted as synonym for the westernization of the world, Sachs (1992), and that it constitutes in itself a strategy of domination, DuBois (1991).
objects of technical nature. Anti-developmentalists analyze aid-policies in terms of foucauldian
knowledge-power regimes and apparatus of control applying discourse analytic approach.

If one reads CSP in Ferguson’s terms it appears that the anti-political machine of the donors
manage to appropriate the long lasting and multifaceted idea of civil society transforming it into a
tool for soft-technologies of social engineering. Anti-politics no longer expresses freedom from the
party-state here, it speaks of the authoritarian nature of technocratic rule.

Like critical theorists, anti-developmentalists consider the regaining of political space to be a
central issue. Here politics is seen as menaced by technocracy rather than by control. In addition,
critical theorists retain a strong narrative of emancipation while anti-developmentalists react to any
grand narratives such as that of development that they consider, as any other modernist narratives,
to be the result of a western project of domination.

As we shall see in the analysis of CSP in the Albanian public sphere, the interesting short-circuit
that is produced applying Ferguson to post-communist context is that here technical expertise has
been highly valued after the experience of the ideocratic regime. The excesses of politics,
interpreted as ideology, generate strong appreciation of anti-politics in Albania. As much as most
people saw the market as the best allocator of resources in opposition to the failed planned
economy, expertise has been largely seen in opposition to the ideological past.

Not the least, as I shall describe in the second part of the thesis, the pursuit for expertise in post-
communism is related to a hope for peaceful transformation against fears of violent conflicts. The
anti-political critique, instead, highlights how CSP’s idea of civil society is a 'normalized' one in
which conflict and contentions are avoided and harmony is generated (e.g. Foley and Edwards
1996). CSP itself is seen as the representation of this desire to avoid the divisiveness of conflict,
along different socio-political, economic or cultural cleavages. However, it is stressed, all these
elements are keys to an understanding of the process of democratization in western countries as
scholars of social movements, contentious politics and social mobilizations well know (e.g. Tarrow
1994; Melucci 1988; Tilly 1996). It is certainly important to demystify the debates around civil
society in western countries on the basis of historical evidence in order to avoid occidentalist
traps.39

39 I apply here Carrier’s (1991) idea of occidentalism as the reverse of orientalism: an essentialist, this time positive,
rendering of the west by members of alien societies together with the essentialist reading of the self.
In addition, when conflict emerges in aid-recipient countries, it is equally important to bear in mind that it will not reproduce western paths. The recipient of aid will have its specific experience, regardless of our expectations or political ideas.\textsuperscript{40} The post-communist Europe has a different experience with violence and it would be a paradox if the critique of western renewed drives for colonization were done by straightforwardly shifting interpretative tools generating new forms of domination via misrecognition.\textsuperscript{41}

Critiques of the technology of power have been very popular among western European radical scholarship and social movements since the 70s. Organized modernity, in which the communist challenge was inscribed, was the target of social movements after 1968. The so-called ‘new social movements’ analyzed by Melucci (1998) struggled on symbolic grounds and rendered visible the power hidden behind the rationality of administrative or organizational procedures as much as behind the “show-business” aspect of politics.

The acknowledgement of the modernity of communist systems was widely and wrongly underplayed by liberal scholars after its collapse, as we shall see below. However, Konrad’s critique to the anti-political power of the totalitarian communist regimes emerged in parallel to that developed in the west and targeted a much more capillary mechanism of bureaucratic control. Just like liberal-universalists, radical scholars criticizing the anti-political nature of CSP, often neglect the specificity the communist as much as of the post-communist experiences. Under communist regimes, the role of the state and its bureaucracy was greater than that of capitalist states. What Ken Jowitt (1992) effectively labelled the ‘leninist legacy’, that is to say the experience of the party-state, needs to be taken into account when considering the lack of legitimacy of the state apparatuses amongst the citizens of former communist countries. At the same time, one should consider that post-modern critiques to modernist narratives generally do not find receptive publics here, despite the extremes reached by socialist regime with their projects of modernization.

In addition, as I argue later, the widespread appreciation of western technocratic know-how cannot be grasped without a careful consideration of the transnational dynamics that shaped the

\textsuperscript{40} See for instance Flam who in her “uncomfortable conclusions” observes that, rather than feminist, environmental and human rights groups that western scholars look for, what really mobilizes post-communist public opinions are “quasi-restitutive” social movements. Alternatively Kopecky & Cass (2003) wonder whether the latter should be considered examples of “uncivil civil society”. These issues are currently under scrutiny well beyond post-communist Europe as in the case of Chakrabarty working on social movements in contemporary India (Chakrabarty 2004).

\textsuperscript{41} See instead later for the debated on Todorova’s (1997) idea of Balkanism and its difference from Orientalism in relation with the colonial experience.
post-cold war context. In the Albanian public sphere, the idea of foreign know-how has been widely appreciated and considered necessary to overcome the hardships of transition.

Ramifications of the issue of anti-politics are present in the debates around INGOs and their managerial turn. Western NGOs, considered as the first advocates of transnational solidarity, those that supported activists in the South and dissidents in the East, are seen as increasingly vulnerable to cooptation by western governments and international organizations. Moreover, despite the character of the rhetoric of exchange and dialogue between organizations of different countries, noted once again by Sampson (1996), the practice that sustains CSP is for the great part based on the idea of expertise. The common explanation for the spread of managerialism is that it is due to the ideological void of the post-cold war era and that it affects the organizations embodying the greatest hopes for the growth of transnational politics. Finally, this literature generally consider the anti-political culture of local NGOs as resulting from the relationship with foreign counterparts and generally with donors themselves.

Heller (2001) offers an interesting interpretation of the technocratic view of the world that donors display in their aid policies, which he considers as a form of utopian rationalism, informed by a highly de-politicised idea of expertise transforming the world. The mirror image of the technocratic utopia, he argues, is the anarco-communitarian utopia of the bottom up, where democracy can be nurtured solely from below such as in the case of anti-developmentalists. As I discuss in the analysis of my case study, Albanian local NGO representatives, were more influence by the first utopia rather then the second: the idea of technocratic management of social issue was largely more appreciated than the democratizing role of social movements due to their complex relation with their grassroots and the experience with a troubled post-communist transformation.

Finally, the problem with such a critique of anti-politics is that it closes the door to any form of resource redistribution as this is seen as constantly reproducing mechanism of disempowerment. As noted by Cooper & Packard (1997) as well as Nederveen Pieterse (2000) there is a convergence between the Anti-Development School and some Neo-liberist in their radical critique of ODA: they

42 Most account of the origins of CSP from the XIX century onward describe it as the result of the build up of different transnational initiatives by NGOs and provide examples such as the birth of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1839. See for instance: (Gruelgel 1999); (Smith et al. 1997).

43 Guilhot's (2001) works focuses on the analysis of the ‘democracy experts’ and more generally the democracy promotion phenomenon. I am interested instead in the narrower topic of civil society and its promotion and the outcomes in the field from the side of the recipient countries.

44 Humanitarian crisis have attracted a great deal of attention and criticism in this sense. In Italy there have been sharp debates around the issue of professionalization and its shortcoming in the last few years (Marcon, 2002); (Bazzocchi, 2003). Interesting debates have been taking place on the web: www.osservatoriobalcani.it for an Italian case that devoted much space to the discussion around international cooperation. One can find on the web many case of web journals that tackled the issue. For a French speaking site see: http://multitudes.samizdat.net/article.php3?id_article=266

Chiodi, Luisa (2007), Transnational Policies of Emancipation or Colonization?: civil society promotion in post-communist Albania
European University Institute
10.2870/25233
both advocate the abandonment of the hopes of transnational resource redistribution in favour of the valorization of underspecified local resources in the first case or in favour of the market’s invisible hand in the second.

Yet, looking at the newly emerging debates and policies within the EU, one finds the same problems with technocracy. Thus, one might argue that the problem with technocracy is not related to donors-recipient relations but rather with the ‘nature’ of institutions and their capacity to transform social phenomena into manageable objects. However, as discussed in the previous paragraph, CSP is a western project implemented in every recipient country all over the world and, as we shall see later, in the Albanian public sphere its standardized approach has been held responsible for the disappointing results. Here lies the ambivalence in relation to technocracy that one can find in a post-communist country such as Albania: on the one hand technocracy is seen as a better option than politics, after the experience with the ideocratic regime, on the other hand the technocratic indifference to local specificities is deeply resented. Yet the two sides of technocracy, as I shall argue later, are not seen as belonging to the same coin.

1.4.3 Epistemological colonization

The third critique to CSP looks at its intellectual underpinning and highlights the issue of epistemological colonization. The main source for this discussion has been the Post-colonial literature which raises the problem of the translatability of western concepts. Great emphasis has been placed on the problem of epistemological domination and ordering of worth of Eurocentric social sciences. Post-colonial scholars have highlighted how the un-reflexive moving to other contexts of the social-scientific categories grown out of one historical experience, systematically produces representations by default, inadequacies and incompleteness (e.g. Ghandi 1998).

This type of critique was almost entirely absent in the post-communist area for obvious reasons: Eastern Europe had not been colonized by its western neighbours and the European continent shared the same intellectual space. When capitalist modernization overtook Europe, the debates

45 For a critique to the critique of Eurocentrism of social science see McLennan (2000) (2003).
46 Rather then epistemological critiques, in the region the most common response are that of conspiracy theories, something connected with the long histories of small states whose regional hegemonic project were hampered by bigger European powers themselves interested in controlling the region.
that emerged about economic backwardness did not divide the continent along east-west axis: the backwardness was equally discussed in southern Europe.47

It was the communist catch-up that created distinct histories in central and eastern Europe during the XX century and it was the demise of the communist regimes that rendered actual the post-colonial debate on epistemological colonization. For central Europe only isolated voices, such as Böröcz’s (2001) with his analysis of the EU enlargement, suggested that the notion of coloniality could find application in the post-cold war transformation of Europe. Böröcz argues that, in this scenario, cognitive colonial relations, “flourish, paradoxically, not in spite, but because of the absence of a specific colonial history” (2001:35). That is to say, categories can be blindly applied to post-communist Europe rendering it inferior and prejudices can be reproduced without major discussion as local scholars generally do not see the problem of epistemological colonization.

Yet, in the last few years, the academic discussion around the epistemological colonization of the Balkans has been growing, widely benefiting from contaminations of the post-colonial critique. The groundbreaking book of Todorova (1997) in particular introduced the debate about the specific variation of Orientalism48 constituted by the Balkans. According to Todorova, the Balkans represent Europe’s mirror image, its dark side, the space of the barbarian, violent other. As Bjelić & Savic (2002) stressed too, the Balkan region was never colonized in the modern sense but the non-colonial hegemonic nature of the relationship that where “balkanism” originates.

The problem with the debates around colonialism, eurocentrism, balkanism and orientalism is that they produce the deadlock of all foucauldian critique of power, included the anti-political critique seen before: as the power divide cannot be overcome, there is no possibility to envisage transnational communication, let alone redistribution of any sort. Predictably, Todorova’s same illuminating analysis on the history of the disparaging European discourse on the Balkans shares the closures of western hegemony’s predicament when the scholar observes that it: ‘releases the “civilized world” from any responsibility or empathy that it might otherwise bestow on more “reasonable people”’.

What this conclusion does not take into account is the massive mobilization among western citizens during the various crises in the region. The 80s and the 90s have been decades in which lay

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47 See for instance the examination of the epistemological colonization of southern Italy by its north proposed by Schneider (1998) who speaks about “orientalism in one country”.

48 I clearly refer here to the notion of Orientalism introduced by Said (1978) one of the founding fathers of the post-colonial critique.
participation in the transnational public sphere has considerably increased. Initiatives of solidarity were particularly visible and consistent during mediatised crisis but one can easily find examples of non-conflict driven transnational initiatives. In fact, western societies continue producing social mobilization across borders, something that becomes important to explore further.

Besides, what the so-called post-backwardness approach, that Todorova, with Hayden-Bakic (1995) and a few others developed, compelled us to consider is the problem of epistemological colonization in connection with the construction of the idea backwardness. As their final aim is to abandon modernist views of development and change, these scholars stress how fundamental it is to acknowledge the hegemonic role of the west while avoiding underwriting ideas of backwardness.

Stimulated by the new debates on civil society, during the 90s those scholars working on political cultures for instance replaced the old language of modernization and prerequisites to democracy with new narratives of cultural obstacles to civil society and sustainable democracy. As pointed by Goody (1998) applying once more a long-term cultural explanation of modernization, has the effect of primitivising "the other" on a permanent basis, 'by making it more despotic almost by nature, or by seeing it as having elementary ('primitive') forms of kinship, time-reckoning, social relations and conceptual rules generally' (1998:33). Clearly such narratives of modernity and backwardness fully belong to the long Eurocentric tradition.

The success of the idea of civil society and the rejuvenation of modernization theories, brought back other debates that had already been exhausted decades ago. The renewed interest in Banfield's (1958) concept of amoral familism in the literature is very significant in this respect.49 His concept, harshly criticized at the time of the publication of his book almost 50 years ago in Italy and abroad, could be recovered in the nineties and became one of the mainstream references in the debates on civil society and its promotion.50 One of the most important criticisms addressed to Banfield’s work at the time was the ethnocentricity of its gaze.51

One of the most prominent critics of the idea of amoral familism was Pizzorno (1967) whose work, highlighting the many shortcomings of Banfield’s study, concluded with a note, that

49 In the case of Albania see as example the World Bank report and the theoretical references introduced: La Cava (1999).

50 According to Banfield southern Italian peasants of the village of Montenegration were living in a backward society because they preferred family allegiances to civil association and bureaucratic values. Yet, studies on Italian economic development showed the extent to which familism has represented an asset rather then a disadvantage.

51 Among the problems of this work, beside ethnocentrism, there was the fact that the village studied by Banfield, Montenegrano, was compared to the larger unit of analysis, that of the Italian nation-state. See Della Porta (1999).
transposed to the small countries in the post-cold war Balkans, has a disquieting actuality: “La via di uscita è o in una nuova (e questa volta patologica) identificazione nazionalista (e in questo senso probabilmente vanno comprese le osservazioni di Banfield sull’incidenza del fascismo a Montenegro); o nell’aspettare di venire coinvolti in un processo di sviluppo economico di origine esterna, sia per una modifica delle condizioni di economicità territoriale, sia per l’allargamento degli effetti di diffusione dello sviluppo, o nell’esodo, cioè da una scelta individualistica di coinvolgimento nel progresso.” (Pizzorno, 1967: 362). At that time world-system theories and dependency theories with their ideas of periphery and hegemonic cultural domination also became popular.

Rather than focusing on epistemological colonization in relation to CSP, most post-communist scholars preferred to question more generally the return to the idea of convergence. Many observed that that after three decades of criticism of the idea of “convergence” by world system theorists, critical theorists and post-modernists, the 1990s have been dominated by what has been named ‘transitology’ (e.g. Tökes 1999) defining the steps that democratizing countries had to transit in order to achieve western liberal democracy. The possibility of convergence no longer requires the passing through stages of development, but rather centres on successful cognitive and institutional transfer of western models.

In the case of Eastern Europe there is considerable intellectual tradition of taking into account the implication for the region of its peripheral position to the core of western European states that recently includes Lampe (1982), Mouzelis (1987) Chirot (1989), Berend (1996), Alleckock (2002) and many others. Both the construction of nation-states and the communist systems have been analyzed in their historical connection with the hegemonic relations characterizing the interaction between western and former eastern Europe since the beginning of modernity.

Andrew Janos (2000) provided one of the most recent narrations of the history of eastern Europe from the vantage point of its peripheral nature in relation with the western world and compared the old soviet block with the new hegemony coming from the west. Janos does highlight the difference between eastern and western international regimes and yet finds continuities in ‘the doctrinaire rigidity with which the “road to liberalism” has been marked out from Prague to Tirana, with little concessions to variable social, economic and cultural conditions’ (2000:367).52

52 Janos considers the grand strategy of Western hegemony as that of cooptation to its peripheries to buy security by rational actors attempting to minimize costs while maximizing future benefits.
The liberal universalist hegemony of the post-cold war era is also fundamental for Kennedy’s analysis of post-communism (Kennedy 2002). Here what is examined is the ‘transition culture’, that is to say the hegemonic narration of change centred on ideas of global capitalism and democracy that invested post-communist Europe. Today, highlights Kennedy, the narrations of modernity no longer pivot on the idea of the nation-state as core institution; modernity is global capital, democracy and civil society.

Looking at this western hegemony one may find the explanation for the reason why seldom post-communist scholars questioned western policy making for its narrow conceptualization of civil society. Third world scholars instead pointed out in a number of studies that civil society varies according to different types of states and cultures around the world (e.g. McILWaine 1998:653).

During my field-work I had to acknowledge that western hegemony and force of attraction was not a distant meta-theoretical problem but rather it was very much present in daily life of Albanians, beyond economic dependency or direct intervention in the local decision-making process. The language of western models permeated debates at every corner. Scholars such as Kymlicka & Opalski (2001), in their work on minority protection and the exportation of liberal pluralist model in post-communist Europe, concluded that although Eastern Europeans complain that models are being imposed upon them, there are few viable alternatives to them.

Among the few scholars that instead referred to the problem of epistemological colonization, while looking at CPS in the Balkans, Sampson (1996) noted how CSP’s idea of civil society is only a representation of western ‘reality’ taken out of context. Yet, he did not elaborate this intuition further.

An important contribution to the debate on “western models” comes from Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) a post-colonial scholars who pushed forward the analysis of the epistemological critique by retrieving the emancipatory drives that originally animated his own intellectual milieus, that of the Indian subaltern studies. In order to do it, categories of western political philosophy should be seen as ‘product of history’ but they are applied by social scientists to construct models that instead of remaining non-real, simulations of a reality – as every model is – they come to be treated as empirical realities.

In this light CSP should be seen as equating with European reality the theory of civil society grown from political theory. As a result aid-recipient countries, such as Albania, are confronted with their own inadequacy to measure up to a model-reality that overlooks western histories and variation and neglects the normative aspects of the idea. Taking the move from Chakrabarty one can
notice that, despite the donors’ desire to transfer institutions, there is confusion about the empirical appearance of civil society in the countries from which the proposed model is taken. The literature on CSP seldom attempts comparisons with what is going on today in western countries (Rueschemeyer, D.; Rueschemeyer, M., Wittrock, B. 1998). With their aid agenda, donors could be seen as proposing a hyperreal picture of western civil society, or European civil society for that matter, to be replicated elsewhere.

Let us consider one of the fundamental texts for CSP: Putnam’s work on Italian regions and the socio-cultural roots of their performance. The origin of Putnam’s concern with social capital was the dramatic decline in civic participation faced by the American civil society. His findings travelled from the USA to Albania to debate the role of civic participation in democracy. It is interesting to notice that Raffaella Nannetti who worked with Putnam on the research on social capital in Italy also contributed to the first World Bank report on social vulnerability in Albania (see La Cava 1999). However, donors’ documents entirely neglect to refer to this crisis in social participation in western countries.

As Chakrabarty clarifies, the epistemological critique is neither a project of cultural relativism, nor a nationalist or atavistic one. This is why questioning CSP for its models does not entail neglecting that post-communist societies, at the moment of the regime collapse, found themselves deprived of a long experience of free civic participation due to their lived experience of authoritarianism.

In addition, Chakrabarty leads us to look at the interaction between the western aid-industry and the post-communist world. As argued as well by many of the scholars referred to above, the latter striving to converge with western models, and the western world reinforcing its identity with the collapse of the communist regimes and further legitimising its self-representation as the rightful model to follow.

It was once again in a collective work on Albania, where the anthropologist Pandolfi (2002) linked humanitarian intervention and CSP in Albania with post-colonial debates. Pandolfi discussed the new forms of governance that humanitarian interventions produce and that she interprets as

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53 The idea of social capital refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions. See the theoretical synthesis of the concept of social capital proposed by Woolcock (1998).

54 Together with this, the criticism to Putnam’s interpretations disappears as well. Many scholars have questioned the validity of his conclusions despite the appreciation of his empirically rich work. Yet Putnams’ work has been constantly referred to justify the need for specific policies encouraging civic participation. See for a review of the main controversial points della Porta (1999).

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configuring a new ‘supra-colonial project’: ‘supra’ due to the variety of western actors involved; ‘colonial’ as it is seen as a ‘project of mass evangelization’ (2002:206). As Pandolfi stressed, here Eurocentrism takes the form of the myth of the generous, rightful and democratic west providing support to countries like Albania that come to constitute ‘its last frontier’.

As suggested by Pandolfi (2002) what dominated has been the idea of exporting western values, to the effect that anything considered western was presented positively. Just like Pandolfi, Janos (2000) observes the current ‘liberal universal’ hegemony has a scope and depth that can be captured only by introducing the metaphor of the missionaries, the bible and the local savages awaiting conversion. The Communists set out to create a new socialist man, and now ‘the missionaries of this universalism want to create new liberal persons endowed with the supranational sentiments of a New Age and liberated from the traditional social ethics and taboos’ (2000:366).

As a matter of fact, civil society has been promoted abroad mostly by people who explain the value of a western model to recipient publics. INGO’s activists, consultants, scholars, think-tanks representatives as well as IO and governmental practitioners working in post-communist countries for the great part assume that there is a western model that is being exported and that people in the field need to know more about it in order imitate it. In this regard, Carothers (1996) neatly described the attitude of US citizens involved in promoting democracy abroad as ideological and patronizing. Carothers refers to this as the 'psychological underpinning' of the relationship with the rest of the world that these experts have. If one looks for the evidence it the field he/she could hardly disagree with the description of a patronizing world of experts, even where such 'experts' lack expertise.

In a post-colonial analysis, this is not just a relatively marginal aspect of the CSP phenomena, rather such a narcissistic attitude speaks of the unbalanced relations that inevitably transform transnational policy into a tool of domination. The transfer of western model avoids the problem of long term cultural explanations by looking at the implication of the incentives generated by policy-making but it faces the problem of epistemological colonization.

Critical theory, anti-developmentalism and post-colonial literature, with their different understandings of colonization, pushed me to consider the centrality of the relation between donors and recipient. Critical theorists and anti-developmentalists look at the relations of power, control and domination but neglect the identity relation between donors and recipients. They differ in as far as critical theorists generally are attached to an idea of emancipation of Marxist origins, that they consider endangered by western interference, while anti-developmentalists dismiss the idea of
emancipation as a grand narrative just like that of development. Rather it is in the sphere of post-colonial scholarship that the role of identity relations emerges as fundamental. As we shall see later, my ethnography of CSP in Albania confirmed the centrality of this aspect.

1.5 False friends but friends?

The analysis of different critiques of CSP confirmed the relevance of the subjects involved in the aid relationship. Here is where one should look to understand why the insights gleaned from “southern” debates around colonization in many ways fail to fit the post-communist contexts. First of all, what one has to acknowledge is the widespread positive reception of CSP and other western policies in the local public spheres, at least among local democratic forces.

The positive reception of foreign interference and the acceptance of its language, approach and aims configures what Schmitter (1997) calls ‘consent’. As one can hardly associate the idea of consent with that of colonization as exploitation or control, with the end of the 90s, the reference to Nye’s “soft power” and that to “liberal imperialism” became fashionable when discussing the wider spectrum of EU policies in the Balkans (e.g. ESI 2005).

In this view not only are Balkan recipients willing to be supported by western donors but also donors are well intentioned in their intrusive presence in the region. The expectation of a Marshall Plan for post-communist Europe, was disappointed but the frequent reference to it by donors as much as recipient is quite revealing in this sense.

Many scholars identified in the idea of “the return to Europe” the most powerful agent to allow for the smooth post-communist transformation in central Europe. The idea is seen as constituting the strongest incentive to compensate for the high price of the economic transformation. The difference between the idea of civil society of eastern European dissidents and that of western donors was widely neglected in the local public spheres during these transformation and the agenda for the so-called ‘transition’ was willingly shaped around the idea of convergence with western models. Whilst dissidents in Central Europe can be said to have forcefully adjusted to the idea of abandoning any social democratic aspiration, as the pressure to introduce budget cuts from IFI was very strong, in Albania, no one argued in favour of the preservation of a social protection that was not longer in place due to the catastrophic economic situation of the country.
Western donors did not need to manufacture consent that was already there and no alternative to liberal democracy was widely supported by post-communist public opinions.\textsuperscript{55} Some scholars stressed the intellectual confusion that dominated eastern European public spheres in this period. Meardi (2006), for instance, highlights how in central Europe it was the same trade unions that had initially supported the shock therapy of welfare cuts and the downsizing of labour force in connection with privatization. Regardless of the problem of confusion in public opinion, what it is clear is that for years there was a widespread acceptance of the idea of transition.

As for the hypothesis that western donors hindered grassroots democratization with their liberal democratic agenda, there is a risk that it does not hold the scrutiny of post-communist developments in the region. As we shall see in the description of the Albanian troubled transition, the local political elites repeatedly endeavoured authoritarian turns while the grassroots repeatedly revolted against state institutions tearing them apart without showing democratic potentials.

The same puzzle of the positive reception of western agenda can be found when considering the critique of CSP for its depoliticizing role. As already mentioned, the expert culture of CSP has been well received in most post-communist countries, such as Albania. Whatever the reason, this element cannot be considered a real disclaimer of the donors’ intention to control the recipients by penetrating the local public spheres but, as I contend, it deserves an in-depth exploration.

Thus the analysis of my case study devotes wide attention to the analysis of the transformation of the Albanian public sphere to give account of it. In the second part of this work, I start by discussing the reception of CSP in the Albanian public sphere at large, that is to say the general welcoming of the policy in the country. Later, I devote a special attention to the place of Albanian NGO in the local public sphere and to the interpretations provided by their representatives of their social functions.

In this regards, the two first critiques of CSP examined above generally identify local NGOs as the \textit{longa manu} of foreign interests in the recipient countries while they generally maintain considerable expectations in relation to the grassroots, seen either as resistant/revolutionary subjects in the case of critical theorists or as resistant/proponents of alternative ways of living in the case of anti-developmentalist.

\textsuperscript{55} Janos (2000) also has some interesting observations on the problem of displacement in eastern European public opinions in the first few years after 1989. One should pay attention, however, not to argue around the confusion to justify the different understanding of the world that generally post-communist European citizens hold in respect to western one. Here I underscore the observation around confusion only in describing the first few years of radical transformations.
However, what emerged in my field-work is that NGO representatives constitute a component of the local elites but they are not particularly successful in their effort to hegemonise the local public sphere. As I argue later on, one should consider that CSP was introduced in a deeply shattered post-communist country and it constituted an important safety net for part of the urban elite. Thus, my contention is that to understand the reception of CSP in Albania one first of all should look at the transformed role of the elites in the country.

Moreover, as my research looks into the outcomes of the policy, whatever the intentions of western donors, the problem of emancipation and colonization should be analyzed first of all in relation to the policy’s results. However, as the latter are widely considered disappointing even by those that consider CSP as a genuine policy of cooperation, the analysis of CSP needs to explore the reasons for the outcomes.

Certainly aims and outcomes can differ due to intervening factors. Unsurprisingly, the disappointing results of CSP in Albania, as in the rest of the post-communist world, led its supporters to identify the problem at local level. Liberal scholars often concluded that the policy was a genuine contribution to emancipation but the recipient’s features hampered it and here the past experience came often to be considered the main explanatory factor for the CSP failure. As suggested by the anti-political and the epistemological critique, one could argue that the failure of the policy can be traced back to its approach.

As for the anti-political critique examined, what should be verified is the role of technocracy in undermining the space for local politics and local civil society transformations. In the case of the epistemological critique, instead, what should be scrutinized is the role of CSP’s categories in generating disempowering narratives even before disempowering policies. In this case what should be verified is the influence of CSP categories in the self-understanding of local public opinions as much as in the policy formulation. And, regardless of the results, whether this influence has disempowering or instead emancipatory potentials at least for some of the actors in the local public sphere.

Summarizing the points made so far, western donors adopts policies that are standardized and that generate similar results all over aid-recipient countries. Their policies were generally welcome in the local public spheres but their results have been considered disappointing all over the region. Understanding CSP’s way of proceeding one should acknowledge the western donors’ Eurocentric tradition but to explain the outcomes of the policy it is essential to fully appreciate the specific relation that the recipients entertain with it.
With or without CSP, transnational dynamics have a role in local state-society transformations. Ideas and resources which transcend the borders of nation-states are important factors influencing local practices and identity formation. This is why, in the analytic proposal that I discuss below, I suggest looking at the level of inter-subjective relations to grasp the implication of CSP in the field.

As opposed to western donors that propose a standardized policy to the recipient country, my ethnography of CSP in Albania is based on the idea that a prominent role in explaining the policy and its outcomes is played by both the locality and its relationality. This two are the dimensions that I suggest should be taken into account. The next chapter then is devoted to a discussion of the meaning that I attribute to these terms. This allows me to present the analytical framework, that I defined to analyze CPS, and to explain how I conducted my field work.

By looking at the donors-recipient relation, from the side of the recipient, one finds out, as we shall see later, that CSP is neither properly a policy of emancipation nor of colonization. Rather it emerges as a policy trapped within the Eurocentric culture of donors and the unbalanced resource redistribution that it should contribute to reduce. As the thesis will show, the problem with CSP is a circular one that can be considered partly open to solutions.
Chapter 2: Reformulating the analytical framework

2.1 Transnational arenas of communications

In the first chapter I highlighted how CSP is a standardized policy that produces similar and unsatisfactory results in the aid recipient countries, that is to say it generates the spread of NGOs or highly formalized organizations operating under the constraints imposed by donors and governments. Clearly local NGOs became the focus of my field-work and I inquired, as any other study on CSP, who are their members, what kind of activities they carry out, what kind of relations they entertain with their grassroots and the like. However, the similarity of the outcome in any aid recipient country made me question the potential of carrying out such research strategy alone.

As undoubtedly CSP provides western donors with a new tool to penetrate the recipients’ public sphere, I examined three strands of the debate around CSP that denounce it for its colonizing ambitions. My critical scrutiny to the denunciations of CSP took into account the fact that in the post-communist world, generally speaking the donors interference was, at first, positively received and, even when criticisms emerged, they did not really question CSP’s assumptions or approach to the local social realms. In the second part of my dissertation, where I provide a thick-description of the case-study, this limit of the different critiques to CSP emerge more clearly.

In the dynamic interaction between theories and empirical inquiry, I identified the issues of identity relations entertained by donors and recipients and the local configuration of the beneficiary as the two central elements to take into account in a combined manner to discuss the implication of CSP in the field.

How to analyse these identity relations in connection with policy-making at transnational level was the problem to solve. This chapter therefore presents the analytic framework that I endeavoured to develop in order to acknowledge the role of western cultural hegemony in the transnational policy-making together with the situatedness of the relationship between donors and recipients.56 Let me start with the discussion around the transnational arenas of communications.

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56 IR theory is state centric and does not acknowledge the special and temporal dimension of its object of study. Instead it is from historical sociology that I draw to explain the background of current transnational relation. My work is just the beginning of the exploration in the Albanian case as we have very little in terms of literature that could help constructing the analysis of such ongoing phenomena.
There was little available in the literature that could be of help, since policies, more than anything else, fall in the realm of nation-states. Transnational governance is an emerging field where cosmopolitan normativity often prevails over empirical scrutiny of developments in the field. Today the study of the European system of governance creates openings but so far it has been inward looking in terms of addressing the specificity of the construction of the EU polity and therefore remains difficult to translate into other contexts. As I mentioned, Albania in this sense constitutes an interesting case as it stands at the crossroad between the position of an ordinary aid-recipient country and that of an EU candidate country.

Interesting insights come from post-colonial scholarship as I discussed above. Here, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized raised the interest in the implication of the intersubjective dimension they entertain. Said (1978) with his seminal work on Orientalism was among the forerunners to explore the implication of identity relations across borders. In addition to this, historical sociology has been the field where the relevance of social, cultural, political dynamics were appreciated beyond statist views, as for instance in the study of revolutions, one of the few available intellectual traditions in this respect.57

More recently, the scholars engaged in the study of multiple modernities introduced categories such as the transnational public sphere, transborder arenas of communication, transcultural politics and the like that contributed to the formulation of my analytic framework. Among them, Höfert and Salvatore (2000), in their efforts to understand historical developments within Muslim countries, draw from Elias the idea of 'civilizing process', that is to say 'the process of building and stabilizing selves capable of interacting with each other in an orderly and productive way, thus producing vital and stable communities'.58 Their working hypothesis is that the civilizing processes in the various Muslim countries, as well as in Europe, did not occur in isolation but was profoundly shaped by interaction with other civilizing processes occurring alongside.

Transcultural arenas of communications, according to Höfert and Salvatore should be highlighted as important factors contributing to each civilizing process. Höfert and Salvatore examine the complex dynamic between inter-civilizing and intra-civilizing developments where

57 For a recent discussion resuming the main intellectual tradition of analysis of revolution see Kumar (2001). In this realm see as well Skocpol’s (1979) work that has already become a classic of historical sociology.

58 The research project of transcultural relation proposed by Höfert and Salvatore is encouraged by Shmuel Eisenstadt from whom they take inspiration. In Eisenstadt’s views and terminology the transcultural space is the site where the concrete forms of contemporary multiple modernities are fought over. Interestingly another research program on multiple modernities, that is to say the Center for Transcultural Relations of Chicago, which engaged scholars such as Charles Taylor and Benjamin Lee, came up with the same concept to offer a cultural theory of multiple modernities and work out a transdisciplinary approach to global phenomena. Clearly, I owe more to Höfert and Salvatore in terms of intellectual inspiration as they have been my colleagues here at the IUE and generously spent their time discussing with me.
competition, clashes, and mutual exchanges combine in historical context. They point out that transborder politics – where, I add, CSP is inscribed - occurring in these arenas/spaces should not be mistaken for exchanges and communications on equal terms since they instead originate in unbalanced power relations. The transcultural civilizing process, it is stressed, builds a structure of identity and alterity that are essential for the constitution of the subject.

These transnational arenas of communications - that affect the chance of building and stabilising selves able to interact with each other and construct a sense of community - turned out to be relevant in the analysis of CSP. I use the term transnational public spheres as synonym with transnational arenas of communications while I do not retain the term ‘civilizational’ as it produces confusion with civilizational approaches such as those of Sztompka (1993), Huntington (1996) and others. Instead, Höfert and Salvatore’s working hypothesis is particularly interesting for a number of reasons that I enumerate here.

First, it avoids a state centric approach without undermining the role of national public spheres in shaping local dynamics. Today confining analyses of social processes to a state-centric perspective is impossible, due to the increased role of global forces, but studies of globalization often undermine how meanings, identities and social relations are constructed in specific locations as well as the weight of space in our life-experience or else our situatedness. Many scholars stressed the role of transnational in contrast to local but situated realities can be strongly influenced by action or phenomena occurring in other localities. As put it by Guidry, the transnational public sphere can be considered as a real and conceptual space that connect different localities (Guidry et al. 2000).

Second, looking at transnational arenas of communications provides a different perspective on the origin of CSP. The aid-policies from their inception responded to the image of ‘oneself’ and that of the ‘other’. Moreover, they were based on the idea of the possibility of improving the situation of the other by making it reproduce the model established by self. The study of the various paradigmatic shifts in Development Studies and aid policies do implicitly recognize this relational aspect (e.g. Cooper & Packard 1997). The authoritarian developmental state coincided with Keynesian policy-making in the west. The idea of structural adjustments emerged when the leading western countries abandoned the idea of the developmental role of the state and adopted the new agenda of the minimal liberal democratic state. The idea of civil society, and that of its role in democracy and development, responds to the post-cold war context. A new pattern of convergence has been designed after 1989 and this time it has civil society among its pillars.
Third, the idea of transnational public spheres allows one to study the local transformation not in isolation from the external world nor only in terms of a response to the model proposed, but in terms of the dynamics between public spheres interacting with each other. Whilst donors are generally more powerful than recipients there is a recipient public sphere that comes in to play. Much work on donors-recipients relations instead see the latter as ‘recipient’ tout court, that is to say not only of financial resources but of ideas and expertise as if there was only a void to fill or a transfer to organize. This fallacy is also shared by those scholars uncritically discussing the relationship between donor and recipient in terms of domination but, as it should be known by now, there is always resistance to domination. Moreover, the description of my case study is structured as to emphasise the process of adaptation of CSP in Albania. As I found out in my field-work, CSP was gradually adapted to the context as western donors were not impermeable to the inputs received in the recipient public sphere.

Fourth, in connection to the previous point, one can transcend a polarisation of narratives of either donors or recipients as inherently heroes or villains. The terms ‘donor’ and ‘recipient’ are just shortcuts as mentioned above that should not lead us to think in terms of homogenous subjects with set of interests more or less well defined, as the idea of nation-states confronting themselves in the international realm often seems to suggest. Rather, both subjects of the relationship are plural, as are their public spheres, and are seen as processes and not as fixed entities. My case study focuses on the recipient side to show how important it is to recognize it as plural and complex in the same way as the donors. I devote particular attention at the main outcome of CSP, that is to say the growth of local NGOs that I examine in their distinct social relation within in the country: with the political elites, with their foreign founders and with their grassroots.

Fifth, the Eliasian perspective allows for the intertwining of both symbolic and material aspects in the study of transnational arenas of communications. These relations of communication also constitute social relations with their paraphernalia of artefacts and symbols (e.g. Pries 2001). Here my concern over the resource divide (financial, technological, know-how) between donors and recipient can be encompassed. As I will describe below, this gap between donors and recipient is highly disruptive and strongly influences the process of rebuilding stable selves and of reconstructing a sense of community. This aspect emerges in particular when I discuss the behaviour of the new NGO elites who experience an enlarged social space beyond that of the locality that they inhabit.

Six, approaching the relation between CSP and the locality in which it takes place as a phenomenon inscribed into the larger transnational dynamics might allow for an analysis that takes

Chiodi, Luisa (2007), Transnational Policies of Emancipation or Colonization?: civil society promotion in post-communist Albania
European University Institute
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distance from both universalist views and relativist stances. Many contemporary theoretical works on civil society have been opposing each other on this point.\(^{59}\) Just like Janus-faceted universalism, relativism with its idea of incommensurability of different cultures may accompany strategies of domination.\(^{60}\) If the idea of transnational arenas of communications is fully appreciated, this polarization might be transcended.

My ambition is to be context-specific in order to appreciate the history people have, as well as to consider their location in the transnational space. Civil societies are in constant contact, exchange and hybridisation with each other. Transnational arenas of communications are characterised by competition, clashes and mutual exchanges that influence the dynamics in the local public spheres in each setting. Transnational dynamics take place and, despite unbalanced power relations, can produce valuable cultural exchanges.

Finally, donors exercise direct interference in the recipient public sphere when they address the local decision-making process with CSP and penetrate the recipient public sphere, but transnational arenas of communication exist independently from this. The local 'civilizing' processes, both the donors' and the recipients' civilizing processes, interact in a dynamic way alongside any possible transnational policy-making.\(^{61}\)

As distinct from the influence that derives from the latter, transnational communications can hardly be avoided. The same autarchic turn imposed by Enver Hoxha to Albania from the 70s onwards, after all, was defined against the external capitalist 'other'. Not only that, regardless of the efforts of making hermetic the isolation of the country, foreign media at a point penetrated communist Albania contributing to the regime collapse. Clearly the identity relations developed in the case of a transnational policy-making such as CSP generate much closer interaction between subjects ‘belonging’ to different public spheres.

I do not propose a causal relation between transnational relations and the outcome of CSP, what I propose is to situate CSP in a context that I suggest matters in understanding the phenomenon, its shortcomings and potentials. This allows me to take into account the role of contagion, as pointed by the literature on democratisation, pushing the argument further. This wider perspective on the

\(^{59}\) As example of relativist one can think of Seligman (1992) and for the liberal universalist of Gellner (1994).
\(^{60}\) It is enough to think at the implication for Huntington ideas’ of clash of civilizations.
\(^{61}\) A similar effort animated a seminar organized at University of Birmingham 5 th – 6 th December 2003 in the framework of ESRC Seminar Series: “It thus recognises the value of the ‘local’ experience in and of itself while at the same time providing a basis for useful engagement with other instances and experiences of the ‘local’ beyond accepted ‘borders’. (…) Furthermore, the dialectical nature of transnationalism was also noted with change in one place encouraging change elsewhere. In this sense, post-socialism (as a definable condition) is a transnational process with change ‘there’ influencing us ‘here’ in the UK.” http://www.gees.bham.ac.uk/research/transnational/.
ongoing transcultural relations serves to position CSP and understand it beyond the contrasting narratives of emancipation and colonization that I discussed before. Let me now explore further the relevance of the locality in the analysis of transnational relations.

2.2 The locality

Drawing attention to transnational relations is not intended to undermine the local public sphere as such, quite the opposite: it will rather serve to highlight the interconnectedness and relationality of the donors and the recipient. My aim is provide an analysis of CSP based on the full recognition of the aid recipient country for its own historicity and specific features. I endeavour to treat historical experiences as the necessary ground on which people interpret the present but I also wish to take into account that I deal with a context undergoing profound transformations where people have to work out new meanings about current realities. It is worth noticing that these are among the intellectual responses suggested by Turner to take into account the rich critique of orientalism while overcoming its deadlock (Turner 1994).

Donors’ policy-making is often standardized but local experiences vary considerably and have a role to play in explaining the local reception of the foreign promoted policies. For instance post-communist countries had their own reception of donors’ discourses of privatisation which differ significantly from that of Latin America. In Albania private property, starting with land-ownership, had been violently taken away by the communist regime. Thus, public opinion has generally been very receptive towards privatization, whereas in Bolivia there were considerable protests against the privatization of public utilities in 2003 and again in 2005.62

In the global arena where CSP takes place, donors’ terms of reference are accepted according to the transcultural relations which the recipient countries entertain with them. However, often the literature treats local issues as adaptation or translation of global processes (e.g. Salskov-Iversen et.al. 2000). Following Benjamin Lee and the Chicago Center for Transcultural Studies, I wish to start conceptualizing global processes as emerging from interconnections among specific localities.63 The finding that CSP in Albania was indeed a work-in-progress that gradually adapted to the recipient context, as argued in the second part of this dissertation, provided the confirmation of this point.

62 Yet, the mainstream narrative on post-communism (see for instance Smolar 1996) argued that after the experience of collectivization there was a need to re-legitimise private property in post-communist societies. As a matter of fact, this was totally wrong in the case of Albania as discussed in paragraph 4.3.

Furthermore, there are many relations that impinge upon the locality, beyond that with the west. Therefore it is important to see which transnational arena of communication is more prominent for the studied location. A Balkan country certainly has a different type of relation to the west, or Europe in particular, than for instance Indonesia. An Albanian or Bosnian Muslim infrequently takes Saudi Arabia as reference point, while the Saudi influence over Indonesian Muslim communities is ever stronger. It is almost impossible in the Balkans to watch an Indian film on television, while the presence of the Bombay film industry - whose shorthand moniker ‘Bollywood’ serves to underline its considerable size - is consistent among Arab countries.

In addition, western donors compete in the field of transnational aid policies with a few Arab countries and Islamic foundations. The motivations expressed by ‘Muslim’ donors for intervening in Balkans countries have been different from that of western donors. The latter expressed their intention to promote liberal democracy and market economy, the former supplied aid in the name of the Umma and the protection of Muslims menaced by ‘religious conflicts’ or ‘communist atheism’ (Bougarel & Clayer, 2001). Albania is a predominantly Muslim country Clayer (2003), but the European identity largely prevails over the identification as a Muslim country. In addition, the aid received from Arab countries and Islamic foundations have not had an influence in the local public sphere comparable to that of western aid. These observations require explanations that can be identified in the identity relations that exist between donor and recipients as I shall explain in the second part of this dissertation.

My underlining of the centrality of the lived experience should not be misunderstood as a conceptualization of the locality as the place of tradition. Today the idea of communism as a refrigerator of history has been widely discredited after long discussion around the explosion violent nationalism in the region. Yet, much of the post-communist academic literature treats history and traditions as oppositional to the kind rational and coherent behaviour deemed necessary to overcome the hardships of transition.

Post-communist countries are among the best settings to see the problems with the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, widely discussed in political theory (e.g. Featherston et. al 1995; Ortis 2000; Daedalus 2000). Communist regimes were among those that enforced the most profound modernising social engineering in their countries. Their 'future that failed', in Arnason (1993) words, was a challenge to western capitalist modernization with a radically new project of economy and society. Its defeat have been stimulating a number of interpretations based on qualifiers to modernity or modernization - such as post-; pre-; quasi-; unfinished-; - that hid more then they reveal of that experiment and what followed.
There are real difficulties accompanying the researcher working on experiences different from those of western Europe. If possible, this problem of categories is even worse for those dealing with eastern Europe where the radically different experiences might date back only two generations. Yet socialist modernization produced profound changes in a very short period of time. Should communism then be viewed as the tradition that the locality is supposed to overcome whilst making the transition to liberal democracy and market economy? The widespread analysis of the communist past in terms of legacies seems to imply this when referring to long lasting pattern of behaviours that developed in that period of time.

Paradoxically, the socialist modernizing project, though clearly not an ‘oriental’ one, ended up orientalised in the post-cold war period. Here comes the fact that the literature on cultural legacies of the socialist regimes displayed unpleasant derogatory peaks of such as the notorious ‘civilizational incompetence’ by Sztompka (1993:243-9). But what dominated the studies on political culture has been the idea of the predicament of the 'socialist mind' that stressed how pathological aspects of social conduct of the past, today prevent healthy social change (e.g. Jowitt 1992; Kligman 1990; Rose, Mishler, Haerpfer 1998).

Certainly, protracted detrimental social economic and political experiences of different kinds shape the attitudes of people. However, it is not always clear to what extent behaviours, considered as a legacy of the past, are actually adaptations to present circumstances, renewed survival strategies necessary to get by in the present. The post-communist decade has certainly been a time of deep transformation where people had to display a strong attitude and adapt to radically new situations over short periods of time. These issues generated lively debates within post-communist studies (e.g. Burawoy and Verdery's 1999:1-2) but only a deep understanding of the past and of the present condition of the context under scrutiny might allow to find an answer.

In addition to this, as pointed by Todorova (1997), in the case of the Balkans, and even more so in Albania, western literature has a long record of disparaging narratives explaining local transformations in primordialist terms (Appaduraj 1996:139-144). The same socialist experience in Albania has been labelled as a ‘tribal road to Europe’ (Gran 1996). Current social phenomena such as the ‘resurgence’ of customary traditions give space to shortcuts such as that of a country based on ‘kanun identity’. Considering that socialism, and above all Albanian socialism, limited

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64 Gran (1996) is an example of a scholar who wanted to carry out a comparative study of modern world history criticizing Eurocentrism of mainstream historiography. Despite good intentions, he remained trapped into the modernist language and the highly prejudiced secondary literature.

65 The Kanun is name of one of the corpus of Albanian customary tradition.
the access of foreign researchers to these countries, a deeper knowledge of the context than the one available would be necessary to be able to establish patterns of continuity with historical experiences.

The cultural analysis of globalisation has evidenced the role of increased cultural interconnectedness in shaping local settings today. Today ongoing transnational dynamics influence the ordinary process of reinterpretation of one’s cultural traditions. As Appaduraj has shown, what we live today is a ‘modernity at large’ (1996) where migration, global media and the market entail new patterns of sociability that compete with the family, churches, rural traditions, schools, etc. that is to say with localized experiences.

The idea of modernity at large does not conflict with the idea of the layered character of the recipients’ public sphere. Clearly people react differently to new challenges and variations, as one can easily grasp considering the differences among generations in taking advantage from post-communist transformation.66 Rather, it adds a new layer to the complexity of the understanding of the locality.

It reminds us how today transnational dynamics are not experienced only by elites, but also influence popular culture, particularly through emigration, global media and the market. Elites continue to hegemonise national public spheres, but they are radically different from the old European bourgeoisie, as well as they differ greatly from the first post-colonial elites, described by Fanon (2000), that had very limited audiences in countries where people were overwhelmingly illiterate and communications media scarce. The post-communist world returns in full contact with global arenas of communication after the experience of socialist modernization that provided for universal literacy and ‘electrified’ every village. Today post-communist citizens are incorporated in ‘modernity at large’ and all of them, renowned academics or isolated mountain dwellers, in different ways live in the same present time.

Clearly working on CSP requires a focus on the elites hegemonizing the public sphere. The liberal democratic view of civil society itself distinguish between intermediary groups and the society at large, while donors sometimes introduce the difference between NGOs and the Community Based Organisations (CBOs), with the latter constituting more grassroots organizations. Therefore, I discuss the relationship that elites, and in particular NGO practitioners,

66 Despite the Eurocentrism of its quantitative analysis of popular cultures in East Central Europe Laitin (1998), for example, points out that the younger generation are quickly becoming part of what he calls ‘European Culture’ distancing themselves from illiberal institutions such as churches and parties in the region.
entertained with the grassroots during the troubled post-communist transformation taking into account the role of such “modernity at large” in which CSP takes place.

Finally, the awareness of the risk to fall into what Chakrabarty (2001) calls ‘heterotemporality’, that is to say the idea that some of our contemporaries are living in different historical time, helped me to understand the reaction of Albanian NGO representatives to western narratives on the backwardness of the local context.67 Dealing with western narratives on the pre-quasi-unfinished modernity of the locality my interlocutors generally blamed the problem on their grassroots.

This is what emerges when I analyze the idea of local NGOs as mediating between donors and their grassroots. Taking the distance from the former, my interlocutors explain their experience with the socialist modernization to disclaim the western idea of their backwardness and they express irritation toward the negative portrayal of their cultural background underlining their different appreciation of gender relations or of the family and its role in overcoming the difficult post-communist transformation. Yet, in line with their historical experience, the Albanian NGO representatives stressed as well the difference between themselves and their grassroots and show their uneasiness towards the homogenizing idea of the local context that the CSP transnational encounters reflect.

Bakic-Hayden (1995) studying the displacement and ‘complicity’ with negative Western portrayals, showed elites from Central and South East Europe in their anxieties about belonging to Europe, defined it as ‘nesting orientalism’. This attitude dominated the Albanian public sphere during the 90s, but, as I argue, it could transform into the ‘ethno-orientalism’ identified by Carrier (1991), that is to say by definitions of the self that are influenced by Western descriptions but that produce an idealized reformulation of the local traditions. In this sense, once I examine the reaction of local NGOs to the limited achievement of CSP, I discuss the extent to which the long lasting ethnocentrism in the region becomes a claim to exceeding of the CSP epistemological categories.

As I discuss in the third chapter, due to the strong influence exercised by western countries in the local public sphere, Albanian elites did not question CSP’s assumptions but is capacity to support the modernization of the country. Furthermore, as described in the last chapter, due to the

67 Chakrabarty shows how the tribal peasant, the nationalist intelligentsia and the colonial bureaucrat in XX century India, they all belonged to the in the same historical time, inhabited the same modern world in which they are thrown into often violent contact with each other, and their politics are or were modern in equal measure, the peasant’s included.
specific context of the Albanian troubled transformation, local NGO elites concentrated their criticism to CSP around a few elements essential for their own positive self-identification.

Chakrabarty’s idea of heterotemporality is parallel to that of Schulze (1998) who speaks about ‘diacronia’ and discusses how the latter may hamper ‘cultural communications’. These concerns are not aimed to avoid susceptible reactions in non western public sphere but they rather constitute epistemological answers to the challenges of the present.

Let me now explain how I carried out my ethnographic work on CSP in Albania and discuss how, after all, my effort to understand the local social context required the cultural mediation of my interlocutors. As I explain in the next paragraph, the need to reformulate the analytical framework taking into account the role of the transnational arenas of communication and that of the locality emerged while experiencing the complexity of the field-work.

2.3 Ethnography of a transnational policy

My interest in the phenomenon of promoting civil society and its specificity in the Albanian case study required a specific research strategy. When I initiated my research project there was little academic work on the topic of civil society promotion and, in particular, very little exploration had been carried out so far on the reception of CSP in post-communist countries. If the first gap has been gradually filled, what constituted a real obstacle to my work has been the state of the art of Albanian studies which have been warn out by the long isolation and the Marxist doctrinarism imposed by the regime, and by the subsequent post-communist hardship.

The Ph.D. training provided me with the chance to explore various disciplines and area studies to come up with my own propositions. I drew selectively from international relations, anthropology, sociology, political science, Albanian studies without limiting myself to the young post-communist field, but I also partly explored other area studies where reference to CSP appeared. Finally, I examined the sub-discipline of development studies, though I stressed that the most important source of inspiration have been post-colonial studies. The result has been a loss of academic field since both topics and the methods that I use are at the cross-roads of many different disciplines, but

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68 The label post-colonial comprehends many different approaches (Dirlik 1994). It is to Chakrabarty (2000) in particular that I owe the most important insights for my work.
I hope to demonstrate that the trans-disciplinary approach enriched the final understanding of the phenomenon I wished to study.

The methodological choice as well resulted from the object of inquiry, rather than the other way round. From the outset the difficult research condition with which I was confronted made it necessary to apply different methods at different times according to the available possibilities. The research then has been carried out applying a combination of various qualitative research methodologies during my field-work such as participant observation, interviewing and documents’ analysis.69

I did not conduct field work in an EU country nor even in an average post-communist one: neither in terms of security conditions nor for what concerns institutional reliability. This is not stated here only in apologetic fashion but also to explain the specificity of conducting research in Albania at the end of the 90s. First, my field work took place after the 1997 state break-down in Albania and after the 1999 refugee crisis, events that made it impossible for me to gather the type of hard data.70

Secondly, one should bear in mind that in Albania there is still no comprehensive and reliable source of information concerning CSP. On the donors’ side, nobody is able to give a general picture of the kind of CSP activities in the field. First, the problem that Albania shares with other aid recipient countries, as mentioned above, is that each donor applies different accounting criteria for CSP project in the field (Ruli, 2002). Second, the variety of actors involved, foreign and local, is such that for the moment only the larger donors’ projects can be accounted for. Even among these, however, it is hardly possible to speak about co-ordination. Despite the relevance of the informal donors’ gathering, the so-called Friends of Albania, in the field donors’ representatives compete against each other more than they co-operate. The co-ordination, when it takes place, is at the level of establishing guidelines while the implementation phase is marked by duplication of efforts and

69 I drew some methodological suggestions from Shore and Wright (1997) who argue in favour of anthropology of policy-making. Yet their interest is mainly on language and discourse analysis while I was more interested in dynamics in the field. In term of guidelines for the field-work I relied on Silverman (1993).

70 Albanian state institutions were first shattered by the collapse of the regime in 1990-1. In 1997 Albania faced a second devastating crisis, called the pyramid schemes crisis, with repeated episodes of mass looting of state properties. The Kosovo refugee crisis in 1999 constituted another big challenge for the extremely weak Albanian state. Cf. annex 1 for an annotated chronology of the main events of post-communist Albania.
competition. The cases of co-operation result more from individual commitment than from an established pattern in the field.71

As one could read at the EU web page in 2003 is that: “On 3rd December 2003, at a Roundtable meeting of Ambassadors and Heads of Mission in Albania, the decision was taken to launch a simple matrix of donor assistance to Albania. Housed on the website of the Delegation, the matrix would be fed and updated on the basis of submissions made from time to time by the donors on their various programs. The idea of the matrix is to provide a simple point of reference for the donor community, for Government users, and indeed for the interested members of the general public.” The list that was made public then, have remained not complete up to now. 72

In addition to this Albania has been a particularly grim case of loss of institutional control over the country as we shall see below, and no Albanian institution was able to tell who was who and was doing what and where over its territory. Integrating my findings with ‘hard data’ on financial resources coming into the country through CSP therefore remained an unresolved problem of this dissertation due to the variety of donors active in the country together with the poor condition of the Albanian administrative apparatus.

However, the problem with hard data is not only related with CSP since generally speaking statistics on the state country were not particularly reliable either. Donors themselves encountered serious problems in statistical data collection since it is well known by now that the National Institute for Statistics (INSTAT) suffered, as much as the rest of the public institutions in the country, from the manipulative habits of the past and the present-day shortage of human and physical resources. The problem of reliability of statistics is common to all those conducting research in non-western countries, but it is particularly acute in Albania since international financial institutions published enthusiastic reports on the fast growing economy of the country right before its devastating collapse in 1997. 73

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71 Evaluation expressed by my interviewees but shared by IO in their documents and INGOs reports. See for instance one of the most recent EU papers on the progress made by each Balkan country on the path to accession: Evaluation of the assistance to Balkan countries under CARDS Regulation 2666/2000 Synthesis Report Volume I Findings of the Evaluation June 2004 p.19 that observes once again how: “Co-ordination with the World Bank and other donors including Member States seems particularly weak in this country. The assumed division of labour, according to which CARDS would focus on institutional building and the IFIs on social and economic development, is not supported by the actual experience.”


73 Given the gravity of the problem, in the last few years the Albanian Institute for Statistics has received a considerable amount of western aid and technical assistance to rebuild itself. The institute published its first yearbook and inaugurated its web page. See Republika e Shqipërisë Institütit i Statistikikë (INSTAT) http://www.instat.gov.al/
If Albanian studies have not yet overcome the communist and the post-communist legacy, what abounds is day-to-day information on the country. A good number of Albanian newspaper articles are regularly translated into Italian, French and English since today Albania is strictly monitored by the so-called international community. Many web sites regularly provide updates on socio-political development in Albania, as well as in the rest of the troubled Balkan region. Donors themselves have produced a number of studies focusing on the social transformation of the country.

There is however a poor record of academic studies providing accurate historical insights or theoretically informed analysis on contemporary Albania. Most comparative works on post-communist societies omit the country, particularly when dealing with issues such as nationalism or inter-ethnic conflict, which have not been pre-eminent political features at stake in 1990s Albania. Instead, Albania is analyzed mainly for its attachment (resilience or revival) of ancient customary traditions or for its turbulent political scene, as I will discuss later on.

The central aim of this research is to discuss CSP, in light of the colonization and liberation debate, examining one case study. However, besides reports financed by donors and international think-tanks, the only book to have appeared on the topic of CSP in Albania is a pamphlet published in Albanian in 2004 (Krasniqi 2004). The only exceptions to the rule are Sampson’s interpretative articles that I referred to in the theoretical chapter (Sampson 1996, 2002). The scarcity of available information on the particular policy in Albania required the diversification of the research strategy so as to gain richer insights of the phenomenon and the context under scrutiny. I combined different methods to gather first of all information on the policy itself, its transformation during the post-communist decade in Albania, and then of the inter-subjective relations it entailed. I used all the information I was able to gather to reason around the puzzle produced by the policy.

To start with I carried out 50 in-depth non-structured interviews with the main actors traditionally hegemonizing the public sphere: journalists, intellectuals, professors, media stars, artists etc. These key-actor actors interviewed were chosen from the most well know people in the field, upon the assumption that those considered by and large trustworthy could contribute to my understanding of things. As in the list presented in the annex 2, I carried on 35 interviews in the first part of my field-work in the summer 1999. I did not tape-recorded them but only took notes and transcribed them. The second round of field work was carried out in the summer 2000 and resulted in another 15 tape-recorded interviews.

I did not fix a questionnaire valid for everyone as not all of them where NGO representatives but allowed every one to speak about CSP in Albania from their privileged point of observation. The
duration of the interviews ranged from one hour to three according to the time made me available by my interlocutors and they were carried out mostly in the capital city Tirana, even though I had the chance to do participant observation in smaller towns such as in particular Vlore and Korcia.

The interviews focused on the origins of the idea of civil society in Albania, the inception of CSP in the public sphere, its effect in promoting civil society, the public reception of the programs, etc. In case the interviewed was an NGO representative I allowed the interlocutor to speak in detail about his/her experience in project making. If the person I encountered was instead a privileged observer I focused mostly on his/her opinion on donors, INGOs and local NGOs role in the country. Finally, during this encounter everyone introduced elements important for my understanding of the social transformation of the country during the post-communist period that allowed me to widen the scope of my inquiry. The risk of chain referral, that is to say that one informant bringing the researcher to another blinding the researcher of other available opinions in the public sphere, was balanced by integrating the other sources of empirical data.

Triangulating information and trying to constrain the risk of misinterpretation, during the eight months of field-work I undertook participant observations, taking part in seminars for NGOs; following NGOs activists during their working days and discussing their experiences and what I was witnessing with them. My research strategy has been to take into account information people provided me during interviews as much as informal talks with people I encountered anywhere, considering ordinary public spaces to be as relevant as the formal public sphere for my purpose. Furthermore, as I carried out the most part of my field work in two different phases temporally distant from each other, the first in the summer of 1999 and in 2000, cross-checking the information gathered.

I enriched the available empirical material by gathering the few publications that appeared on CSP in the country: from official IOs reports to local NGO leaflets. Furthermore, I gathered a good number of newspaper articles, especially published in the Albanian media, dealing with CSP and I regularly searched for web information on CSP in Albania. Newspaper articles and the other available information on the web were not searched with systematic criteria.

However, from 2000 up to now, but especially from 2000 to 2003, I have been consultant for a few Italian organizations involved in the monitoring of the socio-political development in the

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74 Public spheres are hegemonised by elites that, normally through media, debate about meaning but also exercise power and control over the same meanings in a society. Public spaces, instead, are intended here in the widest sense from courtyards, to bars or internet cafes all locations where people in common produce meanings and interpretations of identities.
Balkans, of the western cooperation in the region and of the Albania media in particular.\textsuperscript{75} Many of the articles I referred to in my work were translated by the latter, that is to say Notizie Est, ICS News, Osservatorio Balcani. Beside these sources of information that I worked for, the other most important media I drew from were: AIM, Courrier des Balkans, Albanian Daily News. All of them monitored and translated articles of the Albanian dailies and weeklies and published original articles commenting on the development of the democratic transition of the country.

Since reports, documents of various kinds, newspaper articles, web pages, and the like constitute my empirical evidence as much as the interviews I gathered and my participant observations, I put these in footnotes instead of listing them under the reference.\textsuperscript{76}

As CSP so far has vastly remained constrained at urban, elites level I focused on the narratives from people that hegemonise the local public spaces. In addition, I carried out my field-work specifically in urban contexts, and for the major part in the capital area, as these have been so far the most interested in the phenomenon of Civil Society Promotion. The problem of the grassroots in Albania is not addressed in my present work with new empirical research. I mostly interviewed or met people who spoke about laypeople while drawing from the available literature on the grassroots when appropriate.

My limited knowledge of Albanian did not prevent me from conducting my work since Italian, my mother tongue, is widespread at every level of society, particularly among young generations. Emigration experience for many thousands Albanians and the overwhelming presence of Italian media to a large extent contributed to the unusual diffusion of Italian in the country. However, concerning interviews in particular, I carried them out in Italian, English or French according to the interviewee’s preference. Finally, I write my dissertation in a language that is not mine and therefore there are certainly various levels of ‘loss in translation’ to be taken into account. However, this is the challenge that all of us working at the EUI face. In the end, an in-depth understanding of CSP, focusing on meanings and practices it generated is possible taking into account that I neglect linguistic aspects of the phenomenon I study, and I do not apply discourse analytic methods.

\textsuperscript{75} I worked as consultant of the Italian Consortium of Solidarity from 1999 to 2001 and form 2002 up to now for the Osservatorio Balcani, in both cases monitoring media and following the transformation of international cooperation, mostly in the field of civil society. Thanks to this I was in regular contact with the media correspondents in Tirana.

\textsuperscript{76} There are only a couple of exceptions to this rule when the Albanian source became an internationally available published book. However, due to the problematic situation of the country during the 90s there were very few of such cases as I explain below.
Rather, I considered interviews as ways to elicit information important to reconstruct one decade of CSP policy-making in Albania but also as sources of narratives to analyze identity relations in the transnational public sphere. All the empirical material that I gathered serves this twofold aim as the role of inter-subjective relations in the transnational public sphere emerged as the fundamental aspect of the phenomena under scrutiny.

Due to the lack of secondary literature on CSP, the effort to describe the main phases of CSP life in Albania from 1991 to now was possible thanks to the above described combination of sources. As I conducted my fieldwork predominantly from 1999 to 2000 most of the opinion I gathered reflected the specific stage of CSP development, that is to say opinions around a phenomena that had almost a decade of experience behind. My interlocutors reflected on this past and referred to their expectations about the future clearly informed by their experience during the very troubled post-communist decade in Albania. Therefore, in the analysis of their narrative I endeavoured to take these aspects in critical account.

What I submit to the scrutiny of the reader is the validity of my identifying explanations of CSP in Albania at a point in time. I should in fact recall that CSP is a work in progress in a highly volatile context where everything changes at a very fast speed and therefore the time component is important. The data I present reflect for the most part my own working schedule, a substantial part of the material consisting of what I was able to gather during my visits to the country. Therefore, it is worth underlining that my personal contribution to data collection is related to the last years of the 1990s. I visited Albania the first time in 1997 in the midst of the tragic state-society breakdown and I went back every year since for periods of time ranging from 10 days to 3 months. In total I spent about 8 months in the country, most of which was taken up with carrying out field research centred on participant observation, data and interviews collections.

Although most of my field-work in Albania has been carried out between 1999 and 2000, thanks to my numerous extra-doctoral activities I have continued to follow the course of CSP in Albania very closely. The longer I procrastinated concluding the thesis the wider the experiences I gathered in the field. For the research centre where I work from 2002 to 2006, the Istituto per l’Europa Centro-Orientale e Balcanica, I participated at meetings with INGOs involved in projects of

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77 Narrative analysis has taken impetus in the last few years. The idea is that one can study culture focusing on narrative or stories that people interviewed tell. Narratives are normally considered as sequence of events used to communicate meanings. It is through narratives and that we constitute our social identities. I drew from Somers (1993) (1995 a / b) many methodological insights in this field.

78 See more in paragraph 1.9 on this point.
cooperation with Albania and I have been involved in a new project of research dealing with the public participation of Albanian migrants in Italy. Furthermore, I had the chance to participate in international seminars, summer schools and workshops organized at various levels, from university to INGO, all aimed at constructing transnational social networks between the EU and the Balkans, thus continuing this way my field work in other contexts. In my academic activities I supervised a number of undergraduate theses dealing with Albania, its transnational and aid-relations. I decided to include, on occasion, these experiences considering them part of my field work since they have certainly enriched my understanding of the topic of the dissertation.

My continuous postponing the conclusion of my work and my engagement into different activities bordering the field allowed me to verify the sensitivity of my interpretations on a number of occasions and finally developed into a desire to finally go back to organize them in a readable narrative. Therefore, if nothing else at least this lagging behind schedule increased the depth of my knowledge of the country and the phenomena of the construction of civil society across borders.

1.3.1 Writing about the ‘other’?

In the course of my inquiry, I repeatedly asked myself if, why and how was I entitled to speak about Albania and its civil society. Questioning my own position has been an important source of ideas about the topic of my research. I had to ask myself if I was adopting an orientalizing approach to my ‘object’ of inquiry: if the Albanian ‘other’ was to me such ‘another’ then I should not even try to grasp it. The fact that my country of origin is one where Albanians are perceived as the “other” par excellence put me in the position to oppose such a trend because of my positive experience in my encounters with the country. As a consequence I was aware of the risk of falling into the cliché of trying to provide a picture of the authentic Albanian civil society in contrast to the promoted one (e.g. Abaza and Stuth 1988).

Avoiding the stereotypical position of challenging the master narrative of the west by opposing to it the authentic narrative of the oppressed “other”, the one that should become the carrier of a different order, was relatively easy in Albania. To argue along the lines of ‘new revolutionary subjects’ would simply not have been taken seriously, certainly not by Albanians themselves who have already lived the consequences of radical social experiments. Not surprisingly, ‘Avant-garde’ scholars have generally avoided the region (with the exception of the debates over the NATO intervention in former Yugoslavia), probably since it is difficult in this context to think in terms of new political projects of radical change. Yet, the challenges which not only Albania, but most post-communist countries for that matter, pose are very interesting as I hope to show.
Should it be only Albanians themselves writing about their own reception of CSP if they consider it a relevant topic? In the beginning, post-colonial literature argued along similar lines. The emergence of scholars of non-western origins on the stage of globalised academia was certainly extremely important since their critiques forced social sciences (at least a part of them) to thoroughly rethink approaches, categories and methods. As I will show below, the problem of Albanian scholars to regain voice has not been solved yet and certainly constitutes a serious problem in the field. However, those entitled to write about the ‘others’ of the west, that is to say scholars of non-western origins, have been regularly criticized as well for being alienated from their own culture since most of them work within western academia, or simply for being detached from the life of laypeople since they enjoy a privileged position. The same problem was posed by feminist or queer studies and they both encountered the same dilemma: a white woman could not write about a black one even if they both belong to a southern culture, and a gay man could not speak for a lesbian etc. The point though is that even nationalizing, ethnicising or gendering social science does not provide a way out of the problem of writing about the “other”. Nobody would be entitled to write about anything except autobiographies and even that could be questioned on the basis that a past cannot definitely be retrieved. The more non-white, non-western, female scholars have access to social sciences the better, and the process should only be encouraged to de-provincialise and democratize social sciences.

One way to study CSP could have been to focus on IOs documents. However, I wanted to go beyond the wooden language of international organizations, already widely studied with discourse analytic methods. Similarly, I wanted to go beyond the views of those western activists who regularly hosted me during my stay in Albania and with whom I had many chances to debate CSP. What I was motivated to explore were the views of my interlocutors. However, like everyone, I faced the problem of representation of the ‘other’ that I could only addressed taking into account my own position vis à vis the inquired.

Different backgrounds make different the observing eye and the analysis of the answer given by informants and interviewees. Even more important was the production of specific forms of power and status problems. The simple fact that I am Italian produces peculiar answers as much as my being a woman or being relatively young in age. I took this into account when I was conducting fieldwork as much as when interpreting my raw material. However, these conditions create closures as much as openings. In the end, the limitations of any possible observer’s position cannot be

79 See for instance the academic journal Alternatives for many examples of such an approach.
overcome but simply require acknowledgement by me in the research as by my readers in their evaluation of my work.

It was no accident that for years it was difficult for Albanians to have their voices heard in a non vicarious way: the problem was connected with the devastating crisis that the country was facing. However partially as the result of CSP itself, and mainly thanks to migration, this silence has lately shown some signs of change. Anyway, I gave more relevance to CSP interlocutors in the recipient country, risking the defaults of vicarious representation, since my work was focused upon what the Albanian case can tell about transnational relations and not the other way round. If my inquiry reflects my subjectivity, my writing is part of the transnational dialogue that I wish to expand.

What I am interested in and endeavour to do is to focus on the interaction between donors and recipients. I offer my interpretation of the transformations CSP introduces in Albania to the scrutiny of whoever wants to read this dissertation. I provide evidence of my descriptions without closure since I do not claim to provide any absolute truth, any description of authentic other, and certainly no final word on CSP. What is more important is that I do not think of myself as an outside expert capable of passing judgment over the naive answers provided by the locals. I could not come up with interpretations without my interlocutors. I needed them to answer my questions and to make sense of what I saw. I have been called Ms ‘pse’ - ‘pse’ means ‘why’ in Albanian - for having more then often asked friends and interviewees this question in relation to what seemed to me unintelligible in various occasions. These dialogues were necessary to me, in the first place, to understand what I observed or listen to. Part of my aim then has been to discuss the views of my interlocutors in the field thus opening a dialogue with them in the first place.

As I do not consider my external point of view as more objective, but simply another point of view, I did find worrying the trend that I found in field when people rejected the dialogue on the basis of the different experience. The frequency of statements like: ‘you cannot understand since you are a foreigner’ in Albania as in the rest of the region, can mainly be understood as a response to the widespread judgmental attitude and mis-recognition coming from western scholars and practitioners in the field as I will have the chance to explain. Nonetheless, I consider submitting external views to internal scrutiny and establishing a dialogue as a necessary step for a transnational public sphere to come into being: a goal that I have not given up.

80 See on this point Preston (1999) who argues in the same vein, suggesting a new direction for development theory.
2.4 Mapping civil society promotion in Albania

My ambition, in the study of CSP in Albania, was that to take advantage of the analysis of one case-study and have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny without shortcuts. As Pizzorno has reminded (2000) there are three main ways to conceive of explanations in the social sciences: the causal explanation, the rational choice explanation and the identifying explanation.\textsuperscript{81} I pursued the latter. That is to say an explanation that allows, in Pizzorno’s terms, to situate a phenomenon in a comprehensive map of human experience in which the experience of the researcher and that of his public is taken into account in the analysis. Pizzorno uses the metaphor of the map to describe this type of explanation, that is to say, drawing a map of relevant relations between identified points and areas considered relevant in the analysis of the phenomenon. The points are chosen according to their capacity to answer the question. One could of course draw any number of maps when analyzing a phenomenon and these may vary according to the question that motivates the research.\textsuperscript{82}

In order to introduce the analysis of the case under scrutiny I considered it necessary to draw the map of the identifying explanations to understand what happens when western donors’ policies aimed at promoting civil society in aid recipient countries are implemented. These identifying explanations emerged in the dynamic interaction between the analysis of the available academic literature and my field-work. Many of the considerations I put forward in this part of the dissertation belong to the category of the findings of my research as it will be clear to the patient reader reaching the end of my narration. To simplify the process, I summarized the main findings discussed in the third, fourth and fifth descriptive chapters in the table 1 at the end of this chapter.

Public scrutiny of donors’ policies in aid recipient countries exists in the west, as illustrated by the recurrence of the debates around emancipation and colonisation illustrated above. International interventions in the Balkans generated an astounding level of debate, especially in the media, where first the policy was exalted and where later the issue of colonial domination became prominent (in relation both to vested interests and to the alleged lack thereof). Numerous experts from different policy-institutes, INGOs, IOs, single intellectual, political figures took part in these debates. The media involved were different western national electronic and printed media, as well as discussion

\textsuperscript{81} My translation for ‘spiegazione identificatoria’.

\textsuperscript{82} Besides Pizzorno, the reflection on the ‘evidential paradigm’ by Ginsburg (1989) – that is to say the methodological paradigm falling within the logic of discovery instead of that of systematic theory testing – were equally important to my work.
lists on various web sites. The languages of communication included were many, with the usual dominance of English mediating between them.83

What impressed me during my field work was that these transnational debates around colonization in the case of aid to Albania saw a weak participation of the recipients’ opinions. Most denunciations of western intervention emerged within the public sphere of the alleged colonizers, as much as most appreciations of the emancipatory potential of CSP did. What I considered to be necessary, therefore, was to understand the reception of CSP in the public sphere of the country that I wished to study.

First of all, what emerged in my inquiry is that a general appreciation of donors’ presence in Albania and, especially at the beginning of the 90s, of the need for CSP. If exploring CSP in the weakened Balkan country meant exploring it in a context deeply penetrated by donors, not every country receives as much assistance, nor is it so common for donors to be welcome by recipients when interfering directly in their public sphere.84

While CSP everywhere consists of the growth of NGOs and the professionalisation of civic engagement, every aid recipient public sphere reacts differently to the narrative of CSP. In Albania during the 90s one did not find what Schulze calls ‘the interruption of the translatability of cultural experiences’ as in the Arab world where the use of European cultural code is often interpreted as westernization or worse alienation.85 In Albania instead, western hegemony was well received for years. The reason and implications for the positive acceptance of western heavy interference in the Albanian public opinion at large then required exploration.

This finding provided empirical evidence to the limits of the first critique analyzed above, that is to say the denunciation CSP as a strategy of control. As we shall see in the third chapter, for Albania as well as for the rest of post-communist countries the idea of belonging to the European civilization and the aspiration to join its institutions has been central in the positive reception of western aid policies.

83 The most recent debates around the existing protectorates in the Balkans were brought about by the influential western European think-tank ESI. It was especially important the discussion it raised around the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Interestingly, once again, this transnational debate saw a limited engagement of the Bosnian public opinion. See ESI (2005).

84 On foreign aid currently allocated by main donors to Albania, see the matrix recently introduced by donors: http://www.delalb.cec.eu.int/en/eu_and_albania/other_donors.htm. After the 1997 crisis many scholars stressed that Albania was the biggest aid recipient in the post-communist bloc. See Segré (1997) or Morozzo della Rocca (1997).

85 For e.g. among others: Giammuso (1999) or Brower (2000) analyzing cases of resistance to CSP penetration in some Arab countries. Brower observes that there can be problems of 'receptivity towards western (sic!) values & assistance'.
Highlighting the influence of western hegemony constituted simply one of the layers of the analysis, since power relations at local level matter as well. I did not study ‘victims’ that cannot speak and that are deprived of the possibility of being subject. Having as main interlocutors local NGOs representatives in the study of CSP meant dealing with some of the actors that hegemonise the local public sphere.

Thus, in the fourth chapter I analysed the public reception of the western policy in the country taking into account the specific trajectory of the Albanian elites faced with the radical post-communist transformation, the importance of CSP as new transnational source of social power for NGOs representatives and their new relationship with the political elites after the opening of the local public sphere.

As I argued already, questioning the first critique to CSP, restricting the analysis to the interests that these elites have in welcoming the donors interference limits the understanding of the transformation of the Albanian public sphere. After all, initially, CSP received a wider public appreciation than only that of NGO workers. Not only that, the latter proved able to examine critically CSP and highlight what they identified as its shortcomings.

In addition, what emerged was that CSP granted to part of the Albanian elites the new social role of civil society expert. The appreciation of their technocratic role pushed me to explore in particular the limits of the second critique to CSP, that is to say, the denunciation of its technocracy as antipolitical.

My work therefore devoted attention to the local reinterpretation of the civil society promotion. In the three descriptive chapters I discuss in particular the idea that local NGO practitioners developed of their function as that of civic innovator, modernizers and cultural mediators. I did so while examining the trajectory of CSP in the country. Donors redefined CSP incrementally and the aims of the policy widened from that of simply exposing people to democratic values to that of reformulating the welfare state. The fourth chapter then looks in particular at the consequence of this shift in the local public sphere and at what it reveals of the power relations established in the transnational policy-making.

Finally, the fifth chapter allows me to discuss the last critique to CSP examined above, that is to say the epistemological critique. In the narratives around CSP that I collected during my field-work the problem of the standardization of the donors’ approach emerged. In particular what was lamented was the undifferentiated treatment received by donors’ policy-making. In my findings,
faced with the disappointing result of CSP, and the post-communist transformation in general, my interlocutors criticised the models of civil society that were promoted as unfitting the variety of contexts present in the country and neglecting the specific local experiences.

This finding then gave me elements to reflect about the problem of cultural hegemony and epistemological colonization. CSP’s categories do not explain much of Albania but the Albanian public sphere is deeply influenced by it. The encounter with ‘western’ donors’ project making machine is certainly one important source of transnational relations as CSP penetrate the local public sphere with its resources and narratives.

But, just like the actors involved, the transnational arenas of communications connecting the Balkans with western European countries are very many. Beside the polite, well mannered, technocratic side of the west that I consider studying CSP, Albanians had to deal with the populist-xenophobic reaction to their ‘return to Europe’, a reaction which was much more pronounced in western media. There are different voices in western public opinions, but one could argue that xenophobia had a bigger influence then CSP in shaping identity relations after the cold war.

Therefore when in the 5th chapter I discuss the local NGOs role as cultural communicators, I give space to their wider analysis of the foreign view over the locality. In particular I explain their rejection of the foreign idea of the local backwardness examining their view of the gender relations in the country, of the role of the family and of the issue of harmonization to western norms in a country deeply shattered by the troubles of the post-communist transformation. The chapter discusses then the claim of being cultural mediator in the transnational space when modernity is at large.

My findings revealed the complexity of the relation with the putative west. In some cases, the resistance to hegemony took the form of claims of exceptionality and of exceeding available epistemological categories. Here the dialogue between different ethnocentrisms, the Eurocentric and the Albanian nationalist, risks to reduce the space for creative understanding. However, more often my interlocutors suggested solving the problem of the standardization of CSP by assuming the role of cultural mediators between donors and lay people. The reflexivity that emerged among many interviewees suggests that there are ways out of the post-colonial predicaments. As Chakrabarty stresses, emancipatory politics should not be abandoned due to the deadlock of unbalanced power relations.
Generally, CSP is explored in the three descriptive chapters in its adaptation to the different phases of the post-communist transformation of the aid recipient. Yet, I try to combine the chronological order to give the idea of change in the local public sphere as well as at the level of policy adaptation to the context, with the exploration of a few thematical inquiries.

Thus I introduce my case study in the 3rd chapter and I discuss in particular the European identification of the Albanian public opinion; in the 4th chapter I examine the creation of the new foreign funded third sector in the context of the cancellation of the previous authoritarian welfare system; in the 5th chapter I explore the problem of political instability and describe what happened during the Kosovo refugee crisis of 1999 as example of the ambivalent relation that Albanian elites entertained with their turbulent society. In these three cases I stress the importance of the enlarged social space that my interlocutors experience as important element to understand their reception of western interference.

Finally, stimulated by the analysis of the emergency crisis, I touch upon the issue of the transnational civil society building as it provides elements to examine further the various critiques of the transnational policy. It is evident that CSP contributes to penetrate the beneficiary’s public sphere in a new and deeper way as compared to any other previous policy. But such penetration may also create opportunities to see donors’ and recipient’s public spheres intertwine. Therefore it is important to understand not only the way in which CSP is received locally and reconfigured but also to identify the spaces it opens at transnational level.

Today the debate around democracy needs to expand beyond state borders and can thus benefit from the analysis of transnational relations. In contrast with the idea of a single homogeneous public as in the case of the nation-state, I look at the creation of plural transborder arenas of communication where many actors contribute to the formation of identities, opinions, interests of each public sphere. There are limits and potentials in these developments that I wish to take into account. The uneven power distribution is certainly more acutely unbalanced in transnational spaces as compared to the nation-state level.

All the same, the hegemony exercised by stronger publics might not necessarily be as disruptive as the denunciations of CSP suggest. The work therefore attempts to verify whether, despite this limitation, the transnational spaces that emerge display distributive properties, as in the nation-state, or not. The need for transnational redistributions cannot be frustrated by the observation of the

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86 See the analysis of sovereignty, democracy and transnational dynamics in the case of Balkan-EU relations see for instance Mostov (2002).
unbalanced power relations and its cultural implications. I suggest that despite all these limitations it is worth looking at the openings of the current transnational relations.

In the analysis of CSP it is fundamental to recall that donors neglect historical experiences and the specific configurations of the aid recipient country as much as their own one. The imbalanced resource distribution is the reason for this since the recipients of aid have limited chances to formulate their counter narratives, reinforcing this way western triumphalism. This is why renouncing at transnational redistribution due to its colonizing potential is especially problematic.

Moreover, looking only at the heuristic value of the CSP idea of civil society would limit the problem to the issue of knowing. There is a problem of recognition that goes beyond that of being interested in knowing the other and being known. In one of his latest contributions on the issue, Pizzorno clarified how the point of ‘receiving a durable name from others’ creates the possibility for social relations (Pizzorno, 2000). Beyond knowing and being interested in the other, the idea of ‘recognition’ allows us to explore the problem of recognizing the other as interlocutor, as a subject in a relation that facilitates the construction of transnational civil society.

The conclusion of my work is in line with Chakrabarty’s idea of the need to Provincialize Europe that is to say I start from the interpretation of the local experience (in its transnational context) to return to universal concepts. While the standardization of CSP reduces the spaces for recognition, this is a study of an on-going phenomenon that is susceptible to transformation. The improvement of situation in the recipient country had evident implication in the enhanced capacity of critical scrutiny of CSP that I identified in the Albanian public sphere when I carried out my field-work.

The need to frame the analysis of CSP in the way I have discussed up to now emerged from the field-work in Albania. However, I constantly encountered obstacles in confronting myself with well established disciplinary fields mainly for the dominance of nation-state framework in IR, development studies, and democratization studies; the strength and pervasiveness of explanations base on the essentialized cultural difference, the disciplinary division and most of all my own limited academic record.

The formulation of my analytic proposal resulted, then, from long and lonely meditations on my previous field-work experience. This is why I introduced the general argument first on how I propose to frame the analysis of CSP before presenting the case from this framework originates. Let me then finally come to discuss CSP in post-communist Albania. The description of the case-study
should provide the reader with a better insight and understanding of the validity of my interpretative framework.
### Table 1: The map of the identifying explanations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSP Supporters</th>
<th>CSP Detractors</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Reception of CSP in Albania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support liberal democracy and stability by strengthening intermediary groups (1.1)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
<td><strong>Past</strong></td>
<td>In the Albanian public sphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the third sector (1.1)</td>
<td>Controlling the local public sphere (limiting migration; instability) (1.4.1)</td>
<td>Isolation (3.1) / Experience with Party-state (3.1.1; 3.3)</td>
<td>Need of CSP to revitalise society after regime but disappointing outcomes (3.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curtailing welfare state but worsening crisis of governance (1.4.1)</td>
<td>Attraction to the wealthy western world / European identification (3.1; 3.1.2)</td>
<td>Civil society experts (3.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive transfer (1.2)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Anti-politics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Present</strong></td>
<td>Among local NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft-technologies of social engineering (1.2)</td>
<td>Anti-politics as normalization (1.4.2)</td>
<td>Authoritarian welfare and forced voluntarism (4.3)</td>
<td>Civic innovators (4.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rejection of Balkanism (identification with backwardness and violence) / desire to catch-up (4.2; 4.3; 5.2)</td>
<td>De-legalised institutions difficult to reform (3.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harmonization (1.3; 1.5)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Epistemological</strong></td>
<td><strong>In the Albanian public sphere</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The western model-reality (1.4.3)</td>
<td>Total ideological control (4.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nesting-orientalism (5.2; 5.3)</td>
<td>Crisis intellectual milieus / weak public sphere (4.1; 42)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total state (3.1; 3.2; 4.2)</td>
<td>Degeneration of public life / Risks of populism (5.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weak but layered public sphere (3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 4.2; 5.5)</td>
<td>Standardized policies do not fit the local context and generate artificial organizations (3.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standardized policies do not fit the local context and generate artificial organizations (3.2)</td>
<td>Cultural mediators in the enlarged social space (5.2; 5.3; 5.4; 5.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Part II

Civil Society Promotion in Post-communist Albania
Chapter 3: The locality and its transnational relations

With the aim of mapping the implications of CSP in Albania, this chapter provides an introduction to the context. I present the background of the case under scrutiny and I discuss how, before and after the collapse of the communist regime, its public sphere interrelates with that of donors. As it was only in 1991 when for the first time Albania experienced a democratic public sphere, it is important to consider the context in which this opening occurred. I discuss then in particular the moment of regime change; the problem of the state weakness; and the identity relation that make the Albanian public opinion at large identify with the western world.

My contention is that looking at the transnational relations one can understand the initial enthusiastic welcoming of CSP in the Albanian public sphere. The past experience, the serious economic and institutional crisis and desire to be considered part of the European political and cultural space are fundamental elements to account for the positive reception or “consent” towards the policy in Albania. Looking at the disproportionate resource availability, one can appreciate the role of western hegemony and its force of attraction. In considering the identity relation underpinning aid relations, I contend, one finds the limits to the denunciation of western policies as simple instruments of control of the recipient country.

The second part of the chapter is then devoted to narrating the inception of CSP in Albania and its first outcomes.87 After the initial welcoming of the policy, CSP’s outcomes, that is to say the growth of local NGOs, have been considered unsatisfactory locally as well as transnationally. The criticism that emerged in Albania in relation to CSP did not produce denunciation of colonization regardless of the considerable donors’ penetration of the country. The predominant reception of CSP that I found in the local public sphere did not challenge its aims and means but its capacity to produce results.

Finally, I discuss the problematic relationship between foreign funded NGOs and the local political elites during the post-communist transformation. In this regard, I scrutinize the connection between CSP and the crisis of governance that Albania went through. As it emerges, CSP is a foreign funded project that local political elites had to come to terms with. However, considering the performance of the Albanian political elites since the opening of the public sphere, this observation can hardly be considered as a straightforward confirmation of a donors’ colonial project.

87 The thesis does not refer to political events in post-communist Albania in chronological order. Annex 1 provides a chronology of the major events in the country and serves as a reference to the events that I discuss.
The general appreciation of the donors’ interference in the local political sphere and the relationship between foreign funded NGOs and local political elites, shows the importance of considering the layered character of the transnational arenas of communication that exist between western donors and the aid recipient country.

3.1 The background

Albania is a country where social, political and economic transformations have been of extraordinary intensity since the fall of the communist regime in 1991. Like many other ex-communist countries, it started its transition without commercial codes, laws of contracts or property rights arrangements. In addition, at the moment of regime change, the economy was still thoroughly collectivized and people could not privately own even one animal or a car. Albania had remained a Stalinist country for almost half a century and experienced many of the features of ‘people’s democracies’ to the extreme. The abolition of the monopoly of power of the Albanian Party of Labour and the introduction of a market economy were only part of the huge changes which were implemented after 1991. The post-communist transformation required many additional challenges such as the re-introduction of the Ministry of Justice and the profession of lawyers, both of which had been cancelled under Hoxha’s rule in 1965, when the Albanian regime imitated the Chinese cultural revolution (e.g. Blumi 1997).

The repression exercised by the regime had been one of the worst in the whole communist bloc, with the Party State colonizing all public spaces (and parts of the private sphere too) for 50 years. The liberation from party control and the opening of the public sphere was neither a smooth process nor an uncontroversial one and generated significant western involvement in domestic affairs (e.g. Vickers and Pettifer 1997; Martelli 1998). The opportunity to express, develop and argue ideas about the private and common good, that is to say, the freeing of both public sphere and public spaces in Albania, has from the very beginning been closely related to the re-opening of communications with the west. The latter was rediscovered not only via military and diplomatic relations but also by means of migration, media, business individual encounters and the like.

Under the decades of communist rule, international relations were eastward oriented and shaped by the three main alliances with other regimes in Yugoslavia, Russia, and China. These alliances shaped the different periods of the regime life until the last phase, from the end of the 70s onwards, when Hoxha imposed complete autarchy and isolation of the country as a strategy to maintain
power. Political relations with the west were instead abruptly interrupted from the beginning and in the case of UK and USA even diplomatic relations were interrupted right after the war due to the diplomatic incident in the Corfu channel in 1946 (e.g. Vickers 1995:169-170).

The regime continued to refer to the capitalist block against which it defined itself. The communist system was constructing a new man and a new country to show its superiority to the west. Regime propaganda, for instance, celebrated its achievements while claiming that neighbouring capitalist countries were falling into misery. In addition, the capitalist world was constantly depicted as an incumbent menace against which people should be ready to fight. The Albanian regime was a case of national-stalinism, where harsh repression was accompanied by narratives of national superiority, not only thanks to the achievements of the socialist system but also in virtue of the Illyrian blood of the people. On the contrary, during the cold war the small country was basically forgotten by the west, with the exception of small groups of European Stalinists who continued to point to the Albanian model as the alternative to the evils of western capitalism (Combe 1996).

Tiredness and disaffection towards the regime became unrestrainable during the 1980s. At that point the economic crisis in Albania coincided with the widest availability of “mediascapes”. The electrification of the country was almost completed only around the 70s and therefore the great majority of the Albanian population had to wait until the early eighties before they could purchase television sets. At this juncture Italian public television came to constitute the most important, though prohibited, window onto the forbidden external world. It was increasingly difficult for the regime to isolate the country since even a small piece of metal could be used as an antenna to receive foreign signals that could no longer be encrypted. The images provided of an unknown

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88 Despite the choice of autarchy that followed the rupture with the Chinese in 1976, the Albanian nation-state has along experience with foreign aid as well as foreign interference. First there was the experience of the Italian protectorate; see Roselli (1986) for one of the few monographs on the period, in which the economic relations are analysed; then the Albanian communist party received Yugoslav support during the II world war to organize the resistance and in the first post-war years; with the break between Tito and Stalin in 1948 Tirana sided with Moscow and relied considerably on Soviet financial aid until 1961 (Bianchini 2003). As Ever Hoxha did not accept the idea of the de-stalinization Albania broke the relationship with the Soviet Union and from half 60s it established a new alliance with China. The latter as well was central in term of financial and technical support. However, the rapprochement between Beijing and Washington could not be tolerated by Hoxha who imposed the autarchic turn to the country from 1978 onwards. The country suffered considerably of the consequence of isolation, not only in relation to its population - whose freedom of movement even within the boundary of the state was anyway strictly limited well before autarchy – but also for the economic consequence of this choice. De facto the industrial base of the country started falling into pieces well before the collapse of the regime once foreign support was withdrawn and spare parts of machinery equipment were no longer available (Lohmel 1996).

89 Here I apply the term introduced by Appaduraj (1997) that combines the idea of a landscape with five terms identifying different dimensions of transnational cultural flows, one of them being the media.

90 Intercepting foreign television was severely prohibited, while the regime would select western programs, normally pieces of news, to broadcast. There was only a short period in the 70s in which more programs could be watched. It did not last long and the director of television, Todi Lubonja, was punished for having allowed negative foreign influence to spread in the country. He and his family were then sent to prison.
prosperity, while Albania was facing a devastating economic crisis, made the regime narrative of the misery of capitalism worst than a farce at the turn of the eighties (Vehbiu & Devole 1996).

Even though what had become a paranoid rhetoric of foreign siege had an historical rationale, the experience of oppression at home discredited the propaganda concerning the danger constituted by Albania’s neighbours and the capitalist enemies of Albania transfigured into its people's aspiration. Italy in particular came to acquire the opposite connotation as that traditionally proposed by the regime: it came to be seen as the promised future.91

The communist catch-up with western development, if it was unsuccessful in manufacturing the new man, through the violent modernisation process, had definitely transformed people's ways of living. No one in the country could return to life as it had been previously, not even villagers in the remote mountain areas.

In the aftermath of the Second World War Albanians found themselves in a country badly ravaged by conflict but experienced extreme scarcity in a different way as compared to that of today. It was the war and the foreign occupation which brought Albanians - who up until the 50s were for the great majority illiterate - into contact with the west in the first part of the 20th century. After this point Albanians acquired knowledge of the neighbouring west through the newly introduced universal school system that, under highly ideological schemes, allowed for the first time the mass alphabetization of the population (Swandner-Sievers & Fischer 2002; Romano 1999).

The regime forged a mass society and, until the end of the 1960s, offered significant signs of social and economic improvement. The initial economic stagnation and the decline that followed transformed the communist promise of collective emancipation into an experience of unbearable oppression. Moreover, the communist promise of the 'new world', devoid of capitalist exploitation, miserably failed to provide people with even the most basic life conditions (Champseix 1990 & 1992). The regime kept on telling people that western workers were starving while prosperity was about to come to Albania but it became increasingly difficult to convince them.92 Nonetheless, dissatisfaction towards the regime could not be articulated due to the harsh repression.

91 Italian imperial ambitions towards Albania were manifested immediately after the establishment of the nation-state. After two decades of Italian interference thanks to the formalization of a protectorate, Rome decided the annexation of the country and invaded it in 1939. Since Italian rule coincided with the military occupation during the war, it is generally not analyzed as colonial experience in the modern sense. See Bjelić (2002:6) for a discussion on this very point and my own work carried out with Devole on the lack of collective memory over Italian colonialism. Chiodi & Devole (forthcoming).

92 Among the anecdotes that were narrated to me there were hilarious stories, widespread among youngsters, caricaturing Lei-fen, the Chinese Stakhanof, introduced in Albania by the regime since the alliance with China established in 1974 to promote virtuous behaviours among workers and create moral incentive to stimulate commitment and increase the level of productivity.
The 1989 “contagion” had a fundamental role to play in generating the regime collapse and in many respects the regime-change was similar to that of other countries’ in the block. Only the catastrophic economic conditions of the country that risked famine during the winter of 1990-1991 distinguished the situation from other countries in the region.

The collapse of the regime was the product of a similar positive relation between exit and voice as identified by Hirschman (1993) in the case of the DDR. Originally, ‘the voting with the feet’ of Albanians who fled the country in 1990 and 1991 turned upside down Alia’s project to put pressure on foreign donors whilst attempting to avoid conflict at home by finally allowing some people to escape from the country. The regime hoped to use the first migration flows to obtain aid from western countries but the situation could not be kept under control due to the extreme economic crisis and with the connected deepest legitimation crisis of the system. Thus rather then diffusing the tension, as with Honecker’s Germany in 1989, the “exit” of thousands of people encouraged others to “voice” their protest and bring down the regime.

In March 1991, the first freely elected government established itself in Albania. The regime change was not characterized by major episodes of violence but rather by a situation of state disintegration and social disorder. The underground force driving the regime to its collapse was a disbanded society that undertook large-scale exodus, started spontaneously to de-collectivize the land, abandoned factories and destroyed state property.

The collective actors that openly challenged the regime, in December 1990, were students’ movements and workers’ strikes that began demanding better living conditions and political liberalization.93 The long experience of repression of dissent did not allow intellectuals to play a role as they had in Central Europe, and the same mobilization of society turned out to be ephemeral.

Moreover, in common with eastern Germans who fled the country in 1989, Albanians had a very strong desire to open up the claustrophobic environment in the country. The period preceding the collapse of the regime saw a gradual relaxation in police control and stories started circulating informally criticizing the regime. Everyone knew the answer given by cartoonist, Shtjefen Palushi, from the northern town of Shkoder, notorious for his tranchant jokes, who, when asked what he

93 The relevance of these events has been played down by most non Albanian scholars. In contrast, one of the few foreign witness, the Eurodeputy Alexander Langer on diplomatic mission to Tirana during the crucial weeks of December 1990, in his travel notebook gave a sympathetic and emotionally strong account of the events: “Si sente parlare di diverse fabbriche in cui gli operai avrebbero solidarizzato con gli studenti, i tipografi avrebbero scioperato ed inviato una loro rappresentanza, ed anche nelle altre fabbriche vi sarebbe simpatia per gli studenti. Si incontra gente che spontaneamente dice di essere fiera di «questi nostri giovani»”(Langer, 1996:227). Langer also offers a clear picture of the terror that dominated in the country commenting: “la gente è uscita dalle catacombe”. 

Chiodi, Luisa (2007), Transnational Policies of Emancipation or Colonization?: civil society promotion in post-communist Albania European University Institute 10.2870/25233
would do when the regime fell. *I will climb a tree* - he answered - *I do not want to be overrun by the flow of people trying to escape the country*.  

Albania opened, not only after having been repressed by a despotic regime, but also after a long period of isolation from all kinds of international contact, including those with the rest of the communist block. The isolation in which the country found itself under the communist regime, which degenerated into total isolation with the breakdown of diplomatic relations with China in 1978, produced a genuine widespread desire to open to external influences.

Notwithstanding, the west became a point of reference as to what to do after the regime experience all over the region. The difference between Albania and other post-communist countries, for the great part, was a matter of degree: in the country of Eagles most features simply were experienced in an extreme form due to the worse economic and political situation.

A lot has been written about the construction of the west as superior model by Albanians, in particular by migration studies busy explaining why Albanians showed such a high propensity to leave the country (e.g. Lubonja 2002; Mai 2001; Devole & Vehbiu 1996). Their merit is to have highlighted the importance of the attraction of the west and the centrality of its *imaginaire*. As pointed by King and Wood (2001), generally speaking, western media are interesting as they can act as *important factor stimulating migrants to move. Images of wealth and of a free and relaxed lifestyle in the ‘West’ or the ‘North’ are commonplace in the developing and transforming countries in the world*.

Beside isolation, the resource divide between Albania and its western neighbours was certainly important and contributes to explain the idealization of the West in many ways. Yet, as observed by King and Wood themselves, material and symbolic aspects cannot be clearly separated. Since the fall of the regime, European Union countries, the USA, and Canada, in particular, that in the meantime gained the role of aid donors, had also become the symbol of the strongly desired prosperous life. What the representatives of this wealthy world had to say about Albania have been

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94 I thank my friend and colleague Artan Puto for this and other anecdotes that are narrated in the text.

95 The debate has been very important in Albania itself. For instance, Nano argues that people think that they can find better chances elsewhere than in their own community. However, he stresses it is at home where, even if not in terms of wealth, there are better possibilities for a project of personal self-realization for elites. Nano Mustafa, *Shekulli*, 24 July 2000, (trad. it), ‘Sulle febbri albanesi dell'emigrazione’, ICS news, http://ip21.mir.it/ics/.

96 For a discussion on the concept of social imaginary see: Multiple Modernities Project: Modernity and Difference, by Charles Taylor and Benjamin Lee, Center for Transcultural Relations, http://www.sas.upenn.edu/transcult/promad.html.
very strongly taken into account, at the level of public opinion if not always at the governmental one.

Many pages, particularly newspaper articles, have been written describing the ‘wrong’ ideas that Albanians had of the west and of the support it would provide to them at the moment of regime change. That Albanians were naïve and did not know how the “free world” functioned has been often repeated in western media and then by Albanian media itself. There were certainly interesting examples of how unprepared Albanians were to face capitalist institutions. Vehbiu, for instance, stresses how, deducing from their previous experience, people tended to conflate poverty with the unavailability of goods and, once the regime collapsed, many were surprised that goods were available while money was no longer sufficient to purchase them (Vehbiu 1996a).

As for foreign support, the most frequently quoted example is a famous speech of the electoral campaign in 1992 by a Democratic Party representative, Gramos Pashko, professor of political economy at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Tirana: in case of victory the promise was an unconditional and generous assistance by donors that would have signed a blank check to help them out. A slogan commonly used by the Democratic Party was that: "We rule and the (western) world helps us” (e.g. Vickers & Pettifer 1997).

There are other famous episodes such as that of the visit of the Secretary of State James Baker when the crowd started kissing the official car entering Tirana. High expectations concerned the help that was to be provided by Italy in particular. There was a shared idea in the country that just as Albanians had assisted Italians during the II World War, when after 1943 they found protection from the Nazi-fascists among Albanian families, now Italians would in return help them. That this help was not reciprocated was widely discussed in the following years (Chiodi & Devole, forthcoming). Whether it was a question of unrealistic expectation or instrumental promises of unconditional support given by western governments the result was that soon after the communist regime collapsed the situation changed (Vehbiu and Devole 1996).

That the ‘return to Europe’ was full of expectation is clear. In particular, much more was expected in terms of international solidarity than effectively occurred. In the very first months of the gradual opening of the regime and the first wave of refugees’ arrival, western media responded with a rhetoric of freedom and readiness of hospitality. This did not last long after the Albanian communist regime finally collapsed. The same foreign media that contributed to the fall of the regime then began to play a negative role in the newly freed public sphere. Italian and Greek media,
in particular, displayed a deeply xenophobic reaction towards the neighbouring country and its inhabitants.

At that point the myth of fleeing the country for Albanians was soon counterposed by the myth of the catastrophe/aggression and/or the need to protect one's own wealth, particularly among the Italians and Greeks receiving them. When people were finally granted freedom of movement, after the long period of isolation, the feeling of belonging to the world was frustrated by western restrictions on the flow of population and by the categorical definition of Albanians as 'economic emigrants', as described by the two Albanian scholars Vehbiu and Devole in their seminal work (1996).\(^97\)

Moreover, images of boatpeople escaping the country, together with the first images of the widespread local poverty remained impressed in the western imaginary of Albania. Hence, Albanians were pushed back not only physically, via limitations on emigration but also metaphorically through the constant western media depiction of themselves as poor, backward, violent, etc (Vehbiu & Devole 1996; Mai 2001; King & Wood 2001). The new wave of refugees searching protection from the state collapse of 1997 provided new opportunities to reproduce this image (e.g. Blumi 1998).\(^98\)

According to Vehbiu and Devole, one can speak of ‘interactive identities’ between Italian-Albanian public opinions.\(^99\) It has been noted that at the peak of the various crisis, Albanian television quoted its Italian counterpart in order to refer to what was going on at home (Devole 1998:122). Among my interlocutors Misha observed, for instance, that the personal and the collective identity crisis that Albanians were facing after the collapse of the regime was worsened by the ‘mirror effect’ produced by foreign media ‘Every image of Albania presented in the Italian media comes back here. This is because we are neighbours and many people watch Italian TV in

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\(^97\) Probably it could hardly have been different. On this point it is interesting to note the commentary proposed by Champseix (1996:12) one of the rare cases of a foreign observer of the situation in the country preceding the collapse of the communist system: "Je comprend mon malaise: nous sommes habitués à la misère banalisée pare le «typique» et l’exotique. Ici, rien de tel: nous sommes confrontés à une misère d’Européens. Certains on même les chevaux blonds. Ils nous regardent sans hostilité."

\(^98\) As we shall see later, in the last few years, the situation has improved (e.g. Chiodi & Devole (2005). However, the problem of the negative representation has remained central in the Albanian public sphere and in its diaspora abroad. See for instance the paper presented at the conference organized in Tirana in December 2004 by the Albanian Political Science Association (ALPSA) Gezim Alpion (The University of Birmingham, UK) The Role of the Albanian Media in Enhancing the Image of Albania in the West: Failures and Hopes as one example of the many efforts to think at how to improve the image abroad.

\(^99\) Vehbiu and Devole argue about Italy that Albanians came to constitute the enemy, the epitome of the menacing migrant, against whom reconstituted the shattered national identity in the 90s. See (Vehbiu & Devole, 1996) and (Devole:1998). Many other scholars have after them argued in a similar fashion.
particular. But often information are not verified and constantly project a negative image of Albania that influences people here. They are the first to destroy the hopes people need to have in their own future. While the political opposition uses what Italian media say against the government.’ In other words we can speak of identity formation in the transborder arena that concerns entire collectivities confronting each other and that influences individual or group identities in the same space.100

The sudden reintegration into global processes has been particularly painful in light of the generally harsh economic conditions in the country and the need for radical re-organization. The new attitudes, tastes and models of behaviour have emerged in confrontation with the western world. The deep economic crisis that involved everybody in the country at the turn of the 1980s, with the first signs of recovery transformed into a strong drive to improve living standards. What has dominated since then has been a sense of poverty as shame and the purchase of commodities, and generally speaking material wealth, seen as the most important tool to achieve recognition at home as well as in the transnational space. In addition, the resource gap between the Balkan country and the west became a source of shame for the single individual projecting a degrading image of one’s life-world.101

At the turn of the 1990s, the huge resource divide between Albania and Western countries, particularly in terms of infrastructure, know-how, living standards, and life changes was not a matter of perception but the crude reality. The great dynamism of the economy, much praised by international financial institutions until 1997, had a lot to do with the widespread desire to improve one's own living standards quickly and to leave behind the memory of deep deprivation that had become particularly acute towards the end of the regime. It was the failed promise of communist welfare, itself a result of transnational relations, together with the proximity and the relationality with wealthy western countries that generated new aspirations. Once the worse had passed, it was no longer clear what a dignified life was (e.g. Romano: 1999; Vehbiu, 1995:107-8).

100 Most of the time transnational identities are seen as developing below the state nation-level. See the seminal work of Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994) who discuss about “nation unbound”. This is a different phenomenon from the one with which I am concerned here as I have explained in the first chapter.

101 The issue of material wealth and the shame of poverty is an underlining aspect of transnational relations. Let me just refer here to one episode of my fieldwork when I encountered a young man living in a shanty town at the periphery of Tirana who complained about the poor hygienic conditions of his neighbourhood. I commented that in the downtown of the capital the situation was not much better then at its peripheries. The reply I got was that one should confront himself with the best options available and thus he was thinking at Italy and not at Tirana to lament his unhealthy life-world.
In addition to such new aspirations, according to Altvater (1998:600), in some post-communist countries in transformation, the proximity with western countries generated economic incentives to engage in transnational criminal activities. Similarly Chossudovski (2000) argues that in the international division of labour, the most rewarding of the economic activities that Albania could develop have been money laundering, organized crime, drug and human trafficking.

Yet, the country defies simplified analyses since there are various dynamics taking place, and important differences should be made between them. This brief introduction does not take into account social and geographical differences, the difference between the capital city dwellers, the provinces and the rural population, the position of intellectual elite, nor generational divides. Many of the issues I have just described cut across most of these differences that I analyse in further details below.¹⁰²

This introduction aimed at briefly presenting the background of transnational relations that shape the context in which CSP makes its inception. In the next paragraphs, I analyze specifically two elements that are be acknowledged examining the welcoming of CSP in Albania, one constituting an important feature of the locality - that is to say the legitimacy crisis of state institutions - and the other a fundamental aspects its transitional relations – the European identification and its implication for the transformation of the local political system.

3.1.1 The failed Albanian state

When the restrictions on the public sphere were lifted, the great hopes which Albanians had had were soon replaced by deep disarray. One system collapsed and the new one was still unable to define new norms and rules for the polity. The country had already been challenged by the extreme economic deprivation experienced during the last period of the regime but the deep transformations which occurred afterwards initially made things worse.

Post-communist Albania has been often described, particularly in western press, as a failed state due to the recurrence of deep crisis of its institutions and popular revolts. Paradoxically for a country that defended its sovereignty to the point of experiencing autarchy, most extreme form of protection, Albania ended up badly dependent on foreign aid and repeatedly avoided falling apart only as a result of foreign military intervention. The first time due to the humanitarian crisis during

¹⁰² To give just a few examples: the opportunity to travel abroad, for purposes other than emigration and some form of training, is an option reserved for the very few. Internet server connections are still expensive outside of the capital city and no server existed in 2000 outside Tirana.
the winter 1991-92, the second in 1997 resulting from a political and civil strife; the third generated by an external shock, the Kosovo refugee crisis.

If the problem of state weakness is shared by the rest of the post-communist countries (e.g. Holmes 1996; Verdery 1997; Bianchini 2005), the experience of state-collapse disconnected from military conflict is unique for Albania in the region and can be found only in “third world” countries (Zartman 1995). At all events, even beyond fully fledged interventions, the military sovereignty of Albania has been severely limited since 1991 since small contingents of western troops providing technical assistance and military advice have been constantly present in the country.

Having said that, it should be clear that this fragility of the polity and of its state apparatus are central to introduce the discussion around CSP in post-communist Albania. The same core problematique of whether CSP is an ‘emancipatory’ or a ‘colonialist’ transnational policy requires a careful consideration of the problem of state failure. As we shall discuss in detail, Albania totally depended on foreign aid to implement CSP; second the crisis of the polity increases the hegemonic role of donors well beyond their direct intervention.

The collapse of the regime in 1991 was a relatively smooth and non-bloody in political terms considering the previous experience. If fear of a civil war was present in the country and abroad, many observed that it was thanks to the moderation of the two antagonistic political leaders, Ramiz Alia and Sali Berisha, at crucial moments, if a peaceful regime change was achieved (e.g. Devole, 1998:31; Morozzo della Rocca, 1997:25).

Notwithstanding, the post-communist transformation generated a gigantic retrogression in terms of state-functioning. I mentioned how spontaneous de-collectivization contributed to the disintegration of the system. It was laymen who destroyed any symbol of the previous government. Once factories and mines had been abandoned, the entire economy was barely functional and the 1991-92 was a winter of famine in mountain areas of the north of the country. Food riots and lawlessness during those months were placated by the first foreign military intervention - the so-called Operazione Pellicano - constituted by 1,000 disarmed Italian soldiers distributing humanitarian aid to various parts of the country.

At the time, the economic crisis was so severe that almost everything came to be seen as a possible source of income, pieces of public buildings included. Literally anything was seized for this purpose: windows, chairs, tables from the buildings, manhole covers from the streets, everything that could be taken away from public properties was dismantled and taken home.
The radical political, economic and social transformations that followed contributed further to de-structure the weakened Albanian state. The economic liberalization consistently took off with the election on the 22th march 1992 of first democratically elected non communist government led by the Democratic Party. Openly buttressed and monitored by western countries and in particular the USA, the new government initiated radical and expeditious economic reforms aimed dismantling the total state. Yet the Democratic Party leading the coalition was clearly unprepared to face these daunting tasks and Albania lacked many of the advanced state infrastructures necessary to run a capitalist economy, from banking to taxation and to property rights. The totalitarianian state of before, few years later had problems in having electricity bills’ paid.

The combination of the past and the new economic policy brought to the wholesale de-industrialization of the country and the de facto cancellation of the previous welfare system. Thus, in the first few years emigration became the only available survival strategy for many people. While prior to 1989 Albanians could not freely move even inside the country and official approval to travel anywhere was required, with border areas strictly off limits, the collapse of the system and the disastrous economic situation entailed mass migration abroad as well as an unprecedented internal resettlement of people at home (Carletto et al 2004) (Zonzini 2005).

Such overwhelming economic crisis had a central role in the polity crisis as much as in the weathering away of the state apparatus. But, if the extreme poverty of public resources to respond to the crisis makes Albania a peculiar case, there are aspects of the state weakness that Albania shares with other post-communist countries. As pointed by Holmes (1996:71) the most important legacy and the only universal problem among post-communist countries has been the crisis of governance, that is to say the lack of institutional capacity of the central state to penetrate the country and logistically implement political decisions. But, the problem of the state in post-communism generally emerged as central only after a few years of transition. Initially instead the idea of reducing the role of the state in society was considered a necessary condition for the successful post-communist transformation (Vaughan-Whitehead 2003).

Holmes refers to a number of elements that come into play in explaining the weakness of post-communist states. One of them is the length of the history of statehood that in the case of Albania is particularly short, even if compared to the rest of the region historically ruled by the Central Empires (Austro-Hugarian; Russia and Ottoman). Building a modern nation-state in the areas of

103 The first free elections were held the previous year, the 31th march 1991. The coalition government that resulted from these elections, headed by the then still Workers Party, initiated the path of liberalization and reform that, despite being too gradual to be able to deal with the dramatic economic situation of the country.

104 ICG (2003), for instance, describes how de-industrialization, return to agrarian way of life and migration intersect. A common family survival strategy sees one older brother running the farm while siblings seeked employment abroad.
Albanian population in the Balkans was possible only from the end of the I World War onwards. Albania was recognized as a state at the Ambassador conference in London in 1912 but until the 20s the Balkan wars first and then the First World War ravaged the country. As for the interwar period, it was not long enough to allow the Albanian monarchy to acquire the full control over its territory. Many scholars today consider Enver Hoxha’s regime as that which achieved the social and cultural homogeneity of the nation-state among the different Albanian communities included in the territory assigned to the Albanian state (e.g. Blumi 1998).

Secondly, Holmes examines the legacy of the party-state in post-communism. Considering that the regime in Albania never faced a process of de-stalinisation the problem is deeper here. The decades of political penetration of the state administration carried out by the party, the vanguard of the proletariat, left a clear sign in the political culture of its elites as much as of the administration.

Applying Michael Mann’s conceptualization of the two forms of state power - the despotical and the infrastructural (1993: pp.54-63) - one could observe how the first post-communist elites in Albania in particular endeavoured to keep the despotical power developed by the previous regime. There were repeated cases of abuse of despotical power: from the use of police violence to intimidate the opposition to a failed attempt of a coup d’état in September 1998.

The worst example relates to the 1997 crisis when the country plunged into anarchy after a failed attempt by the government at repressing popular revolts. The latter had exploded when the majority of Albanian citizens discovered that they had lost all savings invested in the pyramid investment schemes, that is to say fraudulent financial organizations that, openly buttressed by the government, had attracted roughly half of Albanians’ GDP between 1995 and 1996 (Korovilas 1999). With half of the country violently asking the President of the Republic to resign, Sali Berisha, allegedly ordered the opening of the army depots across central and north Albania in order to organize his defence (Kola, 2003:323; Perikli, 1997). Such abuse of despotical power, plunged the entire country into anarchy for months until the second foreign military intervention was organized to stabilized the situation. Thus, the complex 1997 crisis, resulting from a mix of political mismanagement and lack of banking infrastructure, was placated by a ‘Coalition of the Willing’, formed under Italian military command, that carried out the Operazione Alba with a UN mandate to re-establish the security condition to held elections (e.g. de Guttry 1999).

Indeed, while the Democratic Party governments made more use of the despotical power, the Socialist, once back to government after the 1997 election, tended to use more often the infrastructural power. But, generally speaking, the culture of political “occupation” of institutions made Albanian elites particularly manipulative of such power. With the justification of punishing
the culprits of the communist oppression, for instance, the first post-communist government initiated the practice of a total purge in the public administration, emptying the civil service of its trained personnel. The result was not only disorganization but a blow to the morale of the public administration. The most infamous episode of such purges, that had long term consequences on the state apparatus, affected the judicial system where the priority was presented as the renewal of all judges considered to have been compromised by the regime. The Democratic led government considered a group of former political persecuted people ready to become judges after just six months training (Vickers 1997; Combe, 1996:20).

There have been numerous instances in which the political leadership abused of its infrastructural power in the course of the decade further de-legitimizing state institutions. Such occasions were provided by the manipulation of the elections, by the control of the privatization process and especially after 1997 by the rampant corruption. Having said that, this should make clear the reason why ordinary citizens do not consider state institutions as neutral actors and hence why they initially welcomed western advice to reduce their economic and political role.

This problem with the infrastructural power of the Albanian state worsened with the 1997 crisis since the following socialist administrations in charge of its reconstruction did not stop the self-styled spoil system. Today the elites no longer need to control the political credential of people and, just as in many other post-socialist countries, the void left by ideology has been filled by clientelism.

As a consequence of its impoverishment and extreme institutional weakness Albania witnessed considerable interference from foreign actors assisting its recovering. If at least the collapse of the regime in 1990-91 had a political solution and the crucial moment was the formation of the anti communist front constituted by the newly formed Democratic Party, the second devastating crisis in 1997 cost the life of 2000 people, deeply shattered the country and entailed a stronger foreign penetration (Devole: 1998).

After that, the country assumed the form of a western informal protectorate with western powers having a say in internal affairs in a quasi-institutionalised way with an informal group called ‘Friends of Albania’. This gathering of Western ambassadors with the resident representatives of the EU, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, co-ordinated the main policy-making lines with the Albanian government. Interestingly the Economist Intelligent Unit’s remark on this situation in

105 Kola notes that in his own experience 90% of the personnel of the Ministry of foreign Affairs were removed from their position and accredits this percentage of purge for the rest of the state apparatus (2003:256). President Berisha was the initiator of this self-styled ‘spoil system’ and according to many instigated a climate of revenge in the country instead of one of reconciliation (Vickers, 1995).
2000 was: ‘A more general drawback of Albania’s rapprochement with the West has been that this has compromised the country’s sovereignty, since government policy in several areas is being guided by the ‘Friends of Albania.’’ (Economist Intelligent Unit, 2000).

In this regard, it is important to note that some Albanian public officials showed their inclination to put the country under the control of western powers. After the 1997 crisis, it was the Prime Minister himself, Fatos Nano, who publicly advocated the re-establishment of an Italian protectorate in the country. The debate over the opportunity or the need for such a development infuriated the country as the memory of western power politics in the Balkans was alive in Albanian public opinion. However, even once Albania had overcome the worst period of economic crisis and had gone through its shock therapy, it was clear that to finance public spending in the country foreign support and interference was necessary.

In the last few years, the political and economic difficulties of the country have significantly diminished while the chances of autonomous policy-making have increased, as I describe later. But what is more, after the Kosovo war in 1999, Albania was promised a ‘European perspective’. Thus, since then, the chance of EU integration mutated the spirit of the intrusive foreign presence, providing a political perspective.

Notwithstanding, much before the concrete opening of this “European perspective”, in the Albanian public sphere the idea of being a European country gave western donors a special legitimacy in their policy-making at home. The next chapter then is devoted to a detailed discussion of the implications of this collective identification.

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107 In 2003 one of the most important sources of income for Albanian economy was constituted by remittances from emigrants. Remittances constitute, according to official estimates, the largest source of foreign exchange, greater than the combined value of exports and foreign direct investment and constituting 14 percent of GDP (IMF, 2002). In Albania the neoclassical argument of reducing taxes, making flexible the labour market and pursue deregulation could not work. On the opposite the fundamental problem here has been that of establishing a functioning system of revenue collection.

3.1.2 We are European

Beside the strong attraction exercised by western countries and the need for financial support due the general crisis of the Albanian polity as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the most important element to account for the strong appreciation of western interference in Albanian has been the idea of being European. I shall thus explore this aspect further in connection with the transformation of the political system during the post-communist decade.

In the Albanian public sphere there was no doubt from the very beginning of the right to belong to Europe. Combe (1996:18) observes that the ‘forgotten’ Albanians invoked Europe with the conviction that the regime had been the hindrance to their European belonging but that the ‘historical injustice’ would be repaired at a future point: once again an ‘eastern’ influence had hampered the ‘normal’ unfolding of the European destiny of Albania: first the Ottoman conquest and then the communist regime. The paradox, of course, is that the communist modernizers who contributed to the spread of the idea of the Ottoman past as a negative Eastern legacy in their ideological reconstruction of the past (e.g. Puto 2003), ended up portrayed as the product of Eastern backwardness, in other words ended up orientalized.109

During the marches against the regime and afterwards during the first free electoral campaigns one of the most popular slogans was ‘Albania in Europe’. Indeed, the last days of the regime life were characterized by the restoration of diplomatic relations with western countries and saw the deputy foreign minister, the socialist Muhamet Kaplani publicly referring to Tirana’s intention of joining the European integration process. The Albanian scholar Kola considers the signature of the Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) with the ECC in 1992 the first step towards the EU membership (Kola, 2003: 284). However, it is rather doubtful that anyone in Brussels considered Albania for membership at that time and, until the very end of the 90s, the EU was only, if at all, a remote perspective (Jonhson, 2001).

Not even the membership in the Council of Europe was immediate. Albania was considered fitting the criteria for integration only two years after its application, on 13th July 1995. As direct consequence of this new membership Albania suspended the death penalty, which the first democratically elected president, Sali Berisha, had been keen to preserve and adopted for the last time in 1992 (Vikers & Pettifer 1997).

As discussed above, the strong leverage of western institutions on Albania politics increased after the 1997 crisis, due to the extreme institutional weakness that followed, but it was never

109 This relationship with the Ottoman past is common to the whole region and even in Turkey, the modernization process in the XX century produced similar forms of etno-orientalism.
unlimited. Having realized that the EU membership did not constitute an immediate gain President Berisha initiated a practices of oscillating between Brussels and Washington according to political circumstances. In addition, Berisha had the chance to play with more cards at the same time: he was proud to announce that Albania was the first country to apply for NATO membership in December 1992;\(^{110}\) while one month before he had signed the treaty of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) hoping to receive aid from Islamic countries.

Even though the majority of Albanian citizens is Muslim, this choice was harshly criticized at home and according to Kola continued to be a burning issue (Kola 2003:295). The risk of alienating Albania from its Euro Atlantic affiliation, was not only seen in the Albanian public opinion as a question of political interests but also of cultural belonging (Clayer 2003). Since the XIX century the predominance of Islam has not prevented the European identification of the small Balkan country.

Being a religiously composite country at the periphery of western Europe - according to pre-II World War statistics, Albanians are about 70% Muslim, 30% of whom affiliated to different Sufi sects, 20% Orthodox and 10% Catholics (Morozzo della Rocca 1990) - the founding fathers of the modern Albanian nation-state considered the reinforcement of the national identity the solution to the problem.

Unsurprisingly the slogan introduced by one of them Vaso Pasha -“the religion of Albanians is Albanianism” – became one of the most important national myth of the XX century (Schwander-Sievers and Fisher 2002). The communist regime transformed this myth into that of the religious indifference of Albanians and violently repressed all local religious tradition, up to the point that in 1967 Albania was declared the world’s first atheist state. The long lasting prohibition to practice religions partially obliterated secular traditions and was particularly traumatic for the Muslim Sufi who had serious problems after the fall of the regime due to the lack of external support.

As in the rest of the Balkans, the issue of the hybrid cultural identity developed in Albania over its history re-emerged in the post-communist transformation but it was negatively influenced by the globalised debates around the clash of civilization.\(^{111}\) These debates had an increasing impact in the democratizing Albanian public sphere where important public intellectuals argued that Islamic traditions were not rooted in the country. Among the most extremist in this respect, the world

\(^{110}\) Only in January 1995 did Albania obtain an agreement for an individual partnership with NATO. However, it is still not a member of the Atlantic Organization.

\(^{111}\) For the foreign influence see: Artan Fuga ‘Y a-t-il un risque d’intégrisme religieux en Albanie ?’, in Koha Jone, 27 novembre 2003, Courrier des Balkans, http://www.balkans.eu.org/
famous writer Ismail Kadare who repeatedly advocated the re-conversion to Christianity of the Albanian population.\footnote{Kadare who wrote his novels applying the nationalist rhetoric approved by the regime Valtchinova (2002), during post-communist emerged as a strong Albanian nationalist-sciovinist. Similarly, the Albanian scholar Aurel Plasari (1998) argued in a book that had resonance abroad that the Teodosio dividing line crossed Albania and that the country should therefore choose which civilization to belong to.}

Even neglecting these excesses, one should note that Albanian elites remain strongly attached to its westernizing ambitions and for instance when, in 2003, media reported a few cases of young Albanian women wearing the veil in public, the predominant reaction of columnists and public authorities was harshly negative.\footnote{See for a review of the debate in the media: Puto, Albania, (11/08/03) ‘Le ragazze musulmane in Albania hanno diritto al velo?’, \url{http://www.osservatoriobalcani.org}.} Who lately emerged as the most appreciated Albanian Muslim intellectual, contrasting the Islamophobic trend in the country, Ervin Hatibi himself argued along the line of the European belonging of the Albanian Islam.\footnote{See Ervin Hatibi, “Pallalallare te Kuj dhe Blu: Mbështetjen e dhunë te armikut në diskursin publik shqiptar” (The red and blu Pasha: the violent islamization of the enemy in the Albanian public opinion) \textit{Perpjekja}, Spring 2005, n.20.}

Notwithstanding, various Islamic foundations and humanitarian NGOs have been active in the country since the collapse of the regime but one cannot say that they generated a strong revival of Muslim religious practices. As pointed by Clayer (2003), there has been an individualized return to all of the three major faiths during the 90s. Instead, what emerged in 1998 was that, due to the unstable political situation and weakness of state institutions, the Islamic terrorists of Al Gihad had found a harbinger in the country. And right before the terrorist attacks in the US embassies in Africa that summer the CIA arrested and extradited some of them from Tirana.

As for the political spectrum, one could argue, simplifying the intricate political scenario, that the Democratic Party condescended with the Muslim tradition due to its anti-communism and its voters are mostly living in the predominantly Muslim north; the Socialist Party instead remains attached to its secularising ambition and rejects religion as a sign of backwardness. However, even the Democratic Party never really questioned the generalized European aspiration/identification that since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire has been dominated the country.

Actually, the idea of the ‘return to Europe’, that was very important for Central European intellectuals (Bianchini, 2004) (Szucs, 1988) (Garton Ash, 1991), in Albania took up the feature of a true myth that shaped the early days of post-communism. In this respect, is interesting to consider the opinion of Fatos Lubonja (2002) who, more than other Albanian intellectuals, focused on the analysis of Albanian myths: ‘\textit{If we can speak of a myth dominating the post-Communist period, it is...}'
the myth of the West. It appears as the strongest drive for the creation of a new identity and a new inspiration and, at the same time, the finding of a new big brother to provide support.’

Many considered that the discussion around Europe and/or generally the West has been often superficially dealt with in the Albanian public sphere. Western scholars argued that the European identity of Albanians is not convincing. For instance Spanò criticized the Albanian political elites for their understanding of the EU integration process as resulting from the ‘aggregation of different national communities, rather then a process aiming to create a multicultural European citizen’ (Spanò, 1998: 168). This type of criticism is clearly problematic considering the popularity of the idea of ‘Europe of the Nations’ even in the EU space.

Such questioning of the European credential had negative impacts in the Balkan country. As the Albanian scholar Ngjela (1999) commented: ‘The commitment to the integration in the Western structures grew to an obsessive objective and claims that Albania was a special partner and a soon-to-be member of the EU and NATO were very familiar in the partisan media. This obsession reflected a state of despair on the part of the people whose miserable economic conditions and a lack of civic awareness did not allow room for any scrutiny of the erratic democracy that was being installed, let alone any philosophical deliberations on integration theories.’

After all, it was not surprising that few among Albanian elites initially had a clear idea of what the European integration process entailed. The EU itself has undergone an important transformation during the post-cold war decade and some scholars argue that we should consider the two transitions taking place in the continent during the 90s: the eastern post-communist transformation and the western integration process (Bianchini, Schoepflin, Shoup 2002; Privitera 2005).

What is sure, Brussels faced its eastward enlargement piecemeal and not entirely wholeheartedly; it was only in 1993 that the criteria for the integration were defined in Copenhagen. As for the Balkans, the EU perspective was not considered before the Helsinki Council in 1999.

While Albanian officials took the “Europeaness” of the country for granted, the most widespread approach on the side of EU representatives has been that Albania needs to be Europeanized not only in institutional but also in cultural terms. In Brussels the idea of pushing

115 In any case Albania makes no exception to the rule in this respect. Pamela Ballinger, for instance, shows how the call for Europe and Europeaness in Croatia, has become central to struggle for political legitimacy for all political forces regardless of their actual practices (Ballinger, 1998).
Albania towards reaching ‘European standards’ to be considered for membership has been often
equalled to that of interiorizing ‘European values’.116

This view has been shared by those Albanian scholars who articulated critiques of Albanian
political elites showing lack of commitment to adjusting to democratic behaviour and thus
thwarting EU integration. The ‘totalitarian mind’ acquired during half a century of socialist system
identified by the Albanian political theorist Fuga (1998) is often seen as shaping the behaviours and
the policy-making of elites despite declared intentions.

Actually, it is true that foreign mediation was repeatedly necessary to overcome many political
deadlocks during the 90s. The experience of the devastating struggle between the two main political
parties continued to jeopardize the country’s recovery well after the 1997 crisis. Even the least
powerful of the EU institutions, the European Parliament, had an important role in this field and in
2002 brokered two highly needed agreements.117 The first time it successfully intervened in
providing a forum for the resolution of the problem of the constant boycott of the Albanian
parliament by the Democratic Party (DP), and the second time it forced the DP and the Socialist
Party to find an agreement on the election of the president of the Republic. The Albanian media
widely celebrated the event as one of the main achievements in the stabilization of the country
where in-fight for long endangered the same existence of the country and then forced the repeated
postponing of the negotiations with the EU for the signing of the Stabilization and Association
Agreement.

While the “European perspective” today opens new possibilities for the aid recipient, it does not
change the current power relations intrinsic to the aid relationship. It is evident, for instance, that
Brussels’ emissaries are entitled to use an unusual anti-diplomatic language in their public releases
when referring to the fact that Albanian political elites should do ‘the homework’ assigned to them
in order to proceed with the integration process.118 And this rhetoric did not generated major
reactions in the local public sphere, quite the opposite. Even when the Albanian media introduced
the term “ambasciatocracy”, to describe their political system where power resides in foreign

116  The idea of ‘European values’ is widely used by EU official documents even more so when discussing Enlargement. That
    democracy is a value in New Zealand, India or Brazil is neglected as it is overwhelmingly the European or Western
    perspective which is considered paramount. Moreover, in the transnational public sphere, when discussing the issue of EU
    membership of post-communist countries, and even more so of Balkan countries, the differentiation between Europeanisation
    and EU-isation is seldom made.


118  The chairperson of the European Parliament’s Delegation for the relations with south-east Europe, Doris Pack,
    sharply criticised the Albanian political elites for their lack of responsibility and political maturity on many different
    occasions that were regularly reported by Albanian media.
bureaus what it mostly meant to criticize was not foreign interference but rather the lack of responsibility of local political elites.

In this regard, many in Albania appreciated the power differential between the EU and Albania as positive in as far as Brussels has more leverage to improve the chances for democratization of the country that the local elites do not seem able to provide (Elbasani 2004). As already occurred in other post-communist countries approaching the EU integration, Albania recently experienced the paradox that the closer one gets to Brussels the higher the expectations and with them the greater the likelihood of open criticism. Thus lately, on occasion, one could find polemical tones in the press commenting the harsh EU official statements.119

Yet, for years, in Albania, as in the rest of the post-communist area, the idea of the ‘return to Europe’ was that of a ‘return to normality’ (Kumar 2001; Kennedy 2002). Debates around Albanian specificities are ongoing but what largely prevails, in my findings discussed later, is the idea of finally becoming like the others. During an interview in 2000 Dritan Tola emphasised that ‘Albania wishes to become a European country’, underlining that Albania had already tried its own model and now it is no longer time for social and political experiments. ‘It would be good instead if we follow the EU general guidelines’.

Some western scholars observed that the perspective of educated urban dwellers differs from the rest of the population disoriented in the labyrinth of transformation often displaying nationalist and xenophobic tendencies. Pandolfi (2002:207), for instance, claimed that Albanian public opinion is still largely nationalist and that a class of sophisticated polyglot Albanians working with foreigner practitioners operate in a transnational context but are alienated by a nationalist local audience. The existence of such a clear-cut divide between polyglot NGO representatives and the rest of the nationalist population is arguable in relation to the European identity. As I describe later, the considerable gap between an NGO representative and a layperson is rather about life chances, and does not centre around the EU perspective nor today it is reflected into political affiliations (Ilirjani 2005).

The relationship with the idealized west in general and EU in particular, of urban NGOs representatives and ordinary people living in remote areas of the country, seems instead rather

similar. As most surveys conducted in the country since the beginning of the nineties concluded, the aspiration for the European integration has been the highest among post-communist countries.\(^{120}\)

Moreover, as noted by Gilles de Rapper (2002) in his fieldwork in the rural villages of southern Albania, the desire for well-being is connected with the ideas of development and progress that are identified clearly with the west in general and the EU in particular. In the village of Devoll, the interviewees of de Rapper claimed ‘cultural superiority over all other Albanian regions due its long and continuous links with the West’ (2002: 192). ‘The contact with the outside world – writes de Rapper – through knowledge of foreign languages, travel or emigration is explicitly sought and acts as a source of social prestige.’

Both elites and ordinary people experienced international isolation during the regime and regained contact with western countries only in the last 15 years developing in many respect similar reactions to this experience.\(^{121}\) As I argue later on, after the idealization, the frustration relating to the transnational arena was shared. Moreover, the nationalist narratives nurtured as a result of harsh experiences of xenophobia and racism abroad, up to now, did not obstruct the desire to be included in the EU political and economic space.

Undeniably, it should not be neglected that for the greatest part of the population the desire of being recognized as European has its first rationale in overcoming the problem of the restrictive visa regime. After all migration has not been only about providing resources to support families, it also provides a way to experience the world behind the borders of the nation-state after the suffocating experience of isolation that lasted for half the century (e.g. Benini 2000; Nicholson 2002; Corso & Trifirò).

As it is well-known in Albania, approximating to EU membership improves the right to mobility across the borders. However, as discussed so far, this concern does not explain the breadth of European identification. On the contrary, one might argue, in line with the denunciation of CSP as a policy of control, that CSP responds to the wish of EU public opinions to limit migration by “helping them to stay at home” (Perlmutter 1998).

In this regard, it is important to observe how the connection between EU aid projects and anti-migratory policies has not been commonly made in the Albanian public sphere. As I shall describe

\(^ {120}\) I am going to analyze this elite/grassroots relations further in the next chapters. Here I wish to stress the potential and limits of the debates around the Albanian European identity. See the regular surveys by the Eurobarometer and the report ‘Albania and the European Union: Perceptions and Realities’ by the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) http://www.aiis-albania.org.

\(^ {121}\) Only a very small part of the nomenklature had access to the external world and even these people had to be very careful to avoid problems with the regime while travelling.
in the next few paragraphs, when CSP is criticized in Albania what is contested is its capacity to produce the expected results. Let me then start the analysis of civil society promotion in Albania exploring the various narratives that emerged around the idea of civil society and the inception of the policy in the country.

3.2 Welcoming CSP

Given that Albania re-emerged on the international scene in 1991 after decades of autarchy, its peculiarity among former communist countries – beside the already discussed deep economic and political crises and more specifically in relation to CSP - is that the language of civil society entered the country together with donors’ projects only at the moment of regime change. As the Albanian EU officer Dritan Tola pointed out during the interview, the concept of civil society entered into the lexicon only from 1992 onwards with the opening of the country: ‘it was people going abroad for training and western practitioners coming along to train NGOs that introduced the concept of civil society. At the beginning the people that understood what it meant were few, but with the time passing it became instead a popular term in media and political discourse.’

A strong consensus emerged at that point over the need to intervene in the social sphere to revitalize it after the devastating past authoritarian experience. The outspoken Albanian intellectual Fatos Lubonja commented ‘this idea of civil society proposed by the west is important by it is a long process. The regime eliminated everything in society by imposing fear for 50 years.’

The Albanian regime, is notorious, was particularly harsh in the field of social control. All mass organizations set up by the communist party-state, such as trade unions, youth organisations, women’s unions, artists associations, etc, constituted instruments of mass mobilisation, of control and preservation of power (Biberaj 1993).

As the Albanian sociologist Vasfi Baruti (1996) observed, in his report on Albanian NGOs carried out with EU financial support, the Albanian communist regime had imposed a ban on all independent organizations since 1956, when a law restricted the activities of all associations that had been created in the country since the beginning of the century with the result of closing them down: ‘the only organisation that survived longer was the Red Cross that existed until 1964. From

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122 Massimo Gnone ‘Verrà uno spirito del tempo nuovo, non nazionalista. Intervista allo scrittore albanese Fatos Lubonja’, in Carta, 29.03.01.
the year 1964 up to 1990 the only non-governmental organisation working in Albania was the Association of Hunters’ (Baruti 1996).

Lubonja observed that in the nineties one could only speak about the construction of a civil society and not of reconstruction since during the period of the old regime the Party and society were indistinguishable: ‘the construction of the Albanian civil society started after the fall of the Berlin wall and communism in Albania.’ Not only that, as Lubonja commented: ‘the concept itself of civil society was unknown up until that point’.123 As confirmed by Krasniqi (2004:19) in the dictionary of Albanian published in 1980 the term “civil society” did not appear.

This fact does not mean that one could not find discussions about the organization of the polity or the relation between state and society before 1990, but these issues were not framed by the language of civil society used by central European dissidents in the years before the regimes collapsed. The isolation of the country was such that these intellectual debates could not include the Albanian cultural elite.

There was not much time in Albania to figure out what kind of social, political and economic institutions would be preferable since the time and space for debate was limited by the speed of the transformation. Right up until its final days, the regime’s apparatus of repression had been very successful in preventing the emergence of open dissidence, and hence the few people who, under the severe control of the secret services, could travel abroad did not dare to openly challenge the language of the system. Therefore, until November 1990 the public sphere was still shaped by the mummified language of the communist apparatus with the successor to Enver Hoxha, the party leader Ramiz Alia, arguing in favour of the “pluralism of ideas” but against real political pluralism.

Undoubtedly the collapse of the regime in Albania was influenced by the 1989 revolutions.124 In particular the death of Ceaucescu had relevance for the Albanian nomenclature and for the social movements fighting for the regime collapse in December 1990. According to many accounts, the Rumanian example in particular frightened the Party leaders that, at the beginning of 1990, initiated a series of concessions to calm street protests.125

However, the influence from the rest of the collapsing communist block in Albania arrived only at a late stage and was not long lasting since the relationship with the west became prominent for all

123 Ibidem.
124 I apply here the famous definition by Timothy Garton Ash who opened the debate on the sequence of events that characterized 1989 as a mix between revolutions and reforms.
125 For instance, Langer writes on the 13th december 1990 (Langer, 1996:231): “La sera aumenta la presenza della polizia a Tirana, ed aumenta anche la gente che con preoccupazione allude all’esperienza della Romania.” Kola notices: “the pictures of the Ceaucescu being executed in the Romania uprising were all to fresh to be dismissed” (2003:194)
post-communist countries. In particular the idea of civil society that had emerged in central Europe, as describe above, did not have time to reach Albania.

Dissidents’ idea of civil society was clearly not related to CSP but it was influenced by transnational dynamics. That is to say, central European intellectuals elaborated ideas of social transformation that responded to local experiences as well as ideas about the rest of the European continent from which they had been cut off during the cold war.

Looking at the Albanian case, instead, means looking at narratives of civil society that result from the transcultural encounters framed by aid policies in the post-cold war period. In Albania, before the subject of civil society became a topic of public debate, it was already part of the “world of projects” analysed by Sampson (1996) and the idea of emancipation of civil society was linked with the expectation of western support to recover from the communist experience. ¹²⁶

Besides, as Kumar (2001) points out, while in central European post-communist context, the exit from state socialism was envisioned with a sense of recovery traditions of the past, in Albania this generally did not occur. In this regard, it is interesting to look at observation made by Vaso (1998:4) in his report on the situation of NGOs in Albania prepared for the World Bank. Briefly describing the historical background of Albania from the end of the XIX century up to now he comments: “The evolution of the non-governmental structures in Albania has strongly been influenced by the political context through which the Albanian society has passed through, without excluding here the internal and external historical factors.” Vaso then compares the ‘mission’ of NGOs then as compared to now and observes that national identity – “the love for the country and national union” - used to be the main concern. Today instead: “The principal mission of the NGOs in this end of century is the creation of an authentic civil society and the activation of all the NGO energies in order to make possible the stability of the society and achieving a sustainable development.”

Despite the efforts to look at historical roots of civil society made in this paper written for donors’ consumption, the idea that the communist regime provoked a rupture with the past that could be mended prevailed among my interlocutors. After all, the past did not serve as a reference point and there was little interest in retrieving it in this realm.

In addition, many people stressed that the present did not allow the Albanian public sphere a strong and active role in ‘translating’ the messages coming from abroad. What dominated initially in Albania was instead a strong disorientation and a widespread desire to follow the initially highly

¹²⁶ See cap.1.4.1.
respected foreign advice. Describing the first phase of reception of CSP in the country Fatos Lubonja observed: ‘People had a vague idea of what they wanted to construct. The only known thing was what people did not want any longer: an authoritarian and dictatorial regime. (...) Albania has been invaded by various experiences and practices coming from abroad: Italy, USA, Germany, France, Great Britain and Scandinavian countries set foot in the country to help and bring their experience. Albanians were confused in relation to this offer.’ (my translation)\(^\text{127}\)

Finally, in central Europe not only dissidents’ debates on civil society constituted an important intellectual reference point, regardless of the influence that donors came to exercise in this field, but also they found some institutional continuation in the post-communist period, alongside the intervention by donors. There, governments themselves had the resources to support new local civil society organizations in carrying out their activities and donors were not the only actors in the field (Klingsberg 1992). In Albania, instead, for years, budget restrictions entailed the paralysis of all state funded sectors touched by CSP (civic educations, cultural production and the like). As I shall describe later, the bereft state could not take up the innovations introduced by CSP and foreign aid long remained substantially isolated from local policy-making.

But what is even more important, in the wealthier post-communist countries of central Europe, local political elites accompanied western donors in the implementation of CSP, while in Albania this was not the case at least up to 2000. Let me first describe the inception of this donors’ policy-making in Albania from the very beginning and then discuss the political reception of the foreign project in the country.

### 3.2.1 CSP enters

CSP was introduced in Albania by the first international intervention organized to provide emergency aid to overcome the tragic winter of 1991-92. As is more and more the case in the course of emergency operations, INGOs intervened in Albania to provide relief to civilians and obtained funds from donors to implement part of their work in the field but they were encouraged to find local NGOs as partners in the aid distribution. As described by one of the key figures of CSP in Albania, the local representative of the American Organisation for Education Resources and Technical Training (ORT) Juliana Hohxa, the beginning of this transborder civil society cooperation: ‘was more interest oriented. Let us say that these international NGOs, that came in the country, at that time, needed some local partners to help with distribution. Up to that point no

\(^{127}\) Massimo Gnone ‘Verrà uno spirito del tempo nuovo, non nazionalista. Intervista allo scrittore albanese Fatos Lubonja’, in Carta, 29.03.01.
foreigner was allowed to enter the country and with the arrival of donors weekly meetings were organized to co-ordinate humanitarian aid distribution. At the very beginning there were only INgos involved in these meetings but, as soon as a few local organizations registered, it was agreed to include them and to promote the creation of an Albanian NGO forum, hiring a person to co-ordinate these weekly meetings.’

Initially, CSP in Albania mingled with emergency assistance but, despite this peculiar beginning, it proceeded in a very similar fashion to the rest of the former eastern bloc. As early as 1992, for instance, the EU introduced in Albania the PHARE-Democracy and PHARE-Lien projects that were already being carried out in other post-communist countries. As a result, those local associations formed in the days of the emergency operations had the opportunity to establish themselves, by applying for new grants from the donors in the field of CSP.

The first major donors to support local NGOs were the UN agencies (UNDP, UNOPS, UNCEF, UNHCR), the Open Society Foundation, the EU with its PHARE projects and its emergency unit (ECHO), the Danish governmental agencies for development co-operation (DANIDA), the main Netherlands Development Organizations (SNV, VNG, NOVIB), the Regional Environmental Centre (REC), the American Agency for International Development (USAID) with its local branch the Organisation for Education Resources and Technical Training (ORT), and the Norwegian People’s Aid. The Italian Department of Social Affairs and the World Bank followed later on, after the 1997 crisis; recently the same OSCE have been involved in the field with a project of establishment of a network of Civil Society Development Centres. A number of smaller foreign actors also financed activities in the same sphere, among which were small western voluntary groups and religious institutions, sometimes with different aims but mostly with similar presuppositions and narratives around the idea of promoting the western models of civil society.

What one can say is that several hundred NGOs have been set up thanks to foreign aid and have been encouraged to implement various kinds of projects since the arrival of donors in the country.

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128 The acronym PHARE (Poland and Hungary Assistance to the Reconstruction of the Economy) is connected with the origins of these projects in 1989 when Poland and Hungary first initiated their transition to democracy organizing round tables in the spring of that anni mirabilis in Eastern Europe. Brussels at the time introduced the first packages of aid showing intention to support those countries that initiated reforms.

129 The Italian side is particularly complex as the Foreign Ministry, and its agency for international cooperation (Cooperazione Italiana), were not previously engaged in CSP, although they have been the main foreign governmental donor in Albania. Most of their projects, even those implemented by Italian NGOs were mainly dealing with ‘traditional’ development work such as infrastructural reconstructions. Rome would rather co-finance projects carried out by other IOs as in the case of a UNOPS project on gender issues. See Development Assistance Committee, ‘Italy’, 1996, n.4, Development Co-operation Review Series, OECD, Paris, 1996, p.18-21. It was the Italian Ministry of Social Affairs DAS (Dipartimento Affari Sociali) to consistently involve in CSP with projects of cooperation between Italian and local NGOs after the 1997 crisis. Thus a peculiar situation was produced with a ministry for national welfare care getting directly involved in the welfare care of a foreign country (Chiodi, 1999).
In 1995 the UNDP Human Development Report mentioned the existence of 500 non-governmental organizations and three years later the same source referred to 850. According to Ruli (2003) a decade after its inception CSP was supporting 800 local organisations.

However, the different sources do not converge. According to a survey conducted in 1998 by the Albanian Civil Society Foundation (ACSF) - as a local foundation financed by the Danish governmental agencies for development co-operation DANIDA - there were only 280 NGOs operating in Albania and legally registered at the tribunal as Albanian non-profit organisations (ACSF 1998).  

As a result of the survey, ASCF published the same year the first directory of local and international NGOs, indicating the activities and the source of financing in which the different organizations were engaged. The directory was regularly updated, however, as ASCF pointed out things change very rapidly, and in the space of a few weeks some organizations disappear, new ones are born and some change their address or activity. The Foundation was also the first donor in the country that in the year 2000 established a website on its activities and about local NGOs in general. Although this website provided a newsletter, the overall information present was still fairly poor.

The Albanian public administration has been even less able to supply precise information on who is doing what. The public institution in charge of supervising and co-ordinating the activities of NGOs is the Ministry of Labour but its activities in the field are still at an early stage as the first timid attempts at seriously engaging in CSP activities were visible only at the very end of the 90s. In addition, the problem when trying to establish how many NGOs exist in the country is mainly related to registration, since local tribunals have a procedure for registering, but do not delete from the lists those organizations that have ceased to exist or that have been inactive for a long period of time.  

To a large extent the very first NGOs to be established in Albania were those that had some kind of connection with the communist regimes and successfully reacted to change. Among the most  

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131 This is something that happens all over post-communist Europe and that most researchers in the field are confronted with when trying to assess the number of organizations in the field and the trend of so-called civil society development. See for instance for central Europe and Russia Howard (2003). Cf for a few examples of articles appeared on newspaper in the rest of the Balkans that discuss the same problem see: Rusovac Olivija (1999), 'Organizations Non-Gouvernementales en Serbie: en quete d'identite', Alternativa informativa mreza (AIM), 19 September, www.aimpress.org; Rusi Iso, (1999), 'Organizations Non Gouvernementales en Macedoine, elles existent, mais ne peuvent pas faire grande-choses', Alternativa informativa mreza (AIM), 23 septembre, http://www.aimpress.org; Tedesco Kate, (2000), 'Le ONG bersaglio di dure critiche in Kosovo', IWPR's Balkan Crisis Report, 3 ottobre, trad.it., http://www.een.org/est/balcani. For a wider spectrum of examples see Matteucci (2000).
skilful organizations to face the transition that emerged since 1991 are a few womens groups that inherited the experience of the Forum of Socialist Women, one of the transmission belts of the system. In other rare instances, such as in the case of the Association for the Blind, there was in addition a direct experience gained abroad by the promoter of the new association. As described by the vice-president of the association, Mr. Sinan Tafaj: ‘The president of the Association of Blind People of Albania had lived abroad because he needed special health treatment. In the eighties, he was in Hungary and Austria, and there while getting cured he gathered information on how blind people were organized elsewhere. This is why he had ideas on how to establish an association in Albania once the democratic movements started.’ Contrary to other post-communist countries, instead, in Albania very few local NGOs inherited infrastructures such as premises where to organise the activities because most public buildings were returned to the original owners or went looted during the two major crises in the country.

Notwithstanding, in a transition dominated by donors’ human, financial and technological resources, even more important than direct past experience or knowledge of foreign examples, a key asset was the possibility to establish relations with foreigners. That is to say, a prerequisite was the knowledge of foreign languages and the ability to familiarize with the language of projects. Of course, at the beginning, only the people who had had a relatively privileged position during the regime had the educational base necessary to learn the art of writing reports in English and fund-raise with the donors.

As CSP’s resources were the only available, in order to procure them, local organizations were required to conform to the predefined kind of organization and master the jargon necessary to apply for these foreign funds. As already mentioned, Sampson (1996) - who in 1994 worked in Albania as a representative of the Danish agency for governmental cooperation assisting local NGOs to establish themselves in the country - noticed that training was one of the most common features of CSP in Albania during the first ten years, even though none of the NGO representatives who submitted projects to him requested training of any kind.

That this feature of international co-operation does not look that much like the romantic narrative of trans-border co-operation, is not a question of accepting some prosaic aspects of the work. I am familiar with many cases of local NGOs that indeed required support on how to manage the organisation, how to manage a project budget, to compile an account book, to write a report on the activity of the organization and the like.

What this aspect of CSP reveals is that there was a know-how associated to such foreign funded civil society that western donors needed to spread. In the light of the anti-political critique, this
could be interpreted as the disempowering interference of foreign donors. In aid recipient countries, where local civil society organizations generally pre-existed CSP, the first critique to CSP endeavour to show how the impact of donors’ policy making provoked the institutionalisation of social engagement and thus the ‘normalization’ of local civil society.  

However, in Albania independent social organizations did not pre-exist donors’ policy making. In this regards, Aldo Bumci of the Albanian Institute for International Studies, interviewed by Radio Free Europe, stressed that: "When one speaks of civil society in Tirana, one finds out that there are no popular movements, but rather institutions -- a sort of bureaucracy. [Here,] the civil society does not mean popular movements. How did the women's associations set themselves up without an [indigenous] feminist movement? They were fashioned according to the [availability of] foreign donors' funds, which were intended to help develop movements consisting of people coming together in free associations. But communism destroyed any possibility for such collective action." Such explanation was not aimed at denouncing CSP colonizing ambition but to stress the legacies of the communist past and the current professionalised NGO environment.

But before scrutinising the reception of CSP in the local public sphere, what I wish to stress now is that the outcome of CSP in Albania has been the birth of highly formalized bodies, as summarised by Hemment (1998) and that indeed the stronger among the newly born local NGOs were those conforming to donors projects. In this context, well-trained young, anglophone, urban dweller had better opportunities to get in touch with donors and to grow in accordance with their parameters and ideas of priority.

Whereas a second group of NGOs - those which Samspon (1996) defines as 'entitlement' NGOs, because they focused mainly on increasing social services, entitlement or cash services for their constituents (orphans, disabled people, pensioners, haemophiliacs etc.) - had a harder time in establishing themselves. This is due to the fact that their promoters were older people, Albanian-speakers only, who had more trouble familiarising themselves with the donors' language of projects but also due to the fact that they were less subsidized by western donors as they did not fit the CSP priorities during the 90s.

The description provided by Sampson on the situation in 1994 was still valid few years later: the better-established NGOs in Albania were mainly think-tanks, women and youth associations,

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132 A different interpretation of the “social movements without collective mobilization” in post-communist Europe is provided by Flam (2001) who sees the process of institutionalization of the social movements emerged before 1989 as the result of a process of demobilization after a period of intense collective actions.

133 See: Alban Bala “What Balance Sheet for the Civil Society in Albania?”, RFE/RL Newsline Vol. 6, No. 72, Part II, 17 April 2002, www.rferl.org. In the same article the Albanian journalist wrote that: “Specialists at the Albanian Ministry of Labor and Social Assistance say the number of NGOs may be as high as 3,000".
human rights groups, and environmental organizations settled in the Tirana area (Vaso, 1998; Romano 2000; Ruli 2003).

Today, the Albanian NGO that receives most coverage by Albanian and foreign media is constituted by highly qualified young Albanians who studied abroad and were hired by donors to set up an organization deliberately modelled on other successful cases in the region. Mjaft, that means ‘Stop it’, replicates the format of the famous and successful Serbian Otpor, the NGO that contributed to bring down Slobodan Milosevic’s regime; the less famous Georgian Kmara that has the same name and contributed in 2003 to overthrow Edward Shevardnaze; and finally the Ukrainian Pora, renowned for its role during the so-called “orange revolution” in 2004.

If Mjaft is simply even more blatantly a copy-card result of a foreign founded NGO, almost all other well established local NGOs have sister organizations carrying out similar programs in other post-communist and aid-recipient countries. As one of my interviewees, the Albanian intellectual Piro Misha who worked for one of the projects of the Soros Foundation, commented, the very name of the NGOs reveal how much they are by-products of foreign engagement in the field. The dominance of English names – according to Misha - can be considered additional signs of a lack of social legitimacy and strong foreign dependence. The reason is clear: local NGOs are the direct result of donors’ intervention in the aid recipient society, it is donors fixing the parameters of project making and highlighting some issues over others in the recipient public sphere.

Moreover, Mjaft well represents the culture of professional activism that defined Albanian NGOs from their inception in the country. Regardless of the fact that it presents itself as constituting a social movement aimed at mobilizing people around civic issues, it does so with the appearance of a professional organization. It is enough to look at Mjaft’s web page to observe the way in which this youth organization defines the functions of their leaders with managerial titles such as ‘executive director’, ‘managers’, ‘coordinators’.134

Overall, the work-in-progress that CSP constitutes is based on the same general assumptions applied in policy making all over the world. Variations that might be introduced in the various policy areas depend on donors’ conceptions of what is to be done in aid-recipient countries. In this regard, the experience in the field generates incremental re-definition of the policies of support. In Albania, as in other post-communist countries, CSP started out mainly with projects devised to enhance the advocacy of NGOs in public policy decision-making processes, and their role in taming society with civic education and the like. While in ‘third world’ countries, NGOs were often

134 See the web page of the organization where Mjaft defines itself as a movement even though it is clearly an NGO. The title of movement is used as they organize public awareness campaigns and hope to mobilize people in support of their initiatives. At the same time they are very eager to show their professionalism www.mjaft.org.
encouraged to work in the field of social services delivery as in this context wide sectors of the population never enjoyed basic social rights, in Europe donors considered the reduction of public spending, inherited from the generous communist welfare sector, a priority to recover from the economic crisis.

As mentioned, in coincidence with political crises, local Albanian NGOs, alone or in cooperation with INGOs, were asked to distribute so-called ‘humanitarian aid’ to people. However, until the end of the 90s the social services field remained marginal for CSP as compared to projects in the field of democratization. Foreign aid in the field of social services became a donors’ concern only after the second major social crisis in 1997. At that point, the World Bank study on social vulnerability recognized the magnitude of the social costs of the transition in Albania and the discrepancy between donors’ initial assessment and policies adopted and the situation in the field: the evidence collected showed that Albania was not just another post-communist country but one where social destitution had reached unbearable levels (La Cava, 1999).

Since local organizations receive more financing from donors if they do not specialize and are able to pursue different kind of goals, when after the Kosovo refugee crisis for the first time western donors focused on the social services in a consistent way, local NGOs reoriented their activities. 135 Juliana Hoxha – the country director of the ORT Democracy Network Program - in August 2000 described this process as ‘a rush into social service provision’ and commented: “What the Kosovo crisis did is really creating a boom in the NGOs sector and the new local NGOs that are created they all deal with service provision (...) with the Kosovo crisis we had community kindergarten, community clinics, street children programs,orphans and stuff like that.’

For the moment it is important to stress the observation that CSP was for a long time conceived as a way to stimulate civic participation via NGOs that were expected to create a new consciousness of the functioning of democratic institutions as well as new democratic values. 136 The organizational transfer in the second phase also included the idea of creating a IIIrd sector as a new option for the reformed welfare. This is an additional reason why what Sampson calls ‘entitlement NGOs’, even when they had inherited organizational experience and had a network of branches all

135 The first vulnerability study of the World Bank followed the 1997 crisis but the first pilot projects after the assessment started when the 1999 Kosovo refugee crisis exploded.

136 Recently donors have returned to this idea with the support of the decentralization process. See the UNDP web page and the project Strengthening the process of decentralization and supporting democratic systems of local governance in Albania http://www.lgp-undp.org.al/ The project is currently supported by a considerable marketing effort. Press releases, document production and newsletters constantly disseminate information about this project. In terms of NGOs the idea that is currently most fashionable is that they constitute monitors for the implementation of national and local policies. Specific projects have been designed to support local NGOs and increase their capacity to monitor institutions and networking capacity. UNDP (2003), Enhancing capacity of Civil Society for Monitoring Progress on NSSED and MDGs in Albania, http://www.lgp-undp.org.al/download/projects/cso.pdf
over the country -as in the case of the Orphans Associations-, did not really become central to CSP agenda for a long period of time and, as direct consequence, did not emerge as powerful actors in the Albanian public sphere.

Besides, in Albania CSP remained trapped in the profound capital-provinces and rural-urban divides. Today the great majority of NGOs are still mainly located in the capital, where human resources are more widely available and where donors are located. Interestingly, a frequent comment of NGO representatives based in smaller towns is that they lack 'information'. What that means is that the physical distance from donors reduces their access to lobbying and hence, to funding. Professor Mamani of the University of Girokastra, a small town in Southern Albania, for instance, engaged with a Tirana-based think-tank in a project of civic engagement and local development, complained with me during the interview about their role as that of ‘vassals of Tirana’s NGOs’.

Since the Albanian population living in the capital is about 1/4 of the total, around 1998 donors began to move their attention towards smaller towns and the countryside. The structural problems connected with this strategic turn were various. Some related to the possibility of accessing of rural areas, some due to the fact that provinces lacked ready formed NGO personnel. Despite the small size of the country and recent improvements in infrastructures, the poor state of roads makes travelling from most towns to the capital difficult. Internet connections were almost absent outside Tirana and small, newly established NGOs often could not afford to pay the telephone bills to access to internet servers which were based exclusively in the capital.  

When donors started to engage more convincingly in the provinces, however, local NGOs began to grow there as well. However, a common occurrence was that a well-established Tirana-based NGO attempted to open a field office elsewhere. At this point the chain of information spreading could become even more difficult since local NGOs tend to be organized around their leader. The hierarchical structure that most of them display thus reduced the chances of cooperation between the capital and the provinces and generally created a power struggle between them.

If the past experience, the post-communist crises and the self-identification as European contribute to explain the positive reception of the donors’ policy in the country, CSP outcomes have been considered disappointing. Of the hundreds NGOs that emerged in Albania some structured

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137 The same economic recovery of the last few years, with sustained growth rates, have left behind rural areas and small provinces while it concentrated mostly in the central area of the country, between Tirana and Durrës. This pattern applies to all post-communist countries, including the new EU member state.
their goals and strategies, developed some experience in the field and carried out a significant number of projects and yet they have not gained a high reputation among public opinion in Albania.

As ICG, one of the most respected western think-tanks, put it, the relationships between Albanian NGOs, the government and the population were weak and, in particular, public awareness and trust in their activities was low (e.g. ICG 1999a). It was enough to have a private conversation with one layman on the role of local NGOs in Albania to hear the harshest criticism. Research Director of the research centre and NGO, National Albanian Center for Social Studies (NACSS) Vilma Kolpeja sincerely admitted: ‘If you ask simple people what is civil society, unfortunately sometimes they see it as a way to find a job for yourself. Why? Because if you go to the ministry of Justice I do not know how many NGOs you find registered but few of them are professionals, are active, are working. Only few of them are good.’

Popular scepticism cannot be interpreted without considering the limited scope of NGOs action in facing the dramatic social situation in the country. Many commentators observed, with Romano (2000) in his review of NGOs activities in Albania, that traces of these projects carried out by local NGOs are not visible. Thus, one should not be surprised to read about scepticism towards NGOs, locally and among foreign observers, in a country where in 2003, after years of sustained growth rates of about 7% with a low inflation rate, the World Bank estimated that one fourth of the population was still living in poverty.138

NGOs failed to deliver opportunities to the population at large as they mostly carried out projects of civic participation, providing social service randomly and only at a later stage. In this regards Sampson (1996) commented: "Regrettably, the scandals and tensions which circulate as rumours are not counterbalanced by any genuine and visible socially beneficial activity in Albanian society.'

Since the beginning of their activities in Albania, certain NGOs have been harshly criticized in articles in the local press. Some argue that these articles resulted from the tension between different NGOs and I am personally informed of cases of misunderstanding between different organizations that ended in defamatory articles in the local newspaper under fairly explicit pressure from one of the contenders. It was indeed fairly easy, particularly with local papers, to arrange the publication of

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such articles as the prosecution of defamation was unlikely and it was common practice to discredit opponents or competitors in the media.\textsuperscript{139}

Yet, around 2000 a number of articles came out in the local newspapers praising some CSP projects in the field. In many cases these articles demonstrated the ability of donors’ press offices as it was often the case of printed media publishing articles that were simple reproduction of donors’ handouts, celebrating their projects. To return at the example of Mjaft, that has also had high visibility in the local press and at international level, the relevance of donors’ support emerges blatantly: the organization is so well connected as to be able to reach the pages of the Financial Times.\textsuperscript{140} Not only that, one has the impression that even the attribution of the UN civil society prize responds to this logic: in order to justify the spending in the field, donors give the prize to their own products, or basically, to themselves.

What is sure is that the image of local NGOs has not really improved even after articles appeared on the press describing exemplary cases of local NGOs working in the country. To the point that even a journalist such as Etiola Kola, who has herself written a few pieces on those ‘best practices’, considers them rather the exception to the rule: “It is not only my opinion, but a widespread one, that in general the so-called NGOs are not that clean. Out of the big amount of money they receive, they invest in their projects a very limited part.’

The context of economic impoverishment matters in understanding the public reception of NGOs in the country. As I discuss further in the next chapter, it is important to consider that Albanian NGOs have become a job market for educated elites. The simple fact of the imbalance of salaries in relation to the rest of the population has to be taken into account. The director of the office in charge of publication for the Soros Foundation, Director Piro Misha commented that the flow of money in the field of CSP breaks ‘the equilibrium in society’ and ‘damages’ it: ‘When the local representative of a foreign NGO earns the triple or four times more than a university professor. What happens is that people would rather work as interpreter or driver and the like for NGOs and international organizations that need local manpower.’ This observation on the salary divide is also true when one compares the stipends of local NGO representatives with those of public officials, teachers, doctors, etc.

\textsuperscript{139} For a recent analysis of the state of media in Albania, see for instance Human Right Watch (2002) The Cost of Speech: Violations of Media Freedom in Albania, Human Rights Watch http://hrw.org/; my own interview to the practitioner Tomas Miglierina who had a long experience in Albania in the field of media support for http://www.osservatoriobalcani.org/article/articleview/394/1/41/ and on the same web site many other more recent articles.

\textsuperscript{140} For an Albanian paper celebrating the ‘movement’ see Mustafa Nano, Shekulli, 16 March 2003. It should be noted that the Albanian journalist was member of the board of the organization.
This ‘lucrative business’ or the ‘marketisation of democracy’ as Karam (2000) calls the creation of alternative employment opportunities for elites thanks to CSP (or the DPP for that matter) is not exclusive to Albania. The situation is the same all over the Balkans as well as among those aid-recipient countries where working for western donors is one of the few economic opportunities open to the local people.\footnote{The literature describing the phenomena is available for all continents. Karam (2000) who looks at Arab world deals with a longer and bitterer experience of relations with western power politics as compared to post-communist countries. For a harshly critical view in the case of some African countries see Clapham (1996). Clayton (1996) instead refers to anti-western feelings emerging in reaction to donors’ penetration of the social arena of developing countries.}

In this respect Albania differs from central Europe were the harsh economic situation never reached a comparable level. In addition, the lack of previous experience of independent organizations of civil society made Albanian NGOs’ relationship with donors tighter and the struggle to gain social legitimacy particularly difficult as compared to the central European context, a point which I discuss in greater detail in the next chapter. In common with the other European post-communist states, Albania was positively inclined towards donors’ advice since “the return to Europe” was a generalized aspiration.

Even though the initial enthusiastic reception of CPS was soon replaced by a disappointment, with stabilization of the general economic and political situation in Albania, CSP was seldom denounced as a form of colonization. Conspiracy theories around western interests have a long tradition in Albania (Schmidt 2002) but they were rarely applied during the 90s to discuss CSP in particular. Let us consider then closely the range of opinions that have appeared in the Albanian public sphere concerning CSP and its outcomes.

\subsection*{3.2.2 Emancipation or colonization?}

As discussed in length in the first chapter, the inception of CSP in post-communist countries generated two polarized narratives: one presenting the policy as a tool for emancipation, the second considering the results disappointing and arguing that CSP merely covers a colonial project. According to Hemment (1998) those who see CSP as emancipatory were those who have benefited from the resources donors’ offer; while those that view it as a colonizing agent were those who have been left behind resource-wise.

Opinions concerning the outcomes of CSP that emerged Albania, follow a slightly different pattern: those who spoke of CSP’s in terms of emancipation are in the first place the donors
themselves and it is clear that their public narratives serve to legitimise their actions. Shortcomings in policy-making on the part of donors were admitted only in private conversations by individual practitioners. However, as pointed by Carothers (1999) there is little learning by doing in the field of democracy promotion in general and in particular in the case of CSP and this accounts for the fact that the revision of project guidelines is generally slow as these are not fixed by field offices but at the distant headquarters.142

The Albanian practitioners employed by donors’ organizations were clearly likely to reflect the views of the latter. As an EU functionary Dritan Tola considered CSP a way to find new solutions to the problems of the country. Juliana Hoxha of the American ORT, when asked if Albania needs CSP, observed that after 50 years of communism Albania badly needed CSP in order to move away from ‘an oppressed society where everything is resolved from above’. Her general evaluation of the policy was that Albanian society has made a considerable steps ahead in the last 10 years but despite this progress remains far from having a civil society. Donors, in Hoxha’s view, should have a long term engagement in this field to increase the potential for ‘free initiative’ among people.

My own findings in Albania contrast with Hemments’s contention that people in favour of CSP are those able to access it, while the detractors are the underdogs. Off course, generally speaking representatives of Albanian NGOs tended to view CSP with a more benign eye than the others, but the key determinant in terms of enthusiasm for CSP in Albania was the temporal dimension.

As mentioned above, when CSP was first introduced in the country many people had high expectations about the potential role of foreign aid. Disappointing outcomes resulted in a change in perspective and the spread of criticism of foreign support. On the side of the detractors of CSP, one of the most uncomplimentary observers was Piro Misha, a respected intellectual working for the Open Society Foundation. The first point he made during the interview was that: ‘We have to explain what we mean by civil society here in Albania since most of what is called by this name is something artificially created by donors in the country. This is not a spontaneous artefact representing the needs of the population to form a community or to organise around lobbies. Instead, there is money coming from Italy, for instance, and as a consequence an organisation is

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142 On various occasions I was privy to discussions between donors and consultants on certain projects which had proven unsuited to the local context but that could not be changed because budget lines had fixed parameters that could not be adjusted to the local situation. In addition to this planning standardized policies valid for multiple locations, a considerable turnover in personnel do not increase the likelihood of policy adaptation to the need of a single context. Moreover, the turnover of personnel does not allow much learning by doing. Such turnover is higher among foreign practitioners but exists also among local NGOs. Among the people that I interviewed I am aware of a few of cases of people who changed employment. Yet, as I discuss later, clearly the higher the participation of local practitioners the more likely becomes the practice of learning by doing.
created to administer it. This has been one of the most detrimental things in Albania. (...) Albania, which has never had a civil society before, has progressed significantly in this direction. Today we have a number of serious organizations that truly represent the embryo of civil society in Albania. But there is a difference from what is formally presented as civil society and what really constitutes it. For instance, we have more environmental organizations in Albania than in Italy but nobody does anything to improve the environmental situation in the country.’

Even when harsh criticism was expressed, as in the above-mentioned case, in principle international co-operation was considered necessary and important for Albania. What is more, the criticisms expressed did not question the cultural underpinnings of the CSP enterprises. In most cases, what was seen as problematic was not the idea of promoting civil society but the fact that the outcomes were artificial and that often people working in the field, foreigners as much as locals, were not committed and engaged in CSP only for private interests.

Both fault-finding and supportive people remarked upon the contingency of the outcomes of CSP. The columnist of the newspaper Shekulli, Mustafà Nano, observed that in his experience two main elements come to play an important role: the care taken by donors in choosing the people to work with and the possibility for Albanian society to absorb ideas coming from abroad: ‘Albania needs time, we cannot import everything from abroad. Foreigners should start from simple ideas and they should pay attention to those whom they work with. Personally, I found myself involved in some public initiatives but there was too much rhetoric going on, too many words. I was not satisfied. Moreover, those leading the meetings did not represent the Albanian élite, they were nobody. This is why I say that foreigners should look for the right people, competent and serious.’

What is noticeable, however, was the acute and widespread awareness of the mechanism of aid distribution. Interestingly, even a popular radio speaker, Saimir Koda, during the interview stressed as obvious the fact that financing local NGOs to take care of social problems was a good thing “of course they help”. Yet, Koda repeatedly stressed the extent to which most of the allocated resources remain in the hands of the donors themselves: ‘Donators! Let us say Italy gives to Albania 25 million ECU. We will have 250 Italians coming to distribute this aid and each one of them will earn 6,000 dollars a month… do you understand how many ECU remain for Albania itself? Every 10 shares to distribute, 4 will be granted to Albania and 6 will go back to foreign hands.’

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143 This is a fundamental aspect of the aid industry that I neglect in my current analysis. See Janine Wedels’ work on this subject (1992; 2000).
The denunciation of colonization did make an occasional appearance among local NGOs, who complained about the attitudes of foreign counterparts. Even in these cases, my research shows that their criticism of CSP did not address the idea of transforming state-society relations but rather remained concerned with power relations. In this regard I am familiar of a case of one Albanian umbrella organisation dealing with youth issues that repeatedly confronted the Italian partner NGO. The different world views over the initiatives to be undertaken in the course of the project making made the Albanian organization publicly denounce the “colonizing” attitude of the Italian NGO, generating a long lasting conflict. However, the Albanin NGO representatives, in this case, were not underdogs, quite the opposite. Their use of the strong reference to colonialism can be seen as a sign of awareness of their crucial position in the donors’ policy-making agenda and was instrumental to their own power struggle.¹⁴⁴

The public criticism of CSP that came closest to a narrative portraying CSP as a form of colonialism came from a few political figures. In particular, the Minister for International Co-operation, Ermelinda Meksi, made regular public declarations in which she openly opposed CSP. The ideas she expressed were that Albania had priority needs when it comes to foreign aid and that such foreign funds should be used to improve the infrastructure, and allow the market to work first. Her vivid polemics around the spread of CSP-type assistance stressed how the latter served the interest of foreign consultants. Hence, she complained about such donors’ interference in policy planning as a form of colonialism, and in this respect has been one of the few public figures to use this type of language. According to media reports, a similar position was expressed by Gramoz Pashko, Coordinator of the Albanian Government for the Stability Pact, at one of the organization’s meetings in 2000. It is worth mentioning that both Pashko and Meski were former professors of economics at the University of Tirana and that the Stability Pact’s chapters on aspects relating to democracy were neglected in favour of those connected to economic development.¹⁴⁵

Finally, my own interview with the spokesman for the Ministry of Labour, the socialist Naim Zoto, revealed the same attitude: ‘we cannot do projects in every field, they should be focused on infrastructures first. Building roads is a better way to reduce poverty in the country than the passive forms of aid that only help people to remain poor. Instead I ask the poor for more patience, but afterwards once the area develops they will not need to ask for help any longer.’

¹⁴⁴ As Hemment (1998) warned, one should pay attention to the sense of guilt of many western observes in their analysis of denunciation of colonial practices. The problem of legitimacy of INGOs in working in recipient countries is discussed in length in paragraph 5.4.

One should note that, during the nineties, in Albania the most common interaction between the political elites and local NGOs has been that of mutual denigration, avoidance and dismissal, though with different features. As noted by Vjolleca Meçai, the representative of the Women’s Lawyers Association: ‘in this country governments do not accept favourably the presence of civil society and its development has been more the result of international pressure than anything else. Political and civil society are in competition for resources and do not co-operate.’ What emerges is that the political elite would not have spontaneously implemented policies of the kind proposed by CSP and that these were generated by donors’ interference in local policy making.

This would confirm the idea that CSP is a western project financed by western money but whether it served the purpose of controlling the aid-recipient remains to be verified. In the analysis of these positions, one should recall that CSP was a minor policy in the wider package of western aid to carry out the post-communist transitions and that what prevailed in terms of foreign advice in the field of reform was the idea of privileging macro-economic policies and economic recovery. Once again the instrumental reference to colonial practices in these cases should be taken into account.146

Leaving aside for the moment the views of the political elites, one could say that generally speaking donors’ policies were not contested by the Albanian public opinion and their underlying logic and assumptions were not questioned while the various projects have been carried out. In my understanding the debate in Albania was not around colonization or emancipation. Rather, the local public sphere has been dominated by discussions of the potential for modernization and CSP policies have been questioned for their capacity to produce positive effects.

Donors themselves, as stressed by Sampson, introduced concepts such as human rights and civil society so as to contribute to the ‘modernization’ of post-communist societies. This idea found a strong reception in Albania and the desire to ‘catch-up’ was widespread, particularly among those people working with local NGOs.147 The long period of isolation created a strong desire for opening and exchanges with the once forbidden world and the awareness of the considerable gap with the west. “We would have been a small town lost in Albania if people did not come from abroad and pursue projects with us” commented a young Albanian NGO representative during a seminar that I

146 Cf. Fatos Çoçoli. Shekulli, 3 July 2000, (trad.it), ‘La giungla delle società e le possibilità dello sviluppo’, ICS news http://ip21.mir.it/ics/. As noted previously, the paradox is that after 1997 leading political figures of the same government to which Meski belonged had argued in favour of a constitution of a protectorate cf. paragraph 3.1.1.

147 I have to clarify now that it is only relative backwardness that my interviewees referred to. In the following chapters I describe how these same speakers refused to be depicted in any way that would deny them the modernizing experience of communism.
attended in July 2003. Similarly, Ledia Dhima, loan officer of the NGO PSHM, commented on the need for CSP, mentioning both the idea that the Albanian society needs articulation as well as to catch-up with the west: ‘I could say that Albania is a kind of a virgin country in this field because it remained behind Europe while Europe has walked away. Young Albanians have gone abroad and are coming back with new ideas but this is not organized. It is about two or three individuals going in different directions each one on his own. If they were organized in groups instead they could be strong, spread their ideas, and have more people listening to them’.

The opening of the public sphere generated a variety of perspectives on the social world, included on the implication of CSP for the country. Promoting civil society can be seen as having increased the likelihood of a more composite public opinion. However, as I describe further in chapter 4, in Albania CSP was not seen as achieving much more than a safety-net for Albanian elites during the difficult post-communist. Let me then explore further the relation between foreign donors, local NGOs and the political class in this period.

3.3 The donors’ project and the institutional counterparts

CSP has fundamentally been a donors’ project in Albania and according to the first critique analysed above this evidence should lead us to conclude that its drive has been that to control the aid-recipient. Even more so, if one realizes the considerable obstacles created to CSP by the Albanian political elites, especially in the first few years of policy implementation.

We cannot say what could have happened if CSP was not introduced in Albania. The only element that we have is that before the arrival of the ‘world of projects’, the political society had absorbed the short lasting social movements that emerged in the struggle for the regime’s collapse. Some participants to the students’ movements in 1990 joined the Democratic Party, while the great majority of people simply demobilized and, due to the harsh economic situation at home, sought new opportunities abroad.

Then CSP made its inception and western donors invested and created incentives for the newly created local NGOs to remain independent from the political parties as suggested by their model of intermediary bodies. What they had not foreseen was the confrontational attitude between the

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148 I gathered this comment during a workshop I was chairing on ‘youth in the Adriatic and gender issues’ in Capaccio Forlì 28 July 2003, organized by the Italian youth association Cactus.
149 Trade unions instead basically disappeared from the scene. Cfr.5.5.
political and the civil society in post-communist Albania. Looking at the relationship between local political elites and Albanian NGOs, one can distinguish at least three phases in CSP implementation in the country, that is to say from 1992 to the summer of 1997, and from 1997 up to 2000 and from then onwards. As the relation between politics and society is fundamental for civil society development, these phases coincide with the main political periods lived by post-communist Albania.

The first period corresponds with Sali Berisha's presidency and with the governments led by the Democratic Party. This phase concluded with the crisis of 1997. CSP in Albania initially started out as in any other post-communist context but, as already highlighted, the country’s economic situation was particularly harsh and the radical transformations generated considerable social insecurity. In this context it was not uncommon that sooner or later people engaging with local NGOs got the chance to obtain a visa to go abroad for a meeting and fled the country.150

Beside extreme economic hardship, therefore, what characterized this period was the attempt of the Albanian government to regain control of all institutions. In this phase western donors did indeed finance CSP projects but it was more important for them to maintain good relations with President Berisha since the conflict in the former Yugoslavia required a stable Albania. The overall donors’ strategy towards Albania was not particularly successful as the country imploded in 1997, state institutions collapsed, and long months of anarchy required a new foreign military intervention to restore order.

In this period, the problem with CSP was the authoritarian turn of the leadership who frustrated the hopes for a smooth democratization, a problem that hit in different ways foreign and local actors. For western organizations it was only a problem of project implementation, for the Albanian organizations and public figures, that opposed the mounting authoritarianism of Berisha, it was a question of strong political pressure and frequent police harassment.

It is important to stress that foreign donors worked independently from one another. In this regard, a study carried out by Thunborg (1997) on USA assistance from 1989 and 1995 provides

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150 These phenomena occurred for years. See the interesting case relating to the NGO working in defence of Albanian homosexuals described by Andoni, Ben, (2002), ‘Omosessuali: disprezzati e soli anche nella morte’, Notizie Est Balcani n. 582 – Albania, 6 ott 02, translated from Danas, 25th September 2002. Beni Andoni described the initial problems faced by the organization when real or imposter-activists used membership of the organization as a way to obtain visa to go abroad. When the NGO obtained the international Filippo di Suco prize for human rights a member of the organization who had been invited to Washington for the celebration failed to return home. In a country where homosexuality is taboo this decision was interpreted as the a sign of an acute identity crisis, illustrated by the fact that people were willing to ‘renounce to their honour to have the visa and emigrate’. On the issue of homosexuality in Albania see Mai (2003).
interesting insights on the role of CSP and its relationship with political society. Thunborg observes that in Albania different American donors had different interlocutors: on the one hand the U.S. government supported the media close to the government; on the other hand many U.S. non-profit organizations and the Soros Foundation supported opposition groups (1997:37).

However, the two groups according to Thumborg “think and act in more similar ways than they themselves wanted to and assumed that they did” (1997:227). And what made them behave in a similar way was not the fact that they opted for compromise with Berisha’s government - which proved to be increasingly intolerant of opponents (1997:96) - but rather that “there was a consensus about supporting an independent media, and this thinking was coloured by the basic value of a U.S. media model which worked as a standard for how press freedom should be promoted.”

Moreover, it is worth noting that foreign support was warmly welcomed in the Albanian public sphere, in which there was an awareness of the risk of a new form of international isolation. There were many cases of international human rights groups regularly providing support to their local counterparts and denouncing the violation committed by the government; of transnational support in the field of media contributing to bring attention towards the political transformation of the Balkan country; of INGOs intellectual networks that at the peak of crises provided local activists with the opportunities to be listen to by western publics. Here one salient episode concerned the Albanian daily paper, Koha Jonë. At the beginning of the 1997 crisis its premises had been burned down by ‘unknow’ people and several of its journalists had been beaten up by the police. Many foreign INGOs mobilized to show support and solidarity for the paper and supported the publication of special number during the worst days of the crisis.

The second phase began at the end of the 1997 crisis with the election of a new government during the summer, and lasted until the solution of the Kosovo refugee crisis in the summer of the year later. The socialist-led government was confronted with the disintegrated state apparatus and

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151 See for instance the valuable work of the Helsinki Committee in the field of human rights; of AIM in the field of media http://www.aimpress.ch/index.htm; of academic networks see Barjaba (1997); etc. For a wider discussion on this point see chapter 5.

152 See the article by the future major of Tirana Eddi Rama, ‘So near, so far’, 12 march 1997, Koha Jonë published thanks to this international support. The article, denouncing the hypocrisy of the western countries supporting the return to authoritarianism in post-communist Albania, was then translated into various languages and republished elsewhere including the International Press Agency IPS. The organizations involved in the initiative were Article 19, Human Rights Watch, Index on Censorship, International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, Inter Press Service e Institute for War & Peace Reporting.
has been in charge of its reconstruction ever since. Not even the despotic power of the state was available as the army and the police had vanished during the 1997 crisis. 153

During this period, which was as well when I carried out my fieldwork, the situation was significantly different in terms of governmental constraints over NGOs as compared to the first one. From 1997 onwards Albanian NGOs were no longer confronted with an intimidating state. Quite the opposite, studying Albania at that point meant looking at an extreme example of disempowered state among post-communist ones.154 Rather than risking political interference, this was a period of increased detachment of local NGOs from institutional relations. The political elites were not really in control of the shattered state and local NGOs depended entirely on foreign donors.

However, this was also a period of significant increase in donors’ engagement in the field, and as a consequence of considerable increase in NGOs’ number and activities or, as Misha called it, a period during which NGOs underwent an ‘explosion’. Donors responded this way to the widespread western explanation of the 1997 crisis that pointed to the weakness of civil society as contributing to the absence of initiatives to counter the expansion of the illegal pyramid schemes and to avoid the devastating crisis (Morozzo della Rocca 1997). In addition to this, the new “humanitarian emergency” brought many new donors to the field in order to support the civil population hit by the crisis via local NGOs.

As a consequence local NGOs found themselves with more financial support and with less governmental control, which was interpreted initially as an expansion of possibilities. They suffered, instead, from the considerable worsening of the security situation in the country due to the spread of weapons among the population and the formation of armed gangs. After the international military intervention had restored a minimum level of security, the situation in the field gradually improved in this respect (de Guttry 1999).

At the beginning local NGOs did not seem particularly concerned with the general institutional weakness. On their side, western donors were mainly worried about the security apparatus and

153 There are many accounts of these events. See for instance the Italian periodical *Limes* devoting a special number to the crisis unequivocally called *Albania. Emergenza Italiana*; see as well Perikli (1997) in another Italian special issue of the academic journal *Futuribili*; for an academic work on the crisis see de Guttry & Pagani (1999).

154 Had I studied CSP in Serbia, I would have been confronted with the opposite scenario, since there local NGOs had faced a very intrusive police-state for years. On this point see: (NGO Policy Group, 2001). It is interesting to consider, however, that even in the case of Milosevic’s Serbia various kinds of transnational initiatives at the grassroots level were allowed. Among post-communist countries, only Byelorussia struggled hard to keep transnational influences out. A comparison outside the region, such as that with Jordan as described by Wiktorowicz (Wiktorowicz, 2000) is also interesting. There, the main problem is the governmental control over NGOs activities, while in Albania because of the institutional weakness, governments could hardly exercise control over the society after 1997, as much as the reverse is true.
invested considerable energies in restructuring the military and the police but did not seem to realise at the extent to which CSP projects themselves required the functioning of all state institutions. They continued, instead, with the practice adopted before of neglecting the state that was to be curtailed after state socialism.

With the idea that civil society needed to be strengthened, a donor such as the Italian Department of Social Affairs (DAS), for instance, made funding available for projects in the social sphere to be implemented in co-operation of local NGOs. What emerged in this phase of project implementation - beside the peculiar situation of a foreign ministry of welfare such as the DAS getting directly involved in the welfare provision of a foreign country (Chiodi 1999) - was that the fragility of the state apparatus was also detrimental to the work of NGOs: the lack of coordination by the Ministry of Labour required additional efforts on the side of the donor itself; similarly at small scale, the managing a youth centre required the active engagement and support of the local municipality, not the least to avoid paying exorbitant rents.

If the first phase was characterized by the political drive to control local organizations and the second was defined by the extreme weakness of the state apparatus, the constant element for all three periods has been the lack of financial resources and know-how. The document of the Donors’ Conference issued in October 1997 for instance stated openly: “Most bi-lateral donors in education are working directly with districts or schools. The Soros Fundation, essentially by-passing the Ministry of Education (MOE), has achieved laudable results in three districts both in terms of school reconstruction and in improving what happens in the classroom. These projects are resource-intensive; the MOE has neither the resources nor the capacity to replicate these innovations across the nation, at least in the medium term.” It is clear that much of that which donors achieved in the field was done regardless of state institutions.

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155 The agreement between the Italian and the Albanian authorities was signed in the middle of the Albanian crisis in Rome the 20th May 1997 and foresaw an investment of 20 billion Italian lira with the idea of improving social services in Albania, in the field of gender issues, youth and disabilities to be carried out in partnership between local and Italian NGOs. The format chosen by the donor was to organize roundtables with local governmental officials, representatives of local administrations, Albanian and Italian NGOs, and Albanian trade-unions to decide, at least formally, the lines of intervention. The idea was interesting on paper and reproduced a format applied by Italian institutions to coordinate the humanitarian intervention in BH. However local political elites turned out to be uncommitted to the project, while local NGOs worked to avoid any governmental interference.

156 In the specific CSP projects I am referring to here, a slight change in direction was decided in 1999 to make NGOs projects more viable and since then there has been renewed attention to institution-building in the field. In particular it was decided that the Ministry of Labour would receive technical assistance to be able to improve its co-ordination capacity in relation to NGOs. The rents of the premises of the youth centres were high as they were considered as business with foreigners. Interview with a DAS officer in Albania.

In addition, when discussing the problem of resources, it is important to consider that throughout the decade the relationship with between local NGOs and public officials, especially low ranking ones, was especially difficult, as the first had better salaries, greater possibilities to cultivate international contacts and experiences, and far greater resources at their disposal etc. In many ways, then public officials did make the lives of NGOs difficult as Juljana Hoxha came to realize after years of CSP work: ‘a simple low rank official can block even a major initiative’.

The last phase follows the end of the refugee crisis in 1999 and is also the period of time in which the potential for integration in the EU became more visible. After the Stability Pact for South East Europe, Brussels showed the first signs of interest in incorporating the whole Balkan region. Since then the level of engagement of foreign donors in the country has generally been higher than ever before, not necessarily in financial terms but in terms of consistency of intervention. The general situation of the country has been constantly improving since 1999, in terms of internal security, political stability, and economic recovery with signs of steady economic growth.

Donors imposed the CSP project on Albanian political elites and the latter in the medium run came to terms with it. Generically speaking, the relation between NGOs and the Albanian political class gradually began to show signs of improvement. The institutional weakness contributed to this development and yet donors made considerable efforts to have the idea of NGOs accepted. In this relation, Juliana Hoxha repeatedly stressed the role played by donors: “It was a big donors’ effort to persuade the Albanian government to accept the NGO sector and ordinary citizens as part of the process of constitution writing, for instance.” Certainly, it was necessary to have Madlein Allbright coming to Tirana and take part in an NGO conference in 2000, to obtain high-ranking Albanian officials’ participation.158

The long-awaited legislative reform, providing a legal framework regulating the non-profit sector, was finally approved in 2001.159 During the interview in August 2000, Juliana Hoxha expressed her frustration concerning the delays on the approval of a new law allowing local NGOs to initiate income-generating activities. ‘The law has been sitting at the Ministry of Justice for one and a half years. Only one month ago we had a couple of NGO leaders that met with the prime

158 The NGO seminar was organized by USAID-ORT in Tirana in February 2000. On this occasion, the President of the Republic of Albania paid an official visit to the meeting. This meeting was particularly significant in terms of participants present and it was not limited to Albanian NGOs but also featured Macedonians, Kosovars, and Serbs. See the ORT report on the event. Despite the limited financial investment, USA agencies have had a prominent role in shaping CSP in Albania.

159 The NGO law, finally passed in early May 2001, established the ground rules for the internal governance of NGOs, recognized the right of NGOs to receive grants from international sources, and layed the groundwork for public financing of NGOs, and rescinded the power of government to supervise NGOs. See: Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative (SPAI), (2001), ‘Albania Civil Society Assessment Report’, Empowering civil society in the fight against corruption in South East Europe. The laws regulating the activities of local NGOs are now the n. 8789-8781-8988/2001.
minister. Letters were sent to the President of the Republic, to the new Minister of Justice. But you know just promises, promises.’ The main justification for the postponing of the legal transformation was that it first required the adoption of the new civil code regulating the status of NGOs. And Hoxha explained further: ‘The government refused to make partial amendments of the civil code just for the sake of the NGO sector, they said we want to finish the whole revision package of the civil code and after that we will introduce amendments of the civil code for the NGOs. But amending the civil code is not an easy thing to do, there are 5 codes to amend and the civil code is not their priority.’ This was the situation in 2000, almost a decade after the first programs promoting civil society were introduced.

It is clear that donors did not have absolute power over the recipient country. For a long time NGOs remained isolated in their own country and unable to rely on the reaction of public opinion to put pressure on the political class. Thus, the support provided by the donors was for a long time insufficient to obtain the new legal provisions fundamental for the development of the sector. Rather it was personal relations established between some NGOs representative and the leading Socialist Party that on occasion improved the situation in the field.

The hostility first and neglect later towards CSP on the side of the local political elites was certainly problematic as it could be considered as confirmation of the colonizing nature of the policy. It is difficult to say what the local political elite would have done instead of CSP had they been free to choose their agenda. Some kind of scepticism is legitimate considering the results obtained in other fields in which local elites were able to make own choices and to manage much bigger budgets than those allocated by CSP.160

It should be recalled that the Albanian political elites have generally been prone to adopt constitutional and legal arrangements similar to other western countries. Therefore there is reason to believe that the opposition to CSP was mostly a question of striving to control all available sources of social power rather than a question of alternative development strategy. Considering that CSP is also one of the least expensive policy for donors interested in exercising a direct influence on the public sphere, the antagonism it faced should be considered mainly in the light of the ambition to control, and avoid being controlled, by the local political class. The mechanisms of political representation in newly democratising countries often reveal serious shortcomings and one should

160 The problem of corruption plagues the country, as confirmed by assessment such as that of Transparency International. Political leaders regularly accuse each other of corruption, even within the same political party. After a long Berisha-Nano fight from 2003 the conflict moved within the Socialist party and the two leading personalities, Nano and Meta who regularly accused each other publicly of carrying out illegal business and even of association with mafia organizations. See for an example among hundreds: Artan Puto, ‘L’Albania resta senza ministro degli esteri’, 05/08/2003, Osservatorio sui Balcani, www.osservatoriobalcani.org.
not assume that the governmental positions straightforwardly reflect those of the public opinion at large.

Furthermore, as many scholars that denounce CSP as colonial project are concerned with the curtailing of the welfare state, it is important to stress from now that, contrary to all expectations, in Albania the same former communist leadership did not show any particular concern for the shrinking of the state competence in the welfare field and instead allowed for the near-total breakdown of the welfare state in the country.\textsuperscript{161}

In this regard, the opinion expressed by one of the donors’ representatives and project manager for UNDP, Valli Corbanese, is that: ‘both the Democratic led governments as much as the Socialists always attributed more importance to big infrastructure projects and never really appreciated projects in the social sphere. Donors had to put a lot of pressure on them to have the latter approved. (…) They generally prefer projects related to infrastructure for their visibility, projects in the social sphere are not visible instead. Besides, I think that they never realized the depth of the social destitution in the country. Finally, the ministry that should be more aware of that, is to say the minister of Labour and Social affairs, had a constant turnover of ministers and personnel. This means that a lot of competence and knowledge of the situation in this sphere was lost.’

These considerations should not hide the intrusive nature of the policy but they cast some light on the difficult process of the opening up of the local public sphere in countries where foreign donors interfere. Power relations are a constitutive part of aid polices as one party donates and the other receives. However, whether the ultimate aims and/or results of each policy are about control is another matter.

Moreover, the SP once re-established in power made great efforts to regain control of the country, including the NGOs sector, this time with thanks to cooptation. During one of the meetings organized by ORT, at which I assisted in 2000, some NGO representatives complained that they had been cut off from funding from major donors due to their affiliation with the Democratic Party and, in their view, it was clear that the Socialist Party representative would endeavour to marginalize them by all possible means. I could not find specific evidence proving this complaint but it is clear that, the SP gradually came to terms with the NGO presence and gradually established its clientele with some of them.

\textsuperscript{161} On this point see further on paragraph 4.3.
It is interesting to observe that the Socialist party electoral campaign of 2000 was based on the idea that in the rank of the party there were candidates coming from the civil society. Being aware of the difficult relations entertained between the political elites and the local NGOs, that was regularly lamented by my interlocutors, I was astonished to notice that the Socialist Party made such explicit use of the concept of civil society as their political slogan. In addition, it seemed to me as contrasting with the low opinion of NGOs in the public opinion and with the results of a survey published at the beginning of the same year according to which the majority of Albanians wanted a strong man governing the country. Whatever the validity of the survey, there was indeed a generalized quest for security in Albania after the state-collapse in 1997 that would have explained the popularity of the idea of the strong hand.

On the other hand, the collapse of pyramid schemes at the origin of the devastating crisis just three years earlier, seemed to confirm the centrality of expertise in managing the post-communist transformation. The DP-led government had not informed people about the risks that they were facing by investing money in fraudulent credit institutions, and thus revealed their dilettantism in policy-making. Thus, during the 2000 campaign the Socialist Party presented itself as the sole contender with the necessary competence to save the country.

Many among my interlocutors explained this recourse to ‘civil society’ as an attempt to counter the widespread disappointment towards the SP performance and to show how the party was socially rooted. Piro Misha, among others, observed that the socialists knew they were ‘totally detached from the country (…) this way the show that they realized that people are tired of their power games’. The widespread idea that politics in Albania was about the interests of a ‘clan’ could be countered by the civil society experts guaranteeing simultaneously the widening of the clique and the deepening of expertise to manage the complex transformation.

The most renowned external candidate in the ranks of the socialist party in 2000 was Eddi Rama, a fine artist who later became major of Tirana, gaining high reputation at home and

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164 A recurrent misunderstanding generated by the lexicon is related to the concept of clan. Albanians themselves use it very often to refer to social networks of different kind. When foreign apply it there is normally a underlining assumption of blood ties and primordial attachments. According to my informant Idlir Hoxha, a term that could also be used in this context is the Turkish term Tarik (this is also used in Albanian). Tarik gives a sense of social network, a form of clientele, without implying modernist views on the primordiality of the relationship which is not implied in the current use of the term ‘clan’ in Albania.
abroad.\textsuperscript{165} Until the collapse of the pyramid schemes he was among those that openly struggled against mounting authoritarianism of president Berisha and by 2000 had emerged as public intellectual. In this case, the candidate of civil society was unrelated from CSP but in other cases candidates were taken from well established think-tanks and NGOs.

Among my interlocutors such NGO mingling with politics did not go uncontested and many showed uneasiness for the risks deriving from such cooptation. However, this trend was confirmed in the years to come and among the ministers of the current Albanian government one can notice more than one famous NGO representative. The allegedly anti-political drives of western donors in any case have to come to terms with local state-society dynamics but such interaction might not prove to be as negative as some of my interlocutors suggested, unless it develops into clientelism.

In this first brief excursus over the history of CSP in Albania, summarised in table 2 at the end of the paragraph, what emerges is that this policy developed independently from the western approach towards the country. At the beginning of transition, the only perspective for Albania was that of an ordinary aid recipient country but what later emerged was a concrete possibility to be integrated in the EU political space. But, for the moment, the increased EU commitment towards the integration of Albania did not really help local NGOs. This is due to the fact that the rest of the donors reduced their commitment in the country. Important sources of CSP projects such as the Open Society Foundation recently closed their main budget lines to the country as a result of the fact that progress has been made.\textsuperscript{166}

As pointed by the western think-tank ESI (2005), up to now Brussels has employed a “traditional capacity building” approach towards Albania, that is to say democratisation and institution building, the standard repertoires of non-coercive instruments towards aid recipient countries. As it moves closer to Bruxelles Albania is expected to receive support in the direction of what is defined as “member state building”, a process which took place already in new central European EU member states and that includes generally speaking a considerable increase in financial aid in all sectors in order to harmonize the local legal provisions with the rest of the Union.

But before this, as denounced by ESI, Albania, as the rest of the western Balkans, risks to remain for a long time in the limbo of a potential membership while western donors’ support

\textsuperscript{165} Many articles have appeared in the western press acclaiming the young major of the capital and he was awarded the best major of the world in the year 2004 by the organization World City Mayor http://www.worldmayor.com/. Rama was re-elected in the following competition.

\textsuperscript{166} This finding resulted from my last visit to Tirana in November 2005.
reduces. Moreover, the EU as a donor is generally more concerned with policies addressing institutions rather than NGOs, and when Albania will achieve the candidate status this will benefit the latter indirectly due to the general increase in resource availability. On the other hand, what one can imagine is that a trend already visible in the last few years is likely to be confirmed: that is to say thanks to the western donors’ pressure, the Ministry of Labour will increase its role of NGO coordination in the welfare sector as I shall discuss later on.

What is sure instead is that CSP was increased in connection with “emergency crises” that put the country in the limelight of western media around 1997 and 1999. In this respect CSP, like other western policies, can be seen as a way to limit the “damages” that the troubling country provoked, with its political instability and its considerable migratory flows. At the same time, one could see CSP as the institutional response to solidarity waves generated in western public opinions by mediatised crisis (Perlmutter 1998). In the Albanian public opinion the two interpretations mingled with a third, that is to say, the strong interests of INGOs in the field, as I shall discuss in the last chapter.

Now, to explore further whether promoting civil society was a project of colonization or one of emancipation, it deemed necessary to look at the rhetoric and practical implications of the policy in the local public sphere. The next two chapters then are devoted to fully explore the outcomes of CSP in Albania taking into account the other two strands of the debate.
### Table 2 The donors’ project and its counterparts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Donors</th>
<th>Political society</th>
<th>Local NGOs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1991-1997</strong></td>
<td>CSP against the legacies of the total state</td>
<td>Hostility against civil society and efforts to control it</td>
<td>Fear of authoritarian turn and international isolation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1997-1999</strong></td>
<td>Increasing CSP</td>
<td>Unable to control and direct civil society</td>
<td>Freedom from institutional control</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2000-2006</strong></td>
<td>New concerns towards institution building</td>
<td>Signs of interests towards the third sector</td>
<td>Gradual normalization of the relations and political cooptation</td>
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Chiodi, Luisa (2007), Transnational Policies of Emancipation or Colonization?: civil society promotion in post-communist Albania
European University Institute

10.2870/25233
Chapter 4: From *intelligentia popullore* to experts of civil society

The preliminary description of the outcomes of CSP in Albania showed that they did not differ significantly from other post-communist contexts. What can be said is that the economic and political troubles experienced by the country and the lack of previous experience of independent organizations in society made the Albanian NGOs’ struggle to gain social legitimacy particularly difficult.

NGOs in Albania were born as “highly formalized structures” and the representatives of Albanian NGOs displayed a clear preference towards a professional outfit rather than an activist one. In as far as the self understanding of local NGOs is concerned, I argue, CSP achieved a successful transplant of its idea of civil society: Albanian NGO-professionals see themselves and their organizations as advocates for society at large and wish to be active around issues of public concern instead of ordinary citizens.

Thus it is important to explore the reasons why CSP’s idea of professionalised social engagement resonated well in Albania and thus contributed to its success. This chapter therefore focuses on the transformed role of Albanian elites in the post-communist period and introduces the contention, further explored in chapter 5, that instrumental explanations for the success of the idea of professionalised social engagement in Albania do not exhaust the issue.

Certainly, CSP was introduced in a country where most people needed to find new source of income and where working for the representatives of the wealthy world for salaries high above the average has been an attractive perspective for most educated urban dwellers. In this respect CSP functioned in Albania as safety-net for intellectual elites and young educated urban dwellers. However, learning how to master CSP’s language was important for NGOs representatives who strove for professional recognition in the field and sought to affirm their new social role in the local and transnational public sphere.

Looking at Albanian public opinion at large, one finds evidence of a widespread appreciation of the idea of technical expertise in the social field even if the results of CSP were not appreciated and local NGO practitioners were harshly criticized. The idea of leaving behind politics, conceived solely as a form of violent and empty power struggle among leading elites, and of leaving behind of the state experienced as inadequate provider, are an important element to account for the positive reception of CSP in post-communist Albania.
This chapter explores further the trajectory of CSP in Albania that started out as a way to expose people to democratic values but later came to cover the reformulation of the welfare state. This involves a discussion of how local NGO representatives reinterpreted their function in connection with the new possibilities offered to develop the so-called ‘third sector’ and in particular shows how they see themselves as civic innovators, an idea that integrates the previously examined idea of civil society experts.\textsuperscript{167}

The Albanian NGOs’ idea of philanthropy is examined here to see whether it results from CSP manipulation of the local public sphere or instead responds as well to the local understanding of the post-communist change. The development of a third sector in Albania is still at an early stage, since reforms in the sector were late. Up until 1997 the transformation of social protection was neglected by foreign as much as by local decision makers. For the moment the chance to develop a non profit sector by fund-raising at home is almost non existent and as result local NGOs remain tightly dependent on donors’ funds. Furthermore, this chapter concludes that rather than a problem of disempowerment, as identified by the anti-political critique, CSP reveals itself as too limited in terms of financial engagement to live up to its aims and promises.

\textsuperscript{167} In the last chapter I add one more dimension to the meaning of civil society in Albania, that is to say the locus of social order contra the chaos of post-communism.
4.1 NGOs as a safety net for elites

Looking for people able to manage NGO projects CSP has, more or less deliberately, allowed for the survival of part of the intellectual elites in post-communist countries. In light of the poverty of public resources and public salaries, CSP became an important way to limit -at least partially- the dramatic brain drain faced by Albania. As noted by Verdery (2000) analysing the Romanian case, working for an NGO was an important opportunity available to that part of the post-communist elites that found itself without ‘political capital at hand to maintain or improve their social status’. Those who had either moral capital (if former dissidents) or intellectual capital, highlights Verdery: ‘Became involved in Western-based NGOs and local ‘civil society' organizations (...). In addition, they could do so from all possible political positions, nationalist, liberal, social democratic etc.’

The context in Albania is very close to Verdery's account and probably the economic survival of the local intellectual elites was much more severely endangered in Albania than elsewhere.

In Albania only few people could claim anti-regime credential as the strength of the repression had inhdred the emergence of a dissident movement. Among them it is worth mentioning Fatos Lubonja who had been a political prisoner for 17 years and emerged as one of the most important public intellectuals. Thus, looking at the most prominent personalities working for local NGOs, one often finds that they had important intellectual or social positions in the past. Among them there were well-known university professors, such as Arben Puto and writers such as Diana Culi, Sevim Arbana and Elsa Ballauri. Their chance of finding a new position in society was largely dependent on survival of the initial anti-communist witch-hunting.

In some cases, the job in the NGO sector constituted a valid alternative for people fired from public positions for political reasons. Rolanda Dhimitri, for instance, who after the regime collapse became a respected head of an NGO, at the turn of the regime-change was vice-president of the Committee for foreign relation of the parliament and was the vice-rector of the “Enver Hoxha” University of Tirana. Similarly, former university professors, such as Ilir Gedeshi or Dashamir Shehi, established successful think-tanks with donors’ funds after they had removed from their posts.

Due to the difficult process of democratisation, some eminent public figures found themselves moving back and forth from NGOs to governmental positions according to their connection with the governing coalitions. For instance, Genc Ruli, minister of the first democratic government in Albania, moved to think-tanks after a short experience with politics in the early ’90 but returned to politics in 2004.
That CSP has been providing socially engaged people with a salary can be appreciated for its own sake. In this context social activism becomes a profession, not only due to the required skills in the world of projects, but also due to the specific economic circumstances.

The radical transformation of post-communism also affected the intelligentsia that feared economic, social and cultural marginalisation. Among my interlocutors, Misha for instance observed the extent to which intellectuals changed their position in society where they have lost centrality since ‘now politicians dominate the scene’. This concern should be understood with reference to the historical background of a country where political and intellectual elites historically had often coincided and led the country’s transformations. In this respect Albanian elites share with the rest of elites in Eastern Europe the historical aspiration to function as platonic intellectuals leading their polis (Bozoki 1999; Patocka 1979; Seton-Watson 1992).

Albanian-speaking intellectuals had been central in the construction of the nation-state from the end of XIX century onward. The founding fathers of the Albanian nation-state were cosmopolitan, multilingual intellectuals who had travelled and experienced a much larger life-world than that of the borders they fought to establish. People used to a large audience, well beyond that of the Albanian speaking populations, which for the greatest majority was anyway illiterate, reduced the remit of intellectual expression but acquired a new role in the creation of the nation-state and gave Albanian language the status of a literary language (Elsie 1995).168

Much of the pre-communist intellectual elite was massacred during the first few years of the communist take over. A second dramatic period for intellectuals was that of Maoist anti-intellectuals propaganda in the 70s that was fortunately less violent than the Chinese Cultural Revolution (Blumi 1997).

Notwithstanding, during the communist rule the intelligentia popullore (intellectuals of the people) emerged as a specific social category in a country whose population in 1945 was 80% illiterate. The socialist rhetoric described a society as based around the revolutionary class, the working class, with peasants having some revolutionary potential, and its intelligentia popullore in charge of educating the workers engaged in the edification of socialism.169 Since there were no

168 The most famous case is that of the orthodox priest, Fan Noli, founder of the autocephalous Albanian church, a widely respected intellectual and Albania’s first prime minister. He was forced into exile by King Zog after his coup d’etat supported by foreign powers. Albanians were the last in the region to achieve independence from the Ottoman Empire. This solution was necessary for them to avoid being swallowed up by larger nations in the region as well as due to the collapse of the Porte and the birth of modern Turkey. Under the Ottoman Empire the intelligentsia was educated in Istanbul, but afterwards it was common to go abroad and after the establishment of the protectorate Italy became an important destination. Enver Hoxha himself studied in France.

169 I thank Fabian Kati who explained this point to me.
universities in Albania up until 1957, that which was opened in Tirana was shaped around the regime’s ideology.

The communist regime did not tolerate any form of intellectual freedom and the choice for the \textit{intelligentsia} was either silence or coexistence in some form. When in 1990 the grip of repression had loosened, some intellectuals ‘organic’ to the system worked for its democratisation. While the world famous writer Ismail Kadare choose the exile at the very last days of the regime existence in 1990,\footnote{The relevance given to Kadare’s choice to leave the country, and the common interpretation of this as a betrayal of his people in the most needed moment, is a good example of the role of intellectual elites in the country. See Faye (1996); Vehbiu (1997).} other writers, scholars and journalists started to organize and speak up against it. Among them some journalists gathered around the periodical \textit{Bashkimi} requesting of independent editorial choices; around the historian Arben Puto instead was formed the first organization for human rights.\footnote{I thank Edlira Bitincka for this information part of her unpublished master thesis.} In the political upheaval against the regime university, students had a prominent role and received support from their professors against the old guard of party militants then considered as part of the dogmatic \textit{intelligentsia popullore}.

Once the regime collapsed, the term \textit{intelligentsia popullore} was replaced by that of ‘intellectuals’. The expectation that once freed the public sphere, a new era of intellectual expression would start was disappointed (Elsie, 1995). The depth of the economic crisis cancelled state funds for any kind of intellectual production or expression for the whole decade.\footnote{The post-communist economic downturn and negative consequences of the loss of the state support for both the cultural production and cultural elites has been a general trend in the region (Wachtel 2003). In Albania the situation was extreme, especially during the first few years. One example is that of the film industry where the regime had invested significant resources due to the strong interests in propaganda. The socialist regime produced 15 long films, 20 documentaries and 16 animations per year which was clearly an achievement for a country of roughly 3 million people (Lako 2000). Post-communism started out with a paralysis of all kinds of production and all cinemas were closed for years.}

If gradually things improved, however, the context had radically changed: the idea of intellectuals leading society was no longer tenable. For the first time, the new political context with democratising political competitions gave laypeople a role in the political arena as well as generally speaking in the public sphere.

For the first time, the country experienced a boom in the expression of popular culture thanks to the appearance of commercial media, besides old style public TV station. This new trend displaced many intellectuals. Criticizing the new mass media for their cultural offer, the writer and NGO
leader, Diana Çuli, commented: “Sembra quasi che ci fosse più energia per combattere durante la dittatura piuttosto che oggi.”  

As in many other communist countries, the amount of books read per person decreased sharply with the collapse of the regime while the offer from TV and popular printed media has substituted the ‘consumption’ of literature. Today’s bestseller is no longer necessarily the high quality literature from Ismail Kadare, but is more likely to be a *feulleitton* written by popular TV journalists.

Some foreign commentators argued about the devastating effects of the commodification of all spaces, from culture to politics, in post-communist Albania (Morozzo della Rocca, 1997). However, the critique towards popular culture in Albania has not generally been associated with that of consumerism. The experience of mass consumption arrived in Albania after that of an extreme form of ‘dictatorship over needs’. Educated elites, like everyone else in the country, were then highly attracted by what they knew constituted western European everyday life while in Albania the normality was daily cues to buy food, shortages of water and electricity, lack of basic items for domestic use (Del Re 1997).

The main concern for Albanian educated elites in post-communism has not been the commodification of culture but rather the loss of material welfare and social status among cultural elites and the political interference and/or the collusion with criminal activities. Arguing that the intellectuals did not recovered from the experience of the regime and remain cowardly, the writer and political figure Dritëro Agolli commented: "La povertà non le fa alzare la testa in alto. Gli unici proletari dell'Albania di oggi sono gli intellettuali, veri e propri accattoni. (...) L'accademia è paralizzata, bloccata dai consiglieri politici del PD. (...) Non ci sono più riviste e giornali di filosofia e cultura; gli intellettuali non hanno più soldi per le loro pubblicazioni (...)” (Agolli 1997: 360). No money not even for a dépliant – writes Agolli – while the DP government sponsors the new popular culture of the beauty contests.

The historian Kristo Frasheri bitterly explained to me that today many people with money and ascendancy had never read a book in their life, his frustrated intellectual passion reveals the uneasiness in front of the new sources of social power. In post-communist Albania educated elites,

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174 The notable exception is poetry, which has remained popular and widely available.

175 This was the case with the young journalist Rudina Djunga’s book.

176 Here I am clearly echoing the famous expression ‘Dictatorship over needs’ introduced to define the socialist systems by Agnes Heller & Fehér (1983).
like anybody else including political elites, must jump into business if they are to regain a role. As illegal sources of wealth abounded in post-communist Albania, any uneducated but ruthless person has chances to ‘overtake’ many who had been socially respected under the old regime.\footnote{177}

While the new market economy changes the sources of social power and mass culture start to dominating, one cannot say that education is no longer relevant in Albania. On the contrary, education continues to be a privilege and an asset. This is confirmed, among other things by the fact that there is a common use of the term ‘intellectual’ in lay language to refer to all those that have some form of higher education. In rural areas it is even the case that those who speak a foreign language are considered the local intellectuals and in possession of a highly respected expertise. This persistence of the appreciation of knowledge converges with the generalized attachment to the idea of progress as stressed in the previous chapter. Not only that, education is probably one of the very few fields in which the people that I encountered speak in nostalgic terms about socialism.\footnote{178}

In light of this background one can understand why some NGOs use the term ‘intellectual’ in their name as in the case of Intelektalet e rinj, Shprese (Young Intellectuals, Hope) in the town of Shkoder or the Shoqata Grate Intelecktuale (Intellectual Women’s Association) in the town of Puke.

In conclusion, experiencing the post-communist turmoil, the old inteligentia popolare found in the CSP the resources to continue performing some kind of public function comparable to their previous occupations. Since CSP expanded over the years and many hundreds of projects were financed, it proved useful not only for the “old” elites described so far but also for a new generation of educated urban dwellers who benefited from the chance to find a job working for an NGO.

CSP granted old and young generations of educated urban dwellers a new way of acquiring social power, not only thanks to the economic benefits but also in terms of a new social role. It is interesting to highlight that such NGO elite generally presented itself not as carrying out ‘noble’ activities in civil society, but primarily as people that could claim some kind of expertise in the field.

\footnote{177}{The stirring up of social roles was made worse by the deep economic crisis and at the same time by the proximity with western influences creating opportunities in the grey, if not criminal economy. This aspect is nicely described in the Albanian film Lettere al Vento by Edmond Budina (2002), where a school teacher that used to be an honest and highly respected person in the past, is presented as socially marginalized due to socio-political changes. On the contrary, ruthless people involved in illegal trafficking acquire money and power. The ignorance and vulgarity of this nouveau rich cannot be combated by the protagonist that is shown as a victim of the changes in the new Albania.}

\footnote{178}{Contrary to other countries, nostalgia for communism in Albania is understandably a marginal phenomena. Only selectively people might recall what they missed of the system. Beside order and security, a frequent issue mentioned by my interlocutors during the interviews precisely education. On the topic of nostalgia and communism see the contribution by Lubonja in the Italian edition of the seminal work on the nostalgia of communism of Boym (2003).}
As mentioned, the language of civil society entered the country together with donors’ projects only at the moment of the regime-change and it was not associated with the idea of moral values and behaviour, as in the case of the central European dissidents who conceptualised the moral civil society in opposition to the corrupted socialist systems (Falk 2003). In the following paragraph, I discuss how CSP provides local NGO practitioners with a new identity based on a know-how – that of the “world of projects”. In addition, I explain how the idea of becoming the “civil society experts” has been particularly appreciated among Albania elites as it looks up-to-date and western looking.

4.2 The civil society experts: think-tanks and advocacy

The transplant of CSP expertise culture in the social realm occurred in a country where a devastating crisis of the local academia accompanied the general decay of state institutions. As in other fields, it was not only that of lack of resources at a single point. The experience of the ideocratic regime, together with that of the isolation, has had very negative implications in the intellectual arena.

Social sciences in particular had suffered under the ideological grip. A discipline such as sociology could not be taught or develop under the regime as it was considered a bourgeois science, while within other social scientific fields ideological manipulation was severe (Tarifa 1996) (Starova & Fuga 2001).

As a practical consequence, in the aftermath of the collapse of the communist system, donors did not have people in place to start carrying out surveys, policy paper and the like, necessary for CSP. A few among my interlocutors recalled that initially local NGOs were assigned roles that they could not fulfil and, as a result, they damaged rather than helping problem solving. Piro Misha for instance commented: ‘a few studies carried out here without competence presented unrealistic figures for instance in relation to the problem of human trafficking. These types of inquiries require know-how that in Albania was not available among NGOs. When this artificial ‘civil society’ carries out such unprofessional works becomes part of the problem by creating distrust in the future of the country. These NGOs increase alarm in the country by making up figures to sell a product to western donors and people do not know what to believe.’

Beside the emergence of vested interests among the local NGO, Misha pointed at the problem was strongly felt among Albanian elites, that is to say of that of up-dating the social scientific
know-how and filling the gap with the western counterparts. The lagging behind and feeling provincial, common among scholars in the region (Genov & Becker, 2001), was particularly acute in Albania.

On should consider that even where there was social scientific expertise available in the country, the width of socio-economic transformation was such to require loads of thoroughly new work. Let us take the case of the massive phenomena of migration, external as well as internal. Even though there were qualified demographers in the country the mapping of the population in the country had to start from scratch (Zonzini 2005). The National Institute for Statistics (INSTAT), once it had overcome its own internal severe financial crisis, faced completely new problems. When carrying out the last census in 2002 INSTAT had troubles fixing valid criteria on how to proceed with the calculation of residents in the country, not to speak about problems such as that of identifying the location and the configuration of entire new neighbourhoods with thousands of new inhabitants that had grown completely unregulated over the years.

Furthermore, there were many issues that had never been tackled before, new social phenomena or issues that could be discussed publicly for the first time. For instance, the 1998 Unicef report on Children and Women’s right reports observed: “The lack of public knowledge on the concept of sexual harassment is evident in Albania. The first study on sexual workers, which was published in Albania, seems to confuse sexual harassment with prostitution” (Unicef 1998:70).

The harsh experience of intellectual isolation, the awareness of lagging behind, the amount of new phenomena to deal with after liberalization contributed to render the constitution of think-tanks the real success story in CSP. In one of the few available analytic works on CSP financed by donors, the Albanian former DP minister and university professor now leader of one of the most successful local think-tank, Genc Ruli, implicitly referring to his own job, stressed this point (Ruli: 2003). But my interlocutors as well frequently expressed satisfaction for the achieved results in this field.

It was in particular North American organizations to focus their attention on the support to think-tanks. Among the most important in the country in terms of financial engagement has been the Open Society Foundation for Albania (OSFA) that covered a wide range of initiatives but devoted a special concern to what is defined as ‘emerging nongovernamental policy institutes’ or simply think-tanks. The OSFA web page stated that these institutes offer policy analysis and
provide alternatives to government policy debates, becoming ‘independent development policy consultants to international organizations’. 179

The donors’ need to have readily available know-how explained their choice to finance private organizations outside Albanian academia, which was itself sinking into local power struggles (Thumborg 1997). The scarcity of resources combined with vested interests hostile to change or favourable to politically driven management of human resources devastated the Albanian universities after 1991. Soon, the opening of private universities in Tirana, among which were the American University and the Islamic College, provided solutions for wealthy families. But the preferred solution for those people that could afford it has been to go abroad for higher education. 180

In this context, CSP allowed the creation of private organizations able to respond to the needs of the project making machine in a shorter period of time. Many hybrid situations emerged in this field with university professors setting up institutes for research, cooperating with public institutions or directly working within governmental bodies.

Besides, the same donors sponsoring CSP offered grants to students and professors to be trained abroad for a period of time. 181 However, one should note that, for years, the Albanian students who received a grant to go abroad were hardly ever recruited at home in a qualified position. The same donor that gave out the grants would not necessarily be able to recruit the people it contributed to train and engage them in the CSP field.

In addition, as already mentioned, the difficult economic situation discouraged people from returning to the country. Albeit at the beginning of the 2000, it was still difficult to address the acute problem of the so-called “brain drain” for the Open Society Foundation, or Soros Foundation, that engaged in a project aimed at bringing “human resources” back to the country by financing part of the salary of the newly hired state employees with a western diploma. 182

With time, a few among these newly constituted think-tanks gained a reputation locally and internationally and in some cases their presence in official international meetings, such as the

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179 Cfr. www.soros.org/natfound/albania. For an example of an observer who expresses a clear cut appreciation of Soros work in Albania with no interest at stake see Vebhiu (1997), who no longer lives in Albania but regularly writes for Albanian newspaper.

180 See the recent report by the Open Society Fundation for an assessment of the situation of private universities: http://www.soros.al/English/projects/education_report.pdf# search=%22universities%20private%20albania%22.


182 See the OSFA policy paper: Strategy Plan 2000-2001, “Strategic goal 8: Reversing the "brain drain"-- bringing Albanian intellectuals abroad "home" and slowing the flight of resident intellectuals.”
Stability Pact round-tables, became institutionalised. Their visibility in the media increased considerably over time and the NGO experts were regularly interviewed for advice on current social issues.183

Somehow training experts in legal or economic matters was relatively easy and yet very important since for a long time foreign organizations were co-writing the main legal provisions, including the drafting of the constitution. The participation of local organizations in counselling and consulting the parliamentary commission in charge of writing the draft constitution was particularly appreciated among my interlocutors. Juliana Hoxha, the local representative of the American ORT, expressed her satisfaction for the results obtained in this field: “We are at that point today that the constitution of Albania was drafted with a major input of the public. 25% of the constitution was changed by public input and this was the first concrete example of the government being really open and very receptive to the public. That was followed by a lot of laws drafted with NGOs input actually working groups of NGOs representatives and the government.’

This example seems to confirm the view of those scholars that denounce CSP as a tool for control and see donors empowering local NGOs in society to have allies in shaping policy making in the most important issue-areas such as economic policies, the form of local governments, the role of women etc.

However, western donors in Albania did not need to manufacture support for their policy-making because the communist past provided a direct experience of a much worse scenario of connection between power and knowledge. Certainly, resources that were once available in the cultural field were now gone but there was little to mourn about the past in this sphere. The post-communist present instead showed that past habits were hard to die and the foreign interference was often seen as balancing the political intrusion and manipulation in any field.

In addition, when pointing to the problem of colonization, one should keep in mind that think-tanks producing poor researches, as I repeatedly encountered in my field-work, were easier for donors to manipulate. Therefore the CSP investment in improving the quality of the work of local think-tanks increased the chances of their independence.

Rather the most evident problem of this kind of support was that it did not address any structural problems: Albanian universities continued to fall apart while small groups of people directly on the

183 For an example of the new role in the public sphere of the think-tanks see a series of articles published in the local press where experts were invited to contribute to the discussion: Osservatorio sui Balcani, (08/08/2003), ‘L'alcolismo in Albania: malati di 'trasizione'? ‘http://www.osservatoriobalcani.org/article/articleview/2361.1
payroll of donors worked to provide them with up-to-date analysis to carry out projects.\textsuperscript{184} In any case, the fear of proliferation of NGOs functioning as a Trojan horse for western interests did not emerge in my fieldwork, while the appreciation of the newly acquired expertise among these same organizations was widespread.

Notwithstanding, while many among my interlocutors, having and not having a direct stake in the field, considered the non governmental policy institutes as the realm where CSP achieved the most important results, on the opposite, most foreign analysis considered limited the capacity of Albanian NGOs to take part in the decision making process. Commenting on the drafting of the non-profit law, for instance, Freedom House observed: ‘\textit{Although NGOs did participate in this legislative initiative, their influence on the policy-making process remains relatively limited in general.}’ (Freedom House, 2002).\textsuperscript{185}

Beyond think-tanks, generally speaking, my interlocutors evaluated positively the work of those NGOs that acted as intermediary bodies or trustee organizations. As discussed in the first chapter, western donors efforts to support local NGOs aimed at stimulating their public participation instead of the society at large. In the case of the constitutional drafting Juliana Hoxha commented “\textit{only we, as ORT, organized a dozen of round tables in Tirana and outside Tirana with the government officials and citizens discussing the framework of the constitution and then discussing real issues}.” Reflecting western donors’ approach what Hoxha considered public participation was fundamentally the engagement of the highly formalized structures sponsored by donors in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{186}

To remain at Hoxha’s example of the constitutional drafting, it is clear that Albania NGOs did not really succeed in advocating for the interests of the Albanian society at large. Judging from the low voter turnout in the 1998 referendum, one should sharply distinguish between the NGO participation and that of the population at large that did not show much interest in the funding document of the democratic polity. If it is true that voter participation at political consultation in Albania had decreased at each election, one could not fail to notice that the previous consultation in 1994 illustrated the opposite scenario: at that time, without any substantial donors’ involvement,

\textsuperscript{184} This problem is highlighted for instance by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) in the report \textit{Funding opportunities for international cultural cooperation in and with South East Europe}, Amsterdam/Bucharest, October 2005, \texttt{www.eurocult.org}.

\textsuperscript{185} See as well the Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative (SPAI), (2001), ‘Albania Civil Society Assessment Report’, \textit{Empowering civil society in the fight against corruption in South East Europe}

\textsuperscript{186} In the end, comparing the process of the EU convention one cannot see a substantial difference as EU public opinion was absent while selected elites contributed to its drafting. However, in both cases the low level of participation of societies at large is a problematic element.
Albanian voters rejected the constitution proposed by President Berisha in order to obstruct his project of concentrating power in his hands.187

There are instances in which the idea of NGOs becoming advocates of citizens’ interests seemed to find concrete application in post-communist Albania. In the opinions that I gathered at the turn of the ‘90s, among the most effective local NGOs were considered those based on the defence of ‘interests groups’, as Kolpleja named them.

Contrary to donors’ reports, my interlocutor underlined optimistically how women NGOs were able to act as lobbyists and had successfully pushed the government to hire more women in the administration and obtained the creation of a Committee for Women issue. The same consideration is valid for the paraplegic organizations: ‘with the help of foreign donors- underlined Kolpeja- they became powerful, had a common voice and pushed the government to pass a law on the status of paraplegics’. Similarly the association for the blind, according to some of my interlocutors, profited from foreign aid and has been able to mobilize at an institutional level to improve the legislation concerning blind people in Albania.

Not surprisingly, my interviewees mentioned examples of organizations that are by nature membership based and do not need to look for potential beneficiaries as in most other cases, that have a narrow mandate on behalf of their members to work for the defence of the rights of this group and, not the least, when there is foreign support. In these cases, the interests are defined, the leaders might already be in place from the past and already have experience, and unless they take only personal advantage from the situation, they might achieve results.188

However, as I explain later in paragraph 5.5r, nothing like neocorporatist arrangements developed in Albania but this is not surprising as the participation of interests groups in the public arena was difficult even among the wealthier and more stable post-communist countries. In addition, very little has been carried out by CSP projects in Albania to organize business associations or provide support for trade unions.

This appreciation of CSP’s results among my interlocutors can be seen as the most successful aspect of its ‘cognitive transfer’ in the recipient public sphere, as discussed in the first chapter.

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187 In 1998 the call for the boycott of the consultation from the DP opposition might have had an impact on voter turnout. However, it seems clear that in 1994 the consultation received much more public attention as compared to 1998. Moreover, it was clear to many that in 1998 it was not a question of substantial political disagreement with the liberal democratic model of the constitution adopted that made the leading opposition party boycott the referendum for its approval. It was rather a question of harsh political confrontation for power reasons on the side of the party that had lost power the year before, with the elections following civil unrest in 1997.

188 There were cases of mismanagement of funds and manipulation of beneficiaries in the case of orphans associations that inherited a previous organizational structure.
Albanian NGO professionals liked to see themselves and their organizations as advocates for the society at large, as active around issues of public concern instead of ordinary citizens. This is precisely the donors’ idea of participation as taking place through NGOs as trustee organizations. Donors have no intention and even less interest, under ordinary circumstances, in promoting social movements. Quite the opposite, they try to avoid the risks of high mobilization by encouraging public participation through NGOs.

Such appreciation of CSP for its facilitation of both expertise transfer with think-tanks, and cognitive transfer with the idea of being the civil society advocates, can be explained first of all in connection with the structural legacies of the regime. As explained before, the role of the local intellectual tradition that endowed intellectuals with a guiding role in society should be taken into account to explain these CSP outcomes in Albania.

Secondly, I stressed that the former members of the intelligencia popullore and the new generation of educated urban dwellers found in their role of civil society experts a new social function in a period of radical transformation and economic hardship. Thirdly, together with their appreciation of their new social role acquired thanks to CSP, my interlocutors enjoyed the chance to acquire the knowledge of new global issues and related terminologies and the expertise in “the world of project”. The last important reason why the idea of NGOs as constituting intermediary groups was especially appreciated among my interlocutors is connected with the degeneration of public life in the country during the post-communist transformation but I discuss in length this aspect in the last chapter of this dissertation where I examine the NGO-grassroots relations.

However, is sure is that the local NGO representatives that I interviewed overestimated their role in the public sphere. Their capacity to influence policy-making has remained very limited up to now if one excludes the case of those NGO workers that were co-opted by the political elites. As a matter of fact, western donors in Albania could not achieve the control of the country thanks to CSP.

189 I underline ‘generally’ since there have been recent cases in the post-communist world showing the opposite attitude on the side of donors. The USA in particular actively supported the Serbian student movement Otpor in its strategy against Miloshevic. But this is more an exception to the rule in CSP even though it is probably one of the fields in which it is more successful as it intervenes in the local public sphere of the recipient when the momentum is building, and empowers some actors over others in local political struggles. The same goes for the other sister organizations in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. Considering the case of Mjaft, the idea of financing a ‘professional social movement’ to stir up the public space from apathy as they think it is interesting to notice how it has to struggle to avoid the take over of its own public initiatives by DP supporters. The risk they constantly run is to be used by them. However Mjaft can use donor’s support and dependency to publicly disassociated from DP’s interests.
Let me now move to analyse a second aspect of CSP in Albania that emerged when the scope of NGOs action was widened. After the 1997 crisis Albanian NGOs gradually came to be involved by donors in the reformulation of the welfare provisions with the idea of developing the so-called “third sector” or “non-profit sector” – that is to say NGOs working in partnerships with state institutions in the social service delivery - and this role produced new challenges and opportunities that are worth exploring in detail.

4.3 The third sector

At the turn of the 80s – as discussed in the first chapter of this work - donors had started promoting participation in developing countries, the former understood as civic engagement and self-help at the grassroots level. When the communist regimes collapsed this agenda seemed even more sensible in Eastern Europe where, according to the dominant western narrative, the citizens had developed a passive attitude because they were used to being taken care of by the all powerful state. Madlaine Albright, the then head of the State Department, in her speech to Albanian NGOs held in Tirana in 2000 explained to the assembly: ‘citizenship in a country, in any country, is not just a gift it is a responsibility. I think people need to know that things are not just done for them. They have to participate.’\footnote{190}

The Albanian communist regime also had its narrative and practice of civic engagement. It was not uncommon that Albanian citizens on Sundays had to contribute to the edification of socialism with some kind of social work, such as building greenhouses, cleaning parks and the like. The strategy of Enver Hoxha to keep people busy in the building and defending of their country under capitalist siege reached its peaks with the construction of the thousands of bunkers from the 70s onwards. Among my interlocutors these past experiences were often used to explain the scarce inclination towards NGO initiatives and the generally negative opinion concerning voluntarism.\footnote{191}

As for self-help, well before the collapse of the regime, people had very concrete experiences in their daily life. With the deepening of the crisis of the national economy in the 80s, more and more people had to find alternative ways to provide for the family maintenance. While in most other

\footnote{190 U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman (Tirana, Albania), February 22, 2000, Remarks by Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright to Participants in an NGO Roundtable.}

\footnote{191 Howard (2003:123) argues similarly that in Eastern Germany the experience of forced voluntarism is still resented by people today to justify the lack of civic participation.}
communist countries the problem of the goods’ supply was serious and queues at the shops were the norm, in Albania the ‘dictatorship over needs’ included malnutrition among the underprivileged in society (Champseix & Champseix 1990; 1992). With the collapse of the regime the informal economy experienced a formidable growth in the country in almost every field. Considering its vivacity one could say that the narrative of self-reliability was well received in practice even more then in theory with the experience of deregulation widely seen as a form of emancipation from the past oppression of the total state.

It is important to recall that CSP was initially conceived purely as a way to stimulate civic participation and socialize people to democratic values and behaviours. According to what Thumborg (1997) calls the ‘educational doctrine’, NGOs were for years assigned the task of ‘exposing’ recipient societies to the values of liberal democracy. In practice, NGOs had long organized seminars where citizens were taught the meaning of democracy, and instructed on what a newly adopted code was all about, what the rights of women should be, etc. Together with seminars, many projects merely resulted in the distribution of leaflets and posters, in the organization of some kind of public events, such as concerts, in different parts of the country. Only when NGOs were involved in providing emergency aid, did some kind of social assistance to people in need emerge.

Instead a consistent engagement of donors in financing projects in the field of service delivery, has been a late move on the part of donors, that is to say it emerged gradually after the 1997 catastrophe. Only at that point did CSP clearly engage with the reform of welfare so that local NGOs would act as subsidiaries to state institutions. Only then did the support of NGOs include in a systematic way the idea of creating a IIIrd sector in the country as a new solution for a reformed welfare state. The process of incremental definition of the functions assigned to local NGOs accompanied increased knowledge on the part of western parties of the recipient context and with the realization of the need for more fully fledged engagement in the country if its stabilization was to be achieved.

In 1999 when the World Bank published the first Vulnerability Study aimed at rethinking the welfare sector, it was clear that the width of social destitution had become very severe. In addition to alarming social phenomena that had exploded after 1991 such as human trafficking, the

192 Commenting on this idea that democratic values can be promoted via training, a friend of mine sarcastically observed: ‘I have never seen in Albania a soul redeemed by an NGOs’ deed’.

193 The first governmental paper defining the local institutional strategy to address social destitution was released the year later.
scarce provision of social services remained chaotic, to say the least. The picture provided by the World Bank study showed that social services were randomly provided by NGOs in the country, as they mainly resulted from emergency projects, and that the map of identified needs did not even remotely coincide with that of the services guaranteed (La Cava 1999). Western media mobilizing resource flows in favour of the ravaged country, especially after the 1997 crisis, led to the proliferation of CSP projects without coordination between donors or with local institutions.

Vaugham-Whitehead (1999; 2003) endeavoured to demonstrate that the social costs faced by Albania during the transition should be considered at the origins of the 1997 crisis. As a scholar and ILO practitioner Vaughan-Whitehead opposed his analysis to the predominant cultural interpretation of the pyramid scheme crisis, that abroad and at home, pointed to the fact that Albanians were ‘irresponsible and immature’ and were “to blame for interrupting the virtuous circle pursued so far, and despite all the good advice given them by external experts: everything would have gone as before if only they had not been so foolish as to invest all their savings in obviously dodgy pyramid schemes, deluding themselves that they could make quick money without having to work for it.” (1999: xvii)

Finally, at the turn of the 90s, Albania shaped its reforms in the welfare field with the support of the World Bank and introduced the idea of targeting the most vulnerable while abandoning the previous system of universal coverage of the social protection. In this regard, what is interesting to observe is that, in the Albanian media, the responsibility for the draconian economic measures was hardly ever attributed to western donors. Instead these were mostly seen as a necessary guide and support for the reforms. On their part, the different governments in the country did not really seem concerned to curtailing of welfare expenditures that were decided.194

Nor can the cancellation of the welfare in Albania be said to have had an impact on political changes, as was the case in other post-communist European countries. In central Europe from 1993 onwards the electoral competitions brought the reformed socialist parties back to power in most of the post-communist countries. According to the analysts, the reason for such unattended change was to be attributed to the social cost of economic reforms that had significantly curtailed the welfare state provisions (Janos 2000).

194 To have an idea of level where social protection had fallen one should consider that in 2002, in a context of monetary stability, the Albanian government, in accordance to IFI, announced the increases of pension by 10% (by 25% in the case of former-members of agricultural cooperatives). As a total, around 547,000 pensioners were set to benefit from this measure: Cfr. Albanian Daily News, ‘Government Decides to Increase Pensions ′, 15th june 2002, http://www.albaniannews.com/.
Electoral competitions in Albania proceed in such a troubled way that it is difficult to state that people brought the reformed Socialist back to power to regain the lost welfare. Rather, the return of the Socialist to power was linked to the 1997 crisis (Pihet 1998). What is clear, is that once the Socialist Party regained power, it did not change policy-making in the field (Fuga 2000).

Western donors’ fears around social demands and people’s attachment to local social welfare were rather misplaced. The welfare state that was dismantled in Albania had failed to deliver services in many fields well before the regime collapsed, and anyway it was provided by a violent authoritarian state. In this respect it should be recalled that the dismantling of all traces of the state from green houses to public schools both in 1991 and in 1997 was a spontaneous reaction on the part of of laypersons.

However, if initially, the deficiencies and the authoritarian nature of the welfare provided by the regime discouraged people from acting in defence of it, at the turn of the 90s the failure to transform it and the resulting void became visible to everyone. Misha pointed at the ineffective reforms: ‘welfare services in the country were certainly of very bad quality but at least, a network of institutional organizations was there. Now, citizens like me have to find all solutions by themselves: looking for a doctor, a nurse, a telephone etc.’

Yet, most of my interlocutors seemed resigned that, being the country a poor one, there would be no money for social services that are an expensive luxury for wealthy countries. As Kolpeja bitterly commented: “Social services are very important for Albania now but they are very expensive”.

One could argue that those elites defining the reforms and proclaiming the inevitability of the social costs of transformation would not be among those that personally pay the prices of reforms. However, this way one would not give sufficient relevance to the fact that in Albania the idea of socialist equality had been clearly de-legitimized while the alternative capitalist model was seen a more efficient in allocating resources and granting prosperity. Throughout the 90s the Albanian public sphere was dominated by the idea of the role of competition rather than by the idea of establishing equality of possibilities. It was held that the state that had so miserably failed to

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195 For a general analysis of social citizenship in communist countries and its authoritarian character see Heinen (1997). Clearly, once again the situation in Albania was extreme even in this field but, for instance, the poor quality of the services provided in Czech Republic according to Hitlinger made that women were not concerned about closing state-run nursery schools. Quoted in Saxonberg, (2001:38).

196 It is interesting to note that one can even find an NGO in Albania that wishes to support the talented children, that is to say the Miqte e Femijeve te Talentuar (Friends of the Talented Children Association) in Tirana that aims at “identifying
deliver its promises should now leave space to the market. The confirmation of the validity of this idea came for instance from the health care services where today it is possible to purchase previously unavailable services from the private sector.197

Generally speaking what dominated in Albania was the idea that the social costs to become a market economy were inevitable and they had to be accepted as part of the transition. As pointed by Janos (2000), initially in east-central Europe, almost everyone could expect to be a winner of the post-communist transformation. Most people could not really say where they would be located socially, where their interests were, and how to express them politically. It is well known the extent to which the expectation of a better future, with the notable exception of former Yugoslavia, played a role during the post-communist decade. As I shall discuss later, one should consider that strikes and other forms of protests organized in Albania never concerned social protection as such but they ranged from party struggles to the defence of state employees’ salaries (Vaughan-Whitehead 1999).

Undoubtedly, reforming the welfare state was not easy in Albania as beside budgetary problems the previous unreformed Stalinist welfare was conceived according to a different logic from that of western welfare systems. Kolpeja noted in this connection: ‘we did not know the difference between social insurance and social system and this is because our system worked in a completely different way.’

Some institutions had to be introduced from scratch, some competences had to pass from one ministry to another, and some deeply changed the meaning. An interesting example provided by Kolpeja is that of the Labour Offices that existed but had a different use: ‘we did not have unemployment and one could not choose the occupation as the government did it for you. Labour Offices existed but they represented something opposite as to now’. Though it would have been difficult to be nostalgic about job security under these conditions, it was equally the case that the setting up of new labour offices resulted in nothing.

Public administration, especially at local level, has been in an appalling situation since the collapse of the system. Public officers were among the first migrate initially, due to salaries kept


197 As is often the case in third-world settings, on the one hand, the phenomena of bribing in hospitals became a widespread informal mechanism of payment that assured patients of the services they needed and public officials the integration of their very low salaries. On the other side, one can sophisticated medical technologies for the artificial insemination for those that can afford to pay. I return to both points below.
low below acceptance many employees deserted their posts to making a living with a second job, where possible, neopatrimonial practices spread while political elites continued the practice of politically appointing, devising their self-styled spoils system.

As matter of fact, after 1997 most donors realized that Albania needed to reformulate its welfare. However, as the turn towards social services came as a response to the crises, the programs introduced in the country were completely lacking coordination among donors and by-passed local institutions.

As pointed by the first critiques of CSP, analyzed in the theoretical chapter, such outcomes could be seen as the direct consequence of western interference that worsens the crisis of governance of aid recipients. However, this conclusion risks to become a shortcut if one does not consider the wider context described so far.

What is sure is that in their incremental definition of CSP, at the turn of the 90s, western donors gradually came to the conclusion that it was fundamental to have local NGOs cooperate with the state institutions as discussed in paragraph 3.3.

Moreover, during the project implementation, it became clear that the latter, just like NGOs, were in dire need of expertise, infrastructures, training and the like. Many programs of support with a special focus on institution building were introduced in the framework of the development of the third sector. Especially after 2000, more and more foreign commentators agreed that it was possible to find motivated people at the level of local administration,\textsuperscript{198} that single institutions would be glad to participate in foreign exchanges, that they would introduce innovations in the provision of services if expertise was made available.

Rethinking social protection in the country, finally, pushed western donors to assist the Ministry of Labour to reorganize and to create incentives for local NGOs to cooperate with it.\textsuperscript{199} The confrontational state-society relation did not easily wither away but it became clear that what was needed was the reconstruction of a new idea of positive state-society relations rather then the spirit of initiative of the post-communist citizen.

\textsuperscript{198} This awareness gradually became more general but in 2000, when I carried out interviews, the UNOPS representative Valli Corbanese was still a fairly isolated voice in claiming so.

\textsuperscript{199} The reforms taking place from 2000 onwards, assigned to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs a political role in the definition of the social policies. The administration of the services is assigned to the state agency ShSS Shperndarja e Sherbimeve Sociale (State Social Services) which assumed the role of coordination and operates at the regional level through its offices. Growing powers are being assigned to local administrations, especially by the latest reform approved in 2005.
As the turn towards social service took place only at the end of the decade, most initiatives started from scratch. The lack of legal framework for the non-profit sector up to 2001 significantly hampered the implementations of the first foreign initiatives. On top of that, even if forms of coordination between state institutions and local NGOs emerged, the latter do no have chances for fundraising at home as donors’ advocate.\textsuperscript{200}

All in all, one should not fail to notice how 15 years after the regime-change Albania the welfare reforms and the creation of welfare mix is still at the level of pilot projects (Izzo 2004).\textsuperscript{201} However, almost all progress in this field depended from western donors’ intervention. The process of implementation of latest reform approved in 2005 has been supported by a number of donors at all levels, ranging from the international World Bank, to the British and the Greek governmental agency, down to small local donors of the decentralized cooperation such as the Italian Regione Emilia-Romagna and its municipality of Forlì.

Thus in discussing the CSP turn towards the development of the third sector in Albania I deemed necessary first of all to explore further the relation that local NGOs entertained with donors and the fact that the latter cultivated the illusion of remaining detached from local institutions for a long time.

\textbf{4.3.1 The power relation between local NGOs and western donors}

Local NGOs in Albania, as it is often the case in aid recipient countries, preferred to rely on western donors rather than on local institutions. This aspect seemed to remain unaltered in Albania with time passing if one considers that I encountered once again as a Gordian knot in 2005 during a seminar I assisted on the issue of welfare reforms organized for NGOs and representatives of local administrations from the Balkans, in Forlì, by the Italian donors of the decentralized cooperation.

The critics of CSP regularly highlight the vested interests of local NGOs in their appreciation of foreign projects. To start with, the need to keep the organizations working generally makes the local NGOs prone to compromise. In the first half of the 90s, due to the deep economic crisis in Albania, CSP was certainly a good opportunity to survive for single individuals as much as for their

\textsuperscript{200} Even at the level of religious institutions donations were still hard to get. We are far away form the days in which out of the Mosque of Tirana people would come to steal the shoes and yet in 2000 when I discussed with people active in the local Orthodox church the possibility of developing philanthropic activities depended on foreign support.

\textsuperscript{201} See the World Bank documents of 2001 entitled \textit{Social service delivery programme: subprojects implemented during the pilot phase}. The open reference to pilot projects had not disappeared from the new law in 2005 where five municipalities were identified as more advanced in the welfare reforms while in the rest of the country welfare provisions were still absent.
organizations. Sinan Tafaj, representative of the Blind Association, stressed the centrality of international solidarity as a way to counter the economic hardship for the associations as well. They had been forced to limit their activities and left many urgent needs unattended, not to mention the sheer impossibility for the organization to advocate for new policies that could improve the well being of the blind.

It is clear that the need for resources pushed local NGOs to adjust to the requests of foreign donors or look for alternative interlocutors. In many ways the reliance on donors’ support made local NGOs resemble the donors’ trustee more than trustee of segments of the society.

But, after a decade of relations with the aid-industry, in relative terms, some Albanian NGOs have increased their power in relation to donors. Those organizations that proved to be reliable partners indeed became donors’ informal local consultants. Every new delegation that paid a visit to the country encountered the few NGOs that were well known among donors to get from them a briefing of the situation.

In addition, the complex web of power in the transnational arena leaves all participants more decision-making power than old bilateral foreign policy. Seeing the variety of donors present in Albania, it is clear that the imbalance in the distribution of power is reduced by the possibility which local NGOs have to change foreign interlocutors when disagreements emerge, which was a reality in the context examined here. I encountered cases of Albanian NGOs, and of single local activists, that after a bad experience with one donor managed to find another one willing to cooperate. Even the case I came across of one local NGO leader, seriously suspected to have misused the UNHCR's money for a private business, continued working since he found another donor willing to support his initiatives.

On the other side, changing donor clearly entailed the adaptation to new projects, competences and activities as foreseen by the new interlocutor. For instance, a case that I came across with was that of local NGO, normally in charge of managing a youth centre, which to continue working, after the first donor had cut the funding, accepted to set up a free of charge service of blood analysis to sensitize young Albanian towards the risks of AIDS.

As a matter of fact, the relation of dependency established by CSP in post-communist Albania was not just prone to acceptance of foreign views. Juliana Hoxha seems to have come to term with foreign interference easily, stressing for instance the responsibility that this entails for donors: ‘everything that is related with the NGO sector is imported, I think, especially in the terms we use. We had a discussion when discussing the draft law whether we needed to call NGOs by this name, or whether we should find a new name. It is the same for what concerns the third sector. (...) we
know that the NGO sector is donor-driven so if you a donor you are their mum. If you stop feeding them they die and if NGOs have hard time to be sustainable, part of this is your fault.’

It is important to notice how criticisms emerged openly among local NGOs representatives that I encountered. In particular many complained about the emptiness of the seminars that donors’ organized for them and that they considered remote from what their needs and expectations. For instance, Piro Misha complained that considerable amount of scarce resources had been spent for what he called: ‘generic seminars that do not interest anybody and then you have to pay people to come and attend the lessons.’

Hemment (1998) argues the problem in post-communist countries is that NGOs are widely perceived as following foreign priorities. This opinion, often shared by the same Albanian NGOs representatives that I interviewed, should be understood not as an issue of foreign policy interests but rather as relating to the type of policy orientation. After the initial positive welcoming of donors’ support that I have discussed above, gaining experience in the field, most people came to the conclusion that CSP was sometimes flawed by donors’ wrong understanding of local problems.

When, for instance, the Norwegian Development Agency (Norwegian People’s Aid) foresaw a project in the field of women rights in Peshkopi, it did so following a foreign view over the problems in the northern Albanian town. Vilma Kolpeja who generally expressed highly positive appreciation for her experience in the cooperation with foreign agencies offered the example of Peshkopie to highlight the sensitivity of the project making. In her view, the economically impoverished and isolated area of Peshkopie required different forms of involvement as “in Peshkopje the role of man is considered central and you cannot go there and promote so openly the right of women because this does not function”.

What this example shows is the centrality of donors’ ideas of the recipient in defining what kind of policy-making is required. There are of course examples of project making following donors’ foreign policy interests, such as those aimed at facilitating the repatriation of undocumented migrants, but the criticism that my interlocutors addressed to CSP did not generally point to these cases.

When CSP was criticized in Albania, as already stressed above, it was done in the name of the results obtained. Here is where the idea of ‘foreign priorities’, among my interlocutors, becomes that of ‘foreign views’. I elaborate further on this aspect in the next chapter when I discuss the idea of “wester models”. For the moment let me simply observe that the Albanian NGOs representatives that I interviewed did not fear to express criticisms towards CSP in private as well as in public.
In addition to this problem of responding to foreign ideas of the local context, my interlocutors lamented the extent to which projects were regularly conceived for short term engagements. What is more, many women NGOs representatives I talked to were frustrated at the limited means at their disposal in carrying out their activities. They promoted the campaigns that donors requested on different issues but at their doors they had regularly many women asking for material support of different kind that they could not provide.

The gravity of social destitution reduced the spaces for training to democratise values and behaviors. This is why CSP turn towards social services at the end of the decade was warmly welcome among Albanian NGO practitioners. What I wish to suggest here is that analyzing the appreciation towards the CSP turn towards social services only in instrumental terms for the personal or organizational chances of survival provided by donors hides the presence of socially committed people and their troubles in working in financially deprived contexts.

As observed above, in the Albanian public sphere there was initially a widespread endorsement of the donors’ idea of the need to stimulate citizens’ participation in addition to an eagerness to learn new languages and practices. On the other side, the appreciation of the proposed CSP turn towards social services emerged with the direct experience that economic growth would not solve many social problems as had been expected at the beginning of transition. Having said I deem important to shed light first on the idea of “civic innovation” and then on that of “third sector” developed by Albanian NGO practitioners in tight relationship with western donors.

4.3.2 NGOs as civic innovators

The widespread appreciation for the opening of new opportunities in the social service delivery, at the turn of the 90s, can be interpreted in many ways. Together with instrumental motivations, the awareness of the hardship in society and the frustration for the lack of means to face it constituted important elements. In this regard, the need for Albanian NGOs to create a local legitimation of their work must be taken into account. A report of the Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative (SPAI) suggested in 2001: “The recent involvement of NGOs in service provision has somewhat improved the public image of the sector. At the same time, it has exposed local NGOs to more
public scrutiny than they experienced before, which could increase NGO accountability in the future." 202

Undoubtedly, for years donors’ advice provided the strongest source of justification to reduce the role of the state, including in the welfare provisions. As one could recently read on a donor’s web pages: “Civil society institutions demonstrate a number of advantages compared with existing State institutions; they are more flexible and adaptable to fast changing conditions, they are more creative and at the same time more successful in reaching people at the grass roots level as they use participatory approaches.” As Alvarez (1998) suggests, this approach constituted the standard neo-liberal idea of charging civil society with taking on the social responsibilities eschewed by a shrinking state. Finally, by the year 2000, the so-called post-Washington Consensus’ agenda emerged among western donors and made the rethinking of the state role common among aid recipient countries.

The reform of the social service system that Albania has been undertaking since 2000, foresaw that public institutions cooperate with local NGOs, compete with them and establish a relation of subsidiary. Vilma Kolpeja, involved in a project financed by a few Dutch agencies of cooperation in the field of community building, fully subscribed the logic: ‘I see NGOs as a complement to governmental organizations in the field of social services. Sometimes they will compete and this will increase the quality of the services provided’. Kolpeja stressed that public institutions cannot carry out on their own the monitoring of their activities nor can they: “give information and orientation to the people to direct them to demand to the authorities the respect of their rights. This cannot be done by someone that works in the public administration”.

When local NGO representatives justified the importance of their engagement in the field of social services, they underlined the difficulty of reforming the state and especially the unlikely prospects of self-reform. The experience with the state developed during socialism and in the first few years of transition, as already stressed, provided ample justification for the mistrust in the institutions that local NGOs displayed. Eva Hasani, for instance, observed: “the state is closed to change. There is not much in terms of financial resources, this is true, but there is a certain narrow-mindedness.” Interestingly this type of observation could be given by state employees who often

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203 See the description of a project in the field of Civil Society on the web site of the British Embassy in Albania co-financed project between the latter and the OSCE and the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV): ‘Civil Society Development in Albania’, http://www.britishembassy.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1085327324776&print=true

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agree with the slow path of reforms. But after all, local NGOs, in their difficult relationship with public institutions mirrored the ordinary citizens’ attitude towards public institutions.

Together with antagonism and scepticism towards the state the interviews that I carried out among NGO representatives showed a desire to move things faster than state institutions would have allowed. As part of the numerous projects carried out in the last ten years, NGO representatives stressed their success stories and their power to modernize the local context. When asked whether the country would have developed similar measures without donors’ support, Kolpeja answered: ‘Maybe they would have come but very, very slowly’.

All in all, my interlocutors that had the chance to work in social services in particular found out that much bigger spaces for change were available in the non-governmental sector and they interpreted their role as one of civic innovators in the line with Fowler (2000).

Among the cases of civil innovation that are worth mentioning, one that received quite a lot of appreciation among western donors in the country was Co-Plan. The organization has been engaged in projects of so-called ‘participatory urban planning’ in the new shanty town of Breglumasi (Bathore), in the periphery of Tirana. It has a strong leadership represented by its founder, Besnik Alija, who was trained in the Netherlands to work for Community Base Organization (CBO) development. Alija is also a fortunate case of a person who after his studies abroad was able to find a qualified occupation at home.

This NGO is a good example of a successful organization that, in its work of mediation between new urban dwellers and the local municipal authorities, contributed to finding solutions to problems such as the provision of water, the construction of roads, the organization of garbage collection and the like. The ground-breaking practices proposed were generally appreciated locally and internationally as they were seen as reducing the risk of violent confrontation between citizens and institutions as occurred in a number of occasions in these areas.

One could say that professional NGOs, such as Co-plan, take over responsibility of the state institutions but on the other hand work to produce positive sum games between state and society.

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204 See: Ludovica Ghilardi, (2003) La ristrutturazione del servizio sociale Albanese. Rapporto di tirocinio presso Amici dei Bambini sede Tirana, Unpublished Report, Università di Bologna. I crossreferenced this finding with other interviews made me available by Michele Nardelli, who was engaged in a project of decentralized cooperation between the Province of Trento and the northern town of Skoder in Albania. In my experience with post-communist Balkans, Albania is unsurprisingly similar to Romania as they two countries experienced the worst type of communist regime, defined by Linz (1998) as sultanistic. In former Yugoslavia, instead, the attachment to state employment is significantly higher even where people are critical of the services provided.

205 Cf. chapter 1 paragraph 1.2.
(Evans 1996). With its clear mandate Co-Plan became a chain of transmission from the grassroots to the public institutions and improved local citizens-authority relations.

If this interesting but potentially controversial case does not represent the ordinary pattern of NGO project making - considering that most NGO projects for years did not have clear-cut profiles and a mandate with concrete implication in the field - what it does reveal is that even when state-society relations were being addressed concretely the donors’ preference went towards private organizations outside state infrastructure.

In this regard one should consider that if public officials often proved to be negligent or unprepared for their role, the relationship with local NGOs that were much better equipped and funded then they normally were, did reinforce the climate of confrontation. The difference in outlook between the fashionable, stylish, high-tech Co-plan office in a lavish new building in downtown Tirana as compared to that of the municipality of Kamsa by itself explains why, instead of the expected positive competition, problems between them emerged.\footnote{The Co-Plan offices were arranged as those of the most fashionable architects bureau etc. but several other successful NGOs had similar premises.}

However, the experience with of highly uncooperative state officials was shared by foreign governmental and non governmental actors and the former with their short term project making look for short-cut solutions. For instance, the INGO Comunità Emmanuel, the only organization working in the field of drug addiction in Tirana, after long and unproductive bargaining with local institutions to be assigned a place to fulfil their activities, in 2000 opted to spend a considerable amount of money to buy the land from a private and built own private premises. The INGO had previously signed a convention with local authorities and had gained a reputation for their work but this was not enough to receive a full public support.

I encountered a few other cases of local NGOs that were civic innovators in the welfare sectors, especially with those organizations working to defend the most disfranchised groups in society such as orphans and people affected by mental and physical disability.

Let me explore the example of disability to understand further the role of CSP and local NGOs in the field of civic innovation. The legal status of the disabled in Albania was regulated for the first time by a law in 1966. The guarantees established at that time for the disabled consisted of a pension. But such support was provided only to disabled workers while persons disabled at birth or those who had become disabled for reason unrelated to his/her role of worker were not eligible of social protection. A new law approved in 1993 was harmonized to EU norms and introduced the
idea of the invalid as a citizen with rights in relation to the state and the society. Yet, in post-
communist Albania physically and mentally disabled people in receipt of treatment of some kind 
were generally segregated to old communist rundown institutions. Beyond the considerable 
burden of care, the families of disabled persons who remained in the home had to deal with strong 
prejudices widespread in society.

Projects designed to sensitize people about citizenship rights were generally very popular among 
NGOs representatives that I met: I heard many times from my interlocutors the refrain: “people do 
not know their rights’ and our work is to inform them and sensitize them. Describing her work in 
the prefecture of Peshkopj, one of the remotest and poorest rural areas, Kolpeja pointed as well to 
the fact that people were not aware of their new right towards the state. She insisted that families 
facing particular problems (e.g. supporting a disabled family member in the home) needed 
counselling and orientation in order to lay claim to the public support to which they were entitled: 
‘they need information to know what are their rights’. Such a view was shared by other foreign 
activists that I met who highlighted the fact that due to the many transformations in the legislation 
many people had rights to social care on paper of which they were unaware.

The idea behind is that once people know their rights, they will take initiatives to defend 
themselves in the framework of existing legal provisions. Yet, the adaptation of legal provision to 
EU standards and the campaign to create awareness in the populace may be insufficient. It is clear 
that local NGOs cannot provide nation-wide coverage in their activities and in data production. 
Officially this is not within their remit since foreign financed projects do not foresee such scope. 
However Albanian institutions, central and local, could not even map social vulnerability in the 
country, let along inform citizens of their newly acquired rights (Trifirò, 1998:145). As described 
by a brochure presenting the outcome of the EU funded Phare-Lien project: “For the time being the 
state cannot afford to allot resources in planning such services, nor support private or associative 
initiatives to this end” (Trifirò, 1998:149).

207 The problem of metal health care inherited from the socialist era was shared by other countries. See for instance 
Disability Advocacy Center argues about the need to improve the treatment of people with mental disabilities among EU 
accession countries where, for instance, inhumane cage beds are still used.

208 That prejudice towards disabled persons is still widespread in the country has been confirmed to me by many 
people. Moreover, I had the chance to visit one of the hospitals for persons with mental and physical disability in the 
southern city of Korcia in 2000. There, thanks to the money of the Swiss cooperation some improvements had been 
made to the very badly maintained building which hosted about 50 people. I also saw the reaction of the people in town 
to the attempts promoted by the Swiss doctor Dr. Martignoni working there to accompany a group of his patients on a 
daily short walk through the town. While old people were simply surprised to see the group walking around town, some 
youngsters insulted them, as they did every day.
Much of the civic innovation in post-communism Albania was about enunciation of rights and possibilities that could not be realised due to the lack of resources as well as the weakness of local institutions in the implementation of the new norms. “Paper rights”, as called by Trifirò in this brochure, created profound frustration and disbelief with references to future promises.209 A short term project financed by the EU can momentarily alleviate the hardship for a few lucky beneficiaries but idea of citizenship as constituted by rights and duties had a long way to go before becoming generalized.

Having said that, I should add that in 2005, in one of my recent visits to the country, I assisted to a performance organized in Tirana, with foreign funds, by local NGOs to sensitise the public opinion on the disabled rights. The newly elected prime minister, Sali Berisha, who a decade ago only aimed at putting the new foreign funded organisations under his control, then took part in the event, that, as a consequence, was showed in the TV news. Moreover, recently a number of television programs raised such issue of disabled rights in the public sphere and informed about the provisions foreseen in the news strategies for social services announced by the government.210

One should recall that changing laws and financing awareness campaigns was much less expensive for donors. As observed by the EU practitioner Trola, given the circumstances this type of CSP engagement was appropriate: “I am convinced that if you start with social services you need a lot of money to make things work. Yes, you can start with small projects with 10,000-20,000 $ and open a small centre for social care. However, you have to think about the sustainability of your centre and you are never sure that it will work. You take a risk. Instead with small grants you can sensitize people on the constitution, on what it is and why people should go to vote. In the social services either you have enough money or…”.

It is important to clarify better this last observation as it also served to justify local NGOs active in the field to see themselves as alternative service provider to the state. As observed by Kolpeja ‘anyway most services financed by donors were not provided by the state (...) in addition every time there is a budget problem what is sacrificed first are social services’. At least, contended my interlocutors a few organizations acquire experience in the field and with time they will make the difference.

209 In this respect Martha Nussbaum’s idea of ‘capacity’ finds concrete evidence: rights alone are not enough (Nussbaum 2002).

210 I thank Alban Trungu for this information.
Up to a point this is a problem of perspective in seeing the glass half full or half empty. We cannot predict now if these organizations supported by CSP will survive the changes in the next few years and the seeds they planted will grow. What we can say, from the recent experience, is that the general situation of the country where CSP is carried out is a fundamental variable to take into account to verify the success or the failure of the policy. The improved relations between political elites and local NGOs, described above, played a central role in widening the potentials of civic innovation in today’s Albania as compared to the past.

Anyway, we can say that despite the reforms undertaken form the 2000 onwards, the development of a third sector, dealing with social services in partnership with state institutions in Albania has remained in its infancy. When the Albanian local NGOs, that I interviewed, referred to themselves as constituting civil society or alternatively constituting a sector, defined as IIIrd sector or simply NGO sector, they de facto only spoke about the CSP’s transfer of organizations that required some kind of expertise, that carried out projects and where people were paid to perform their roles. Their capacity to introduce innovation in the social realm instead should not be overestimated when their capacity to influence the local decision making process remained limited, as described above. Let me provide a few more elements to understand this contention.

4.3.3 The new foreign funded philanthropy

While the idea of equality lost political legitimacy in post-communist Albania, social vulnerability reached such distressing levels as to push many local NGOs to appreciate the turn towards social services that donors proposed. However, those among my interviewees, that complained about the lack of financial resources to support the people in need, clearly enjoyed the idea of resembling charities rather then organizations engaged in the struggle for redistribution.

In addition, the Albanian NGOs’ ideas of social engagement differed not only from left-wing ideas of bottom-up struggles for distribution but also from traditional religious approaches to charity. What they wanted to resemble were current models of experts’ philanthropy, that is to say professional private no-profit organizations that fund raise and provide services to citizens. However, their chances to fundraise at home, at public as much as at private level, have been inexistent thus far and therefore only foreign funds allowed them to work.

Decertifying completely the work of Albanian NGOs, the Socialist Party representative Naim Zoto not by chance commented sarcastically: ‘you and I now organize a cocktail and voila we have
our NGO’. In addition the chaos generated during the various emergency situations in the 90s,
facilitated the misuse of CSP resources. However, this constituted only a side effect of a generally
turbulent situation. What I consider more important is the fact that with time passing and the
general situation improving it became evident that local NGO workers aspired to keep their
privileged position in the social hierarchy. This feature reinforced the idea widespread in the
country that local NGOs form a kind of club for elites.

Despite the improved economic situation in the country, the NGOs representatives remained
among the few that could afford the fashionable and expensive bars and the boutiques in the city
centre, in the area that what was once called the Bloku, the forbidden neighbourhood in downtown
Tirana accessible only to party representatives.211

Interestingly, two of the most respected women’s NGOs in Tirana, on their side, opened very
fashionable cafés at their premises in the city centre. These places, that represented islands of peace
and relaxation for people like myself, functioned almost exclusively as a meeting place for foreign
delегations. Even when a few local activists had the chance to become regular customers of these
places, they would be simply proving the growing divide between ordinary people and the
privileged NGO professionals.

Romano (2000:52), for instance, in his review of NGOs activities in Albania, expressed his
positive impression of the work of one association, Miq dhe Paqe, adding a polemical note in
relation to the others, stressing that he interpreted the fact that the president of the organization did
not have a visitor’s card as a sign of serious engagement. This observation can be explained
considering the displacement of someone who is used to social engagement as a morally and
politically high but economically poor perspective as is the case in the country where he comes
from, that is to say Italy.

This was the reaction of most foreign activists that I encountered in the field who were ill at ease
with the professional culture spread among Albanian NGOs. In many explanations that I heard, this
attitude was attributed to the predominance of Anglo-Saxon models of civil society in Albania. In
this view, this discrepancy is related to the transformation of the discourse of grassroots
mobilization for the attainment of rights into a discourse about expertise and fund-raising (Guilhot
2001).

There are indeed different philanthropic traditions in western countries. Taking the examples of
Germany and Great Britain one can notice for instance that the source of the donation differs as in

211 I thank Arolda Elbasani for reminding me of this aspect during our conversation in 2004.
the former it is the state only and in the latter the private and the public financing coexist (Anheier et al 2000). Taking the current structural incorporation of the civil society organizations in the field of services delivery in Italy one can observe how this move is generating a new professionalization of the field that has an impact on the long traditions of catholic charity as much as on the leftist conceptions of bottom up struggles for social rights. The public investment in the field on the one hand transforms social participation into a profession, on the other it reinforces the so-called non-profit sector (Ranci 1999) (Donati & Colozzi 2001). Here as many other western countries the idea of corporate governance and at the increased role of foundations in the social and cultural realm is gradually establishing itself due to the reduction in public spending and the incentives coming from Bruxelles.

However, if one is to find a clear cut difference between Anglo-Saxon and continental European donors’ projects in post-communist Europe the most important difference that he/she can identify is the attention devoted by the latter towards the strengthening of institutions as regulatory bodies (Bruszt & Stark 2003:74) (ESI 2005). Yet, this stronger concern towards institutions does not affect CSP. The widespread rhetoric insistence on the problematic lack of volunteerism in the Albanian civil society is shared with other donors and the voluntary work is not seen in opposition to the increased capacity to fund-raise and professionalise the organisations.

In my fieldwork, the typology of projects financed and the language used by the various western donors in the field did not really differ on these points. Certainly, none of my interlocutors pointed at specific differences between the Dutch, the Scandinavian, the Italian or the Anglo-Saxon agencies of cooperation in this realm. In his speech during an NGO forums organized by the American ORT in 1999, for instance, it was a Dutch representative of SNV who stressed at the need to improve the professionalisation and the formalization of local NGOs.212

Let us rapidly consider the example of the European Union projects devised for all post-communist countries including Albania from 1992 to 2000.213 These were called Phare projects and were divided into Phare-Democracy and Lien-Democracy. The first was devised to spread knowledge about newly acquired democratic institutions and citizens rights within a large public. The second was mainly a matter of training, and seminars addressing local NGOs working with

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213 A second generation of the EU projects for the Balkans was introduced from 2000 to 2006 and was named CARDS. The Cards financing were expected to respond more clearly to the needs identified on the ground. The curious note to add here is that one of my interviewee stressed that term ‘cards’ would not have been the one the Albanians would have introduced as in the Albanian language it is similar to a vulgar term that identifies the penis. Even the acronym used shows that the problem of standardization remained even when the projects were designed having in mind the Balkan region only.
vulnerable groups in society and foresaw in particular the establishment of partnerships (Liens) between local and EU NGOs without addressing the declining provision of social services in the country.

Even though Albania initiated the post-communist transformation in a devastating economic situation, it was treated as any other communist country in the framework of EU projects: to overcome the crisis, the curtailing of the state and of the supposedly generous social welfare was deemed necessary in Washington as well as in Brussels as explained previously.

Regardless of the reality of such Anglo-Saxon model of civil society as opposed to a continental European one, what the western activists that I encountered echoed in their discussions were critical theorists’ analyses of the implications of professionalization of the field. According to this view, NGOs cannot possibly deploy forces to fight against social marginalization. At best, they work for piecemeal improvements with soft-technologies of social innovation. At worse, their work remains totally isolated from local social dynamics (Deacon et al. 1997).

Scholar such as Stubbs (1996) came to define NGO workers in the Balkans as a ‘globalized new professional middle class eager to assert its hegemony in the aid and social welfare market place’ as a result of the foreign penetration of the local job market. Referring to NGOs as a class Stubbs clearly underestimated the volatility of the context. As observed by Sampson (2002) there is a significant degree of insecurity in the CSP realm as donors budget lines are not fixed for all the time.

Indeed, NGO representatives were self-interested in their appreciation of the idea of the ‘third sector’ as salaries in the CSP world are considerably higher than those in the state sector. However, arguing that the vested interest of NGOs in Albania influenced the reforms of social protection implies an overestimation of local NGOs’ role in policy-making. As already stressed above, Albanian NGOs have rarely been able to influence the decision-making process.

One should instead fully appreciate how the idea of expert philanthropy that currently hegemonises transnational relations responded better to the Albanian elites’ understanding of the post-communist changes as compared with the views of critical theorists. Competing foreign approaches to social change were present in Albania, even though the mainstream western donors’ views were hegemonic in the public sphere. This occurred not only due to hegemonic power of the narratives sponsored by governmental donors but also, as I discuss further in the 5th chapter, due the past experience, among the various social actors in the transnational public sphere, the western radical views were the least understood in Albania.
What remain paradoxical, however, is that such expert philanthropy was entirely sponsored by western donors and that it could not stimulate the so-called ‘private social responsibility’ nor emerge as the result of local policy-making. What is more, one could question the nature of these organizations as civil society-oriented, since the difference between them and an ordinary firm was not very clear: an NGO such as Co-Plan did not make profit at the level of the organization but one could argue that it did so at an individual level, considering that the salaries earned allowed its members to have the standard of living of the most privileged in society.

Yet, it is useful the comparison with different context such as that of the former GDR where the western German of philanthropy was transplanted. Here, were state funds have been made available to develop a third sector, the gap with the west in term of volunteers was never filled but in return some scholars noted how local organizations showed a stronger capacity to fund-raise and were more professional than their western counterparts (Anheier 2000). Taking this example one might wonder whether post-communist countries, in catching up with market economy and liberal democracy, assumed from the beginning the more advanced features that the rest of western countries are taking up more gradually.

Moreover, despite the privileges and the social role of NGO workers, the observed outcomes of CSP do not exclude that local NGOs, sooner or later, become agents of social mobilization. This development partially occurred in urban context during the refugee crisis in Albania as I shall describe in the last chapter. Looking at recent development in the Balkans, it seems even more possible that NGOs act as a catalyst for participation. Clearly generating social mobilization against an oppressive regime such as with Otpor in Serbia struggling against Milosevic, or mobilizing people during catastrophes such as that of the Kosovo war, is easier than generating public participation under ordinary circumstances.

But even, in Albania recently Mjaft proved able to mobilize other urban, young, educated dwellers around civic awareness campaigns, most of which organized with the idea entertaining people while spreading the values of civic participation. The public events it organized in some kind of ‘situationist’ fashion encountered to the taste of the Albanian urban youth but one should not be surprised to find out how such globalized organization, in more then one occasion, proved highly reactive around nationalist issues. It would not be surprising to see these young professionals turning later on into populist political actors.

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Otpor was a youth movement constituted by university students. Its leaders were privileged in their society and yet they could size the momentum and became agents of mobilization.

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4.3.4 The deluding transnational space

The assumption on which ODA rests is that foreign aid helps revitalize local economies so that the virtuous circle of growth allows its replacement with locally generated resources. For donors promoting civic innovation in the wider context of aid programs means paving the way for a future in which local authorities will have the chances to extend the localized best practices learned to the whole country.

In Albania the initial severe economic crisis and violent political in-fighting retarded the stabilization.215 Even with the considerable recovery of the Albanian economy in the last few years, though, it was unrealistic to expect that the structural situation of an impoverished country like Albania could ameliorate to such an extent as to replace aid with locally generated resources in so short a period. This well-known problem with development aid affected most of the CSP projects I encountered. If it should not lead to arguing in terms of pre-requisites to democracy following the old modernization paradigm in social science, neither should be neglected.

The political elites of post-communist Albania, have often been uninterested in consistently engaging in public policies and the local NGOs had limited capacity to open public debates and generate a consensus in favour of new welfare investments. If ODA had been of sufficient capacity to respond to social demands and create opportunities for the enjoyment of citizenship rights, donors would become direct interlocutors of the lay people receiving assistance, the latter would relate to external sources of citizenship rights.

In this respect, one should not discard in principle the hypothesis of developing fully fledged transnational social policies. According to Majone (2002) in the EU space social policies played a small role as they are seen as zero sum game policies. Following the scholar, this is due to the fact that in non-homogeneous polities it is almost impossible to pursue redistributive policies with clearly identified winners and losers. In the EU, instead of devising social policies to reduce inequalities among individuals, the choice was made in favour of regional policies reducing disparities among regions. However this distinction is blurred if one looks to the field of specific EU policies since these often do address institutions and actors within a region rather than the whole area.

215 In the last few years, despite the many weakness of the Albanian economy, the growth rate is much sustained and it seems as if the country is significantly improving its economic chances. Political instability instead remains serious.
What one can say looking at the extent of social destitution in Albania is that it could not possibly be remedied by the little donors’ expenditures in the CSP field. In the 90s donors presented the promise of emancipation but their engagement was too limited to integrate a financially bankrupt state and a polity in deep identity crisis. What western donors did provide was the restoration of security when the three crises erupted and in connection to that they gradually pushed for reforms in the welfare sphere. As a consequence donors’ technocracy constituted the main driving force of reforms. It is clear that the lack of knowledge of the local context due to the previous isolation of the country and the deep post-communist restructuring rendered slow even the technical assessment of the recipient’s context.

However, as shown by the anti-political critique, when foreign technocratic know-how replaces local political struggles projects are designed according to the donor’s perception of the context and are largely implemented on the basis of standardized projects of reforms. This is because there is no constituency to which this transnational policy-making is responsive or whose requests are articulated. Here the difference between exporting models and working for transnational public sphere emerges clearly.

Indeed, the strengthening of local NGOs did enrich the local and transnational public sphere of new social actors. One might argue that donors’ learning by doing during the post-communist decade in Albania is to be partially attributed to the strengthening of local actors able to have a dialogue with them in the country.

In this realm, however, one cannot underestimate the role exercised by western narratives in limiting the space for creative innovation by local actors. In this regard, it is useful to recall the success among most of the Albanian NGOs representatives that I encountered of the ideas of self-reliance and state inefficiencies. Commenting on the only form of state assistance to families under the poverty level that remained in Albania, that is to say cash services, Kolpeja expressed her strong criticism: ‘there were about 160,000 families receiving cash services and many other were not considered entitled as they do not fulfil the established criteria and though are in need.’ However, state payment of basic social assistance, such as disability allowances, besides guaranteeing the subsistence of the direct beneficiaries, as noted by Lawson, McGregor and Saltmarshe (1999:11), constituted one of the remaining signs of the state’s presence in peri-urban areas of northern Albania after the 1997 crisis. It is hard to say if cash services really competed for the same

216 In the last chapter I return to this problem of articulation of requests and formation of constituencies in the Albanian public sphere.
resources with other NGO projects in the field due to the amount of donors and projects active in this sphere.

What is sure is that the idea that Albanian NGOs practitioners were convinced that state transfers could not change the situation of the poor and generated passivity while beneficiaries could not be correctly identified, dominated over the last few years. It is evident that such narratives of passivity reflect western debates about welfare free-riders, as much as western assumptions about the functioning of communism regimes.

As stressed in the first chapter, CSP entails more than an export of more advanced social practices into recipient countries: inter-subjective relations take place the transnational public sphere. In this regard it is revealing that over the years I continued collecting references to the importance of western models in CSP policy-making. Let me recall here that the idea of western models has been declined variously as: Western, European, Swidish, etc. A useful example here is that of the many projects financed by the Italian governmental DAS with the idea of reproducing the ‘Italian model’ of social service provision while only a few years later some projects financed by the Italian Regione Emilia-Romagna to support the creation of the so-called ‘social private’ insisted on the idea of promoting the regional model.

In connection to this, western donors, at all levels, continued to avoid confrontation with the debates around declining participation in civic initiatives and professionalization of social engagement in today’s western countries. After all, as mentioned before, the reduced civic participation in the USA was the initial reason for Putnam to study social capital in Italy.

Interestingly, during a seminar organized in Italy (Forlì) by the Regione Emilia-Romagna Ermelinda Zaimi, a young Albanian living in Italy and working in the NGO sector, involved in the training commented: “what is never clear during these seminars is that in Italy the experience in the field of shelter for battered women is at best 15 years old.” Indeed, in some cases, the legislation of donors’ countries that is exported is very recent but results from decades of work on the side of non governmental bodies, as for instance in the above examined case of disability. As Trifiò (1998: 143) commented: “Albania today can benefit of an already elaborated experience. However, the time of adaptation is indispensable”. But even here, the recipient country would benefit from importing a debate, instead of models.

As a matter of fact, in EU countries such as Italy, lately NGOs have been targeted by the transformation of the welfare state and become the cheapest way to provide social services in what
is now called ‘the third sector’. Yet, the increase in the number of associations coincides with the increased financing of public institutions that have to reduce their expenditure in the field of service provision and by making workers more flexible reduce their protection.

Instead the promotion of the third sector in Albania introduces the flexibility of work but provides services that have costs per capita that are higher than public ones. If CSP succeed in devising a new third sector in the country, by forming local actors engaged in the field and by assuring the introduction of new legal provisions, in the medium term the situation could be rebalanced. However, as for the 90s the supposedly subsidiary NGOs reinforced the random service provisions instead of generating competition for quality services.

With the idea of promoting the so-called ‘social businesses’, that is to say the ‘*method of using market forces to generated funds for social empowerment*’, according to the UNICEF web page, some projects were financed to employ “*socially excluded youth providing them with a clear pathway to productivity, self esteem and independence*”. What impressed a journalist of the Financial Times observing one of these programs was that the local NGO looked like a firm established by foreigners to offer services to them. The comment added by the paper echoed some of the denunciations of CSP examined above: ‘*sometimes the entire country looks like an unofficial western colony*’ (Kuper, 2002). That IOs purchase goods through these organizations, at higher prices than the market, should not really be seen as a problem: after all non-profit initiatives can rarely be competitive on the market in western settings as well.\(^\text{217}\) The issue is rather the projects in the field remain too limited and thus leave the vast majority of social demands unattended.

A paradigmatic example of the implication of transnational governance is provided by the Open Society Foundation. Looking at its engagement in the field there is the example of the opening of a school in the shantytown of Breglumasi and the providing equipment of another in downtown Tirana. In the media coverage at its inauguration in the summer 2000 the latter was presented as the school with the most up-to-date technology available and in a high-tech infrastructure. These fortunate, centrally located students were given the chance to access 'western means', even though the average western student does not enjoy the luxury treatment showed by Albanian TV in the case of downtown Tirana. The school financed by Soros in Breglumasi described by a Co-plan publication instead paid the price of being in a marginalized neighbourhood. Thefts and vandalism

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\(^{217}\) What is surprising is that a UN agency, such as the UNICEF, underwrites the idea that one should produce to be considered a citizen. Generally the UN adopts the capacity approach. See Nussbaum (2002) for a discussion on this issue.
soon spoiled the available infrastructures. The latter were anyway not sufficient and shifts became necessary to allow all students in the neighbourhood to attend classes.\textsuperscript{218}

In the meantime the average school in the country, with poor conditions and thousands of students dropping out very early,\textsuperscript{219} is forgotten between the two extremes. Entire sectors of the population have been abandoned by state support and did not have chances to experience the advantages of democratic citizenship in the new democratic state, while CSP deals with the extremes.

No wonder that most of my interlocutors, NGO representatives or not, shared the view that the little that has been done in many fields came from donors' input and look for a foreign project to provide the needed resources. As pointed out, however, the need for state coordination of donors’ projects emerged as fundamental.

Some scholars, arguing against CSP, suggested returning to the state-run and organized service provision. This option advocated in the name of the return to politics as the arena where decision-making takes place acknowledges the fact that if donors’ investment leaves short of its expected results, one cannot be so confident in souvranist solutions.

To start with, there is certainly limited capacity for public spending in countries such as Albania. Second, this poverty of resources has devastating implications for the state-society relation. The idea that working with public institutions leaves long lasting results does not take into account that, just like NGO personnel, public officials have a very high turnover due to the spoil system and the remaining high propensity to migrate. Third, rampant corruption, widespread clientelism, criminalization of economies and the like can rarely find locally devised solutions (Della Porta 1999).

Notwithstanding, one can observe how the cancellation of the social protection in post-communist Europe resulted from IFI indication as much as from the reluctance of Western Europe to engage with its reunification after the cold war and invest resources to keep the so-called “European social model” alive (Vaughan-Whitehead 2003) (Meardi 2006). The EU had a limited role in the sphere of social policies even in the case of the new central European member states.

\textsuperscript{218} Denisa Xhoga & Irena Shabanaj, “In day in the schools on the suburbs of the capital” in Mirela Dalipaj, Social Aspects of Urban Development in the Bathore neighborhood, Kamza Municipality, Tirana, Co-Plan, Tirana, April 2000, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{219} The educational drop-out phenomenon in Albania is alarming. In 2000 some figures referred to a figure of 40% of Albanian students who did not go beyond the first 8 years of compulsory education. Ansa, Bruxelles, 5 decembre 2000, 11:14, “UE: Ancora inadatti i sistemi scolastici di alcuni paesi balcanici candidati”.

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Here, just as in Albania, the reform of the social services was designed under the World Bank’s supervision and followed the safety-net approach, currently applied to every aid recipient in the world (Deacon 2005). It is not reassuring to consider that the experience, in the rest of post-communist countries, has been that this system is more expensive and less efficient than the old universal coverage system ( Vaughan-Whitehead 2003).

As for now, one can say is that CSP’s civic innovations, despite grand declarations, created islands of good practices, normally enjoyed by the privileged social actors involved, and became more a form of window-dressing rather then substantial transnational policy-making. It is useful to recall here the document from the 1997 Donors Conference that admitted how the Ministry of Education in Albania did not have resources or capacities to replicate innovations proposed by donors.  

In addition, one should take into account that it was under tight foreign supervision that the public expenditures in the most important fields within which citizenship rights take up a concrete existence - health, education, and social policies – have been reduced. Consider for instance the perspective offered in the Albania Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Prepared by the Government of Albania in 2000: “spending on health in Albania (2.1 percent of GDP in 1999) is one of the lowest in the region and since 1990 has fallen significantly in real terms. Currently, 30 percent of existing health centers are not functioning due to a variety of reasons. Albania has fewer physicians and nurses than other countries in the region. Large rehabilitation needs still exist for the physical infrastructure. Informal payments for health services which are supposed to be free are a common phenomenon”.

Similarly, the public spending in the field of education has been regularly kept lower than the average of western countries.  

Resources invested in education in Albania in 1997 represented 3.1% of the national budget while in Belgium they were 5.6% of a much richer budget (UNICEF, 1998). Not only that, but the small share of the poor budget is required to cover the need of a country where, according to the UNICEF’s report: “by 1992 only 45 percent of primary and 70 percent of secondary school buildings were functional according to the Institute of Pedagogical Studies. The 1997 crisis brought further damages to the poor school infrastructure.” (1998:77). By poor infrastructure one should understand the possibility of broken windows or no heating, as one can read in the report: “According to the ministry of Education, at primary level stoves are non-

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220  Cfr. par. 3.3 on this point.

221  This is once again in line with the developments in other post-communist countries that devote in general much less of the national budget to the welfare system then an average EU member (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2003).
existent or non-operational in approximately 75% of the classrooms”. Today this is no longer the case in Tirana but conditions remain in many schools in the provinces remain very problematic.

As a matter of fact, Albanians citizens found themselves confronted with unresponsive public institutions, depleted of resources on the one side and with the sporadic foreign funded service provision on the other. As the country does not have the local resources to sustain a welfare state, in order to develop a third sector in Albania much greater investment from foreign agencies would be necessary. After 15 years of CSP in Albania, it is very unlikely that a fully fledged system of basic service provision will be put in place to take care of the colossal social needs identified by the World Bank in its Vulnerability Study (La Cava 1999). There is no sign whatsoever that foreign aid in Albania will provide universal coverage of the basic needs: when foreign funds are available the social services are provided, where this is not the case the need is left unattended.

Rather then colonize or emancipate, CSP benefited the NGO practitioners to whom the transnational policy offered a job market and provided a new social role. In order to overcome the post-communist transformation, Albania had a number of challenges to face and one of them was that of rediscovering the centrality of its public sphere where western models could be adjusted to local circumstances. I discuss this aspect in the next chapter where I analyse further the complex relations with the grassroots that Albanian NGOs entertain in the local and transnational space that they experience.

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Chapter 5: The enlarged social space

The Albanians have entered the third millennium
With a mobile phone in one hand
and a candle in the other\textsuperscript{222}

Having discussed the birth of NGOs in Albania, their reception in the local public sphere and the relationships with donors, the current chapter explores the controversial relationship that they entertain with the grassroots. In this context I discuss further the reason for Albanian elites’ the appreciation for their role of civil society experts, beyond the problem of the ideocratic past previously analysed.

Considering that elites in Albania were confronted with a crisis-ridden process of political democratisation, CSP was welcome as one of the tools to stabilize the country thanks to foreign support. Establishing the equivalence between CSP and normalization, as the anti-political critique does, one risks neglecting the problem of the authoritarian turns; the experience of state collapse and, generally speaking, that of the degeneration of public life during the turbulent process of post-communist transformation in the Balkan country.

Furthermore the chapter looks into the dynamics between the local and the transnational public sphere to account for the NGO-grassroots relations. Indeed Albania urban elites were used to a privileged position and CSP gave them a new social role but one should consider the extent to which social cleavages have been reformulating in the last few years with regained spatial mobility of lay people and with the emergence of new sources of social power in the country. The country dwellers that Albanian elites endeavoured to nationalize throughout the XX century, today generate a strong sense of alienation among NGO elites that experience an enlarged social space with their daily work. I explore in particular how local NGOs remain trapped in between donors’ narrative of backwardness and their own uneasiness towards rural and mountain dwellers.

As I discussed in the previous chapters, the initial reception of the policy was one of enthusiastic appreciation by local elites hegemonising the public sphere. However, the decade long experience

\textsuperscript{222} Popular joke recounted at the turn of the millennium.
with CSP disappointed Albanian NGO representatives who criticized in particular the western standardized approach towards their country. Facing the need of adjusting western models to the local context, local NGO workers proposed themselves as ‘cultural mediators’ between donors and their society. This finding allows me to examine the further the antipolitical critique and debate the epistemological critique to CSP. Interestingly, what my interlocutors in the NGO sector did not take into account is relationship between such standardization and the technocratic approach that they enthusiastically embrace.

I scrutinize in particular the way in which the NGO representatives, adjusting to the post-communist profound transformation and thanks to CSP, carved out a space for themselves in the transnational social space. Their source of social power is foreign but it is spent locally and they have to justify their role. The role of cultural mediators that local NGO representatives carve out for themselves has positive potential. The blind acceptance of western imports is replaced by self-reflexive scrutiny that accompanies the local NGOs growing role in the local public sphere. This difficult but important carving out of space is not unproblematic given the complex relation established with the grassroots and the enlarged social space.

In this context I question the viability of the anti-political critique towards CSP as a straightforwardly disempowering enterprise. As I argue one cannot disentangle this success of technical expertise in the Albanian public sphere and the risk of de-politicising power of the anti-political machine of technocracy, from the fully fledged analysis of the local social context. Albanian NGOs found themselves in an uncomfortable position between neo-traditionalist narratives at home and the foreign reproduction of balkanist stereotypes about their country in the transnational public sphere. Lacking social legitimacy, local NGOs used technocracy to empower themselves in the local and transnational public sphere.

Later on I explore in detail the Kosovo refugee crisis that provided an unusual scenario, that is to say it allowed Albanian elites to rediscover pride towards laypeople and their cultural background. This episode on the one hand provides more elements to discuss the ambivalent relationship that NGO elites entertain with the grassroots; on the other gives me the chance to discuss the dynamics created by the participation of international NGOs to relief operation and ordinary CSP making. The Kosovo crisis leads me to further explore the issue of the transnational civil society making. The exam of the dynamics in the field is carried out by testing the three critiques to CSP in this case.
Finally, analysing the epistemological critique, I stress the circular problem of CSP that identifies the need to have social actors emerge in the public sphere but which, with its hegemony in the recipient social context, pushes local NGOs representatives back and forth between etno-orientalism and etnic-orientalism. What the different denunciations of CSP for its colonising power do not take into account is the difficult process of carving out space for themselves that local NGOs had to carry out in the post-communist transformation. On the one hand, the NGOs role of western instruments of penetration of the local public sphere emerges as widely overestimated due to their limited role in the local public sphere. On the other side, their gradual acquisition of social power can generally be said to have enriched the transnational public sphere and have contributed to the gradual adaptation of CSP to the context.
5.1 The *shoqeria civile* against the degeneration of public life

Albania, due to the experience of isolation under the regime and due to the deep crisis that followed, was particularly receptive of foreign influences, models, narratives of all kind. For years in the country, generally speaking, the opinion of donors had the highest prestige. Indeed those that worked for donors’ organizations generally perceived IOs engagement in the country as positive in many fields, but no one in the Albanian public sphere publicly criticised international organizations for their policies, not even the commonly targeted IFI. International Organisations, and the EU in particular, have been considered by the powerless local public opinion as essential to discipline the political elites as much as to help out in overcoming the problems of the economic transformation.\(^{223}\)

As discussed in the previous chapters, the spread of the idea of civil society in Albania was concomitant with the inception of CSP in the country. When the idea of civil society was interpreted as donors suggest, that is to say, as intermediary groups, there was generalized consent about the fact that there was no civil society in Albania beforehand and that the country required support to revitalize society after the totalitarian experience.

Yet, looking at the way in which the idea of civil society informed the self-understanding in the local public sphere I found another usage of the term that goes beyond the idea of intermediary groups. The newly entered expression of *shoqeria civile* has been commonly applied as well to refer to social order, civility, civic behavior etc.

The deep transformation of state-society relations that occurred during post-communism destabilized the life-world of all Albanians. Most of the interviews that I carried out referred to this aspect in one way or another. For instance, the NGO activist Ledia Dhima defined civil society as ‘*a group of people organized according to the rules, the respect of each other and the moral codes*’ mingling the two meanings of civil society: the donors’ intermediary groups and the recipient’s need for social order.

During my interviews the recurrent theme was the shock resulting from the degeneration of the life in the country. The feeling of insecurity experienced during post-communism led many to think that manufacturing orderly participation was necessary. This need to ‘civilize’ the turbulent society

\(^{223}\) This idea of EU’s disciplining role can be found in other post-communist countries as for instance Bulgaria cfr. Francesco Martino, ‘La Bulgaria tra crisi irachena NATO e UE. Intervista a Svetoslav Terziev’, *Notizie Est*, n.805, 21 maggio 2004, [http://www.notizie-est.com](http://www.notizie-est.com). The same, however, could also be said about Italy.
has been present in the Albanian public sphere and constituted an additional element to explain the positive reception of CSP in the country. Clearly it was mostly donors and NGO representatives who advocated the idea that NGOs could become vehicle of this civility, especially after the disappointing results of CPS during the 90s.

When discussing the need to promote civil society in Albania I asked the question ‘were you uncivil before CSP?’ and generally I was given a negative answer. The concern toward the degeneration of the public life during the last decade was so widespread that it contributed to rehabilitate the communist regime for its ‘civilizing’ efforts in the eyes of many citizens. It was a ‘civilized dictatorship’, argued the public official and the think-tank president Edomond Dragoti, ‘sometimes the regime worked in a good way, in a way of gathering people, of developing communications, giving education, and health care. It happened in a dictatorship and a centralized state where the society was kept closed.’

Such rehabilitation of the past in terms of its ability to generate order not only should be connected with the generally disorienting experience of post-communism, but also it should be placed in the context of the three main crises that ravaged the country. Riots, looting, and revolts characterized political life in Albania during the 90s and reached the peak during the 1997 crisis when, after the state collapse, the country for weeks was in the hands of criminal groups. These phenomena, that received a lot of attention abroad, were highly traumatic for Albanian public opinion in the first place.

Considering Albanian NGOs only as instruments of foreign penetration that have interests at stake in supporting the CSP enterprises - as the first denunciation of CSP analysed above suggests - means neglecting the strong reasons that Albanian elites have to rely on western support: in craving to develop a shoqeria civile following donors’ advice, local NGOs reflect the widespread need to reformulate the rules of the polity in which they live.

One should take into account that on repeated occasions, before and after 1997, strong tensions degenerated in localized episodes of violent conflict. In many cases, I could not identify coherent explanations of these explosions of violence. Let me take the example of a chief of the police who was kidnapped in 2000 in the town Laç after attempting to crack down on supposedly illegal traffics. The special police sent from Tirana to liberate him were accused by the opposition in parliament – with its electoral base in these areas - of intervening, and perpetrating “acts of terrorism” on ordinary people. In the great part of media, instead, what prevailed was the idea that the police’s violence was proportionate to the illegal activities involved. Among the people that I
interviewed, many had no doubt that it was a matter of crime, as border zones in Albania are places where illegal activities prosper.

Certainly, the relation between criminal activities and the new economic forces that emerged in the last few years in connection to the main processes of transformation has been ambivalent. For instance, the construction sector emerged as one of the most profitable economic field and was used for money laundering. Furthermore, the new groups that consolidated in this business used the acquired power in unscrupulous ways, further weakening the rule of law. The capital city, for instance, that used to have the highest green space per capita in Europe due to the urban planning of the regime, became a jungle of new constructions that were systematically regularized by local administrations even when they were built in school yards. Among the people that I got to know, a former school teacher, employed as porter at the premises of one international organization, bitterly advised me to watch the old documentaries produced by the regime to have an idea of how the town looked like before urban speculations spoiled its character.

The illegal activities that spread in the country unrestrained by public control and stimulated by new international opportunities are one aspect to consider but they should not be mixed up with ordinary infringement of laws. While the country underwent radical changes, ordinary people could not rely on a regulatory state capable of enforcing the rule of law and their survival strategies contributed to the growth of a ‘sea of informality’. The booming informal economy in Albania according to Vaught-Whitehead (1990:347) resulted from the restrictive monetary policies that were adopted from the very beginning of transition in Albania that, while generating monetary stability, rendered participation in the formal economy un-viable for most economic actors. What is sure is that such extended informal sector reflected and exacerbated the declining capacity of the state.

Everyone in Albania, including the privileged NGO workers, knew that the health care system was de facto no longer free of charge and that paying doctors and nurses in the state hospitals had become the informal rule (Vian 2004). Similarly, facing corrupted public officials rent-seeking their position at the land and property registers was as well the most common experience for Albanian citizens dealing with the public offices.

In addition, the confrontational post-communist party politics rendered the post-communist transformation particularly difficult. In this respect, it is enough to notice that the last general elections that took place in July 2005 were still plagued by numerous episodes of fraud and that the

224 I take from Böröcz’s (2000) interesting work on informal rules in post-communist countries the expression ‘sea of informality’.
local elections, foreseen for January 2007, were postponed due to the harsh political struggle around their organization.

Many among my interlocutors blamed the political elite for creating a constant climate of insecurity and occupying the public space with their political in-fights. Even leaving aside the major crises episodes, for years it was problematic for people other than the political parties’ supporters to go in the street, as their protests would be taken over by them for other own purposes.

The problem of public participation without violence has certainly been acutely felt in the country. The leader of Mjaft, for instance, explained that their campaigns of civic protest were intended to diffuse a new idea of civilized protest in opposition to the widespread practice of violent revolt and looting. On a number of occasions the NGO itself found its non partisan public campaigns at risk of being taken over by the opposition party when public protests were organized in the streets of Tirana.

Over the last few years, as reported by the Albanian weekly Klan, collective actions have significantly increased. Among them there have been demonstrations organized by local communities to ask for public provision of water, electricity, public work on the sewerage system etc. The experience of powerlessness and arbitrary power was the rule under the communist regime, and has its present ramification in that it is rare that protests result in commitment from public officials to find solutions to the problems raised.

What is new is the possibility to express discontent and for journalists to report about them, while in the past public dissatisfaction could only remain hidden. Yet, this new possibility created further tensions in a country where people were not used to the flows of news on violence as much as corruption, bribery, frauds and the like that deeply contrasted with the old official optimism of the regime’s media (Miglierina 2001).

Although, today’s protests are generally unrelated to CSP, indirectly, the training given to the media by increasing journalists' skills, interests and engagement can be accounted for donors’ contribution to the democratization of the public sphere. This emerged for instance in 2001 in the case I am familiar with when some protests organized in a small village of the Prefecture of Korcia to ask for the reparation of the sewage system came under the limelight of the national media. The

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225 See for instance Koha Jone, 11.08.04, ‘I Kam paragjykuar femrat shqiptare’.

Swiss Radio journalist who prepared a reportage on this case reported to have personally trained some of his colleagues involved in the circulation of this news in Albania (Miglierina 2001).  

What is strongly feared, locally and transnationally, is that these protests may degenerate and tear apart the state, as occurred in 1997. In 2003 for instance the OSCE released an early warning about a potential new outburst of violence in the country. The occasion was provided by the marches in the shantytowns of Tirana when the new dwellers, chanting the slogan “we want to be citizens of Tirana like anyone else”, claimed their right to the property of the land that they have been occupying since the beginning of the 90s. The OSCE document stated: “A confrontational undercurrent is still strong and there continue to be volatile tendencies in Albanian society. The recent demonstrations by squatters in the suburbs of Tirana were close to escalating beyond the control of the police forces and spreading to new locations, revealing that the old way of taking to the streets to demand solutions still exists. Property and other compensation issues frustrate many and the everyday social and economic realities are grim for the majority.’ Violence did not erupt nor was the problem of the property of the land solved. The justification was that the complex legal provision in the field of property rights was under general reform to harmonize it with EU norms.

In this case, the Albanian media were very critical of the document presented by the international organization as they considered the risk of social turmoil misjudged and in any case saw the publication of the early warning as increasing the chances of instability and damaging the image of the country abroad.  

Interestingly, the Albanian NGO Mjaft launched the first “awareness campaign” right before these events, thanks to a considerable CSP investment. In the newsletter the Campaign Director, Erion Veliaj, reproducing the usual western narratives explained that: "People are resigned to a reality they think they cannot change, immune to corruption and tolerant of injustices. The average citizen appears to have signed a ‘certificate of silence’ and given up on trying to seek solutions. This reality should and must change.”

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227 I thank Tomas Miglierina who made available his reportage for the Swiss Radio on this case.


229 The first campaign took place between March and July 2003 while the protests in the shanty towns erupted in June.

If following the mainstream CSP analysis Mjaft referred to a situation of passivity in the country, it was also the case that during the same period of time the most esteemed weekly paper presented the situation in opposite terms: “Toutes les couches de la société, nanties ou démunies, protestent. Des manifestations, parfois mal organisées, rassemblent dans les rues des élèves qui exigent des locaux corrects, des victimes du régime précédent qui demandent réparation, des syndicats qui souhaitent une augmentation des salaires, des retraités qui veulent que leurs pensions soit versées, des résidents qui espèrent que leurs habitations feront l’objet d’une légalisation, et des propriétaires spoliés de leurs biens. Tous s'affrontent aujourd'hui aux forces anti-émeutes de la police, qui n'hésitent pas à jouer de la matraque, même sur des députés qui jouissent pourtant d’une immunité liée à leur fonction!”

Only by looking at the complex relation with foreign donors and the society at large, that I have discussed above, can one understand such discrepancy of interpretations between the NGO and the press or explain the reaction of the latter to the OSCE document. On the one hand Mjaft reproduced the donors’ narratives as they had received the mandate to promote participation following CSP guidelines, on the other the irritated reactions to the foreign early warning confirmed the urgency of Albanian elites to rehabilitate the negative image of the country in the transnational public sphere.

The desire showed by my interlocutors, to be recognized as local civil society experts, results from a combination of local and transnational dynamics and one cannot straightforwardly attribute the anti-political culture of Albanian elites to the western penetration of the country. The soft technologies of social engineering introduced by CSP, that local elites are inclined to learn and implement in their country, seemed to respond to the need to contrast the degeneration of public life in the country.

Indeed this learning process takes place in an enlarged social space and the Albanian elites discover the extent to which their personal identity depends on the country dweller that they have tried to educate throughout the XX century, ad discussed above. Local NGO workers suffer more


232 The problem of image abroad is a constant source of concern. For instance the three main issues listed by Sokol Shameti, responsible for the relationship with media of the NGO Mjaft as troubling the Albanian civil society are: “Uno di questi pilastri è il risveglio dall’apatia dei cittadini, un altro è la riabilitazione del senso della protesta, ma ce ne è anche un terzo che riguarda il miglioramento dell’immagine dell’Albania nel mondo” Sokol Shameti, the person in charge of the communication with the media of the NGO Mjaft: Maraku Indrit 25.03.2005 “Mjaft! ‘BASTA! Il risveglio della società civile albanese’, http://www.osservatoriobalcani.org.
than other people from the external identification with their grassroots as they have been in constant contact with donors and generally the widespread prejudices on their country. They live in a social space that goes beyond the locality: their identities are formed in the local as much as in the transnational social space.

Nonetheless, what emerges is how misplaced has been, in many ways, the hope that local NGOs could contribute to new and less disruptive forms of contentions. CSP does not help to solve the problem of the weakness of intermediary groups as its western models do not fit the local context. The distance that separated the NGOs’ educated urban dweller from the rest of the grassroots constituted a serious obstacle to the encounter.

What is more, these elite organizations could not compete with political parties in mobilizing rural areas and in the newly born shanty towns where thousands of people migrated after leaving the desolate countryside. But let me describe further the complex relation that foreign funded local NGOs entertained with their grassroots in the post-communist transformation.

5.1.1 The internal other

Together with insecurity and corruption, what my interlocutors lamented the most were the consequences of the unrestrained process of urbanization resulting from the depopulation of entire rural and mountain areas of the country since 1991. Tirana before the collapse of the regime had the size of a town of 350,000 inhabitants but doubled in size during the 1990s.\textsuperscript{233} Clearly, local authorities could not control this impetuous to change and new neighbourhoods grew completely unregulated, radically transforming the main urban areas, such as Fier, Elbasan, Lezha, Durrres and the capital.

Traditionally, Albanian urban elites looked at the rural population, even more so that of mountain areas of the north, as their own ‘internal other’. The urban-rural divide in Albania has not been eliminated by the partial economic modernization of the socialist system and the countryside has not been urbanized as in the west. Some scholars argued that in the Balkans it was rather the countryside that ruralised the socialist towns (Allcock 2000; Bougarel 2000; Fuga 2000). Rural culture was deeply shattered by collectivisation in Albania but agriculture remained an important

\textsuperscript{233} In this sense Albania clearly differs from other post-communist countries where internal rural-urban mobility could take place during the post-II world war decades (Sjoberg 1994). In the rest of the region, rather then urbanization, one could assist to the return to the countryside for those that lived in the vicinity of the main urban centres. See Verder (1996) on this point.
component of the national economy. The communist regime transformed social organization in the countryside but the rural-urban cleavage remained under the new circumstances. Moreover, the Albanian communist regime tightly controlled people’s movement and thus that the ratio of people living in the countryside remained the highest in Europe even after the massive migration flows during the 90s.

This cleavage had important political implications in post-communism from the beginning. The capital city and some smaller towns were at the forefront in the struggle against the communist regime, while the countryside was more conservative, as shown by electoral result in the first round of free elections in 1991 when the socialists remained in power thanks to rural voters. While the political expression of the countryside considerably changed in the following years, with the radical transformations that took place, the reasons for the rural-urban divide did not wither away.

Among the people I interviewed the attitude towards the rural population varied from almost total rejection to the grudging recognition of its role in the constitution of the nation. Dhima, referring to rural dwellers that she encountered during her activity explains ‘I was in a village called Zurlik and there is no society there. They are not organized. They are completely sleepy there. They just think of surviving day-by-day and nothing else. They do not have a clue of what is a cinema nor do they think about organizing any social activity, not even pic-nics. They are not even conservatives since they did not prove to themselves whether they are or not’. At the same time Dhima underlined that her own identity depends on the general image that the country has abroad and it is in her personal interest to care for the rest of the population in need since they are the majority and therefore influence external perceptions of the country. In this regard she considered the CSP initiatives as potentially improving her personal as much as the general situation.

Opinions differed from one another according to the aspect considered. While Dhima spoke about old villages where things seemed immobile to the eyes of an urban dweller, Kolpeja noticed the dynamism of those that migrated: ‘Before we were all equally poor but they were forced to stay in the villages. As soon as they were allowed to move they did. Some emigrated abroad and some to urban areas. Their life is better here otherwise they would go back to their villages. A new settlement like Bathore has changed a lot since 1993 (…). Of course there are many problems, particularly with hygiene there, since the area was built without permission but this is a fact now and you cannot send them back home.’

Contrary to Kolpeja’s understanding attitude, internal migration generally has not been well received by old residents who maintain a strong sense of superiority toward the new residents. The
rejection by old dwellers towards newcomers should be contextualised according to the speed, size and context of the transformation which occurred in the main urban areas. Thousands of people moved from the more inhospitable areas where perspectives were very limited. Old urban residents, seeing the transformation as endangering their social space, reacted with a good dose of intolerance to the arrival of their country fellows.

The new city dwellers have remained clearly identifiable in Tirana due to their appearance and behaviour. People going to live in the main urban areas were mostly described as in Ledia Dhima’s words as: ‘not informed about the real rules of the city, the real rules of the society in the city’. The most frequent description of rural dwellers that I collected is that they were used to living faraway from each other in their houses in the mountains and now that they found themselves in urban neighbourhoods where they did not know how to behave and therefore they ‘should be informed about how society is organized’.

In Kolpeja’s description people under communism were equally poor. Even though this observation is partially true in comparison with a western life style, it was not so in local standards. Besides the privileges of the nomenklatura, the simple fact of living in a town was a considerable advantage over the countryside. Every aspect of life was more problematic in the countryside including food provision when agriculture was fully collectivised and served to support the industrial development of the urban areas. Among the punishment that the regime could give to the disobedient comrades at that time was sending them to work to one of the small villages in the country.

After the collapse of the regime and the subsequent profound transformation it was hardly the case that the newly urbanized could find better opportunities than old dwellers. Kolpeja’ analysis reveals the anxieties about finding a new stable source of income as well as a new social role: while she used to be a public employee at the Ministry of Labour, now her privileges in the NGO sector generate insecurity as they depend on unforeseeable western donors’ budget lines and short term project cycles.

In a contest of radical transformation where the privileged position of urban educated elites was endangered by the economic and social transformation discussed in chapter 4, the incentives created by CSP to engage with the grassroots were turned into a confirmation of the need to educate and modernize ordinary people by bringing in western ideas to them. Lamenting the generalised lack of civicness in the country, Dhima considers NGOs initiatives as relevant in spreading new ideas concerning self-organization and the respect of rules as she commented: ‘if at the heart we have...
foreigners, my position is that at the main vein, close to people that come from outside and close to ordinary people here. I bring new mentalities and ideas with blood down to the capillaries.’

Most of the observations on this ‘internal other’ that I gathered among my interlocutors mirrored the challenges produced by the post-communist transformations in the locality but were clearly influenced by western narratives. Mixed interpretations were offered by Mirela Dalipaj in her report for Co-Plan on social aspects of the new settlement of Bathore. Her atypically deep understanding and complex analysis of the social situation of the new urban dwellers combines with passing strong judgments such as: ‘looking only for individual benefit (…) they are not able to improve by themselves their situation.’ That new city dwellers already face numerous challenges and live under very inhospitable conditions is recognized by Dalipaj who knows how the situation looks like in terms of basic security, service provision and working conditions, and yet her report concludes that although state does nothing for them, it is their fault that they remain in a ‘lethargic position’.

Despite the fact that both Albanian and foreign NGO representatives generally describe the new shantytowns as environments where people are passive or anomic, one could argue instead that they have been very dynamic environments where solutions are found without any institutional support. Much of the new informal settlements in Albania could be described using the approach suggested by Bayat (1997) who analyzed the vast array of un-institutionalized and hybrid social activities as forms of social expression of ordinary people in poor social setting.

Since these occur outside so-called civil society and cannot be defined as social movements, they tend to be left out or analyzed in terms of people passive resistance (Scott 1985). On the contrary, Bayat describes this quiet encroachment of ordinary people, such as emigrants, slum dwellers, street vendors, etc. as having a surreptitiously offensive capacity, engendering significant social changes. Widespread desire for a dignified life together with their deep distrust of state institutions, encourages disfranchised people to obtain public goods by transgressing law. In these contexts, bribing officials or exploiting governmental and non governmental organizations becomes a widespread and socially acceptable conduct. Clearly, in the analysis of Bayat, this free-of-charge redistribution of public goods exerts a heavy burden on the state’s resources but unless the state is able to provide those communities with work, protection and public service provision this pattern of interaction is very likely to continue.

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235 Bayat (1997) proposed a very interesting analysis of the informal dynamics taking place in the shanty towns around Teheran and questioned the current use of the term civil society suggesting that it limits the understanding the contexts such as that he takes into exam.
In the transnational space the divide between the modern and the backward, that CSP and the foreign interlocutors establish, local NGO activists attribute to their own “internal other”. For instance, Dalipaj repeatedly considers the difference between new capital dwellers and ‘more modern urban population’ as something that impedes integration (Dalipaj 2000:12). The difference is certainly deep between them as showed by her presence as researcher carrying out the interviews in a context where women instead are constrained at home by their families. Women in Bathore have different life chances then Dalipaj as her research showed and this creates uneasiness on both sides: “Young women suffer from low expectations and fatalism about the likelihood of positive changes in their condition.” (Dalipaj 2000:16).

Dalipaj’s awareness of the hardship that people face in Bathore which is not even policed, when she enumerates the list of priority needs felt by her interviewees, ranging from basic medical care to education facilities, seems to vanish as she commented that: “Services like cinema, theatre, bookshops, libraries, mother and child consultation etc are not selected as a priority, but these form an integral part of building up civil society services and mentality” (Dalipaj 2000:26).

The relationship that local NGO practitioners entertains with donors tended to widen the already existing gap with the beneficiaries such as the new urban dwellers in Bathore. But, on occasion, the enlarged social space that these Albanian elites experienced provided as well opportunities of narrowing such distance. For instance, Besnik Alija, director of Co-Plan, explained how he started his work new shantytowns thanks to a foreign NGO. The Dutch CEBEMO that was working in the area of Bathore and introduced him to the existence of the new settlements that he did not know. Offering a clear example of the elites’ perspective, he commented: “Some of my colleagues either in Tirana or Rotterdam expressed their deep surprise that my final research pertained to such a “vulgar” subject as illegal settlements”.236

Unquestionably, the relationship with their ‘internal other’ produced tensions of different kinds. Even the practice of the massive looting of public assets, profoundly impressed the western idea of the country, was explained to me in repeated occasions as due to the resentment of newly urbanized towards the city that excluded them. The new dwellers of the shanty towns have widely been considered responsible, for instance, of burning down the library and looting the faculty of Agriculture that is located nearby during the 1997 crisis.

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236 These observations can be found in the introduction to his master thesis, presented for the graduation in Rotterdam at the Urban Management Centre, that I was kindly allowed to read.
Regardless of the validity of these accounts, what is clear is that my interlocutors faced numerous troubles in adjusting to the new post-communist context. They fear endangered by the economic and social transformation of post-communist Albania and their role of modernizer is questioned by the democratisation of the local public sphere. Disciplining their folk is no longer possible, educating it has become more difficult with the weakening of the state control and with the explosion of the new popular culture. In this context, Albanian elites appreciated the new social role offered by western donors. CSP was indeed welcome here but, as I discuss in the next paragraph, it was gradually submitted to an interesting critical scrutiny as such foreign sponsored social power can be spent only locally.

5.2 The cultural mediators

In many scholarly analysis, post-communist Europe, and even more so Albania, were vulnerable to what Kennedy (2002) calls a western triumphalism. Yet, by the time I started my field work, that is to say in the summer of 1999, people had acquired a significant experience with foreign aid and critical views started to spread A revealing example of the growing disappointment and detachment from the donors’ narratives in Albania is that of the columnist Mentor Kikia who stressed that the promises of transition to capitalism did not seem to differ from those of transition to communism.237

The fact that the Albanian elites became increasingly critical towards foreign attitudes and ideas did not imply the rejection of western assistance nor of western cultural hegemony. Western prosperity remained the main reference point and even the regional issues mattered only relatively and mainly for security reasons, while the rest of the global phenomena were instead almost neglected by local media. For instance, the problems affecting the so called Albanian diaspora in the region, that is to say ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, did not really become central until the 1999 refugee crisis, as described later.

It was rather a disappointment towards the repeated promises of a ‘Marshall Plan’ and towards the failed expectations of fast improvement. The various narratives appeared in the public sphere to account of the past transformations, the present reality and the future strategies, instead of an outright rejection of foreign expertise put CSP and its approach to the local context under critical scrutiny.

237 The regimes in Eastern Europe used the term “transition” when referring to socialism as a step before the building of the communist society. See Kikia Mentor, Koha Jone, 18 April 2000, (trad it), 'La transizione che non finisce mai', ICS news http://ip21.mir.it/ics/.
To start with, when questioning CSP my interlocutors regularly lamented donors’ standardized policy-making. For instance, according to Misha the reason why CSP results in the artificial creation of organizations was that: ‘it has to do with the way in which the system of western humanitarian intervention works in the Balkans as much as in the third world: it is not thought to face real needs, the reality of the context but it is based on prearranged models.’ Piro Misha provided the clear example of what happened in practice: ‘At the beginning, for instance, we had seminars on the experience of a female judge in New York that were ridiculous because they presented issues that every woman knows here, but they were a way to spend money in project-making in an artificial way coming from an African country to here.’ This observation can be understood considering how indeed CSP resulted from the expansion of activities of many international organizations that moved to post-communist countries coming straight from working in “third world” contexts, as I observed in the first chapter.

If at the beginning of the transition transnational relations generated strong desires to imitate and conform, later on, in response to western donors’ constant reference to western models of civil society, most of my interlocutors argued the need for adjusting foreign models to local circumstances or even for working out their own 'Albanian models'. Most among my interlocutors objected, as did Adrian Dhima of the Institute for Public and Legal Policies, that Albania needed to define a path of transformation that addresses its specific context: ‘Swedish models cannot be implemented here’.

While stressing the specificity of their social context, my interlocutors reacted to repeated experiences of misrecognition produced by the rigid standardization of CSP. Sinan Tafaj, describing his contribution to an international conference on the integration of blind persons in society commented: ‘Various ways to achieve this goal were proposed at the conference and we gave our opinion based on the Albanian experience. But what is important is that we fundamentally recognize ourselves in what Europe and the rest of world has reached in this field. The reference to European experiences was not longer about a total adhesion to the models proposed and what emerged was the desire to have one’s own experience taken into account as well as to be considered as interlocutors.

The idea that local NGOs with their expertise were working to define the best solution for the country was strongly advocated by many of my interlocutors. Yet, regardless of the intentions, local NGOs did indeed remain trapped in between the donors and their public opinion where their

238 See as well the already mentioned case of Genc Ruli (2003).
work was mostly criticized. The Albanian journalist of Voice of America, Ilirian Agolli (in Romano, 2000: 36), for instance, pointed specifically the difficulty of NGOs in relating with their social context, the elitism of many NGOs and their strict adoption of frameworks born in the west observing that these projects and the local NGOs carrying them out ‘are in orbit’ in relation to the reality of their country, far from people’s needs (despite working in their name).

Similarly, Krasniqi stressed how local NGOs worked around issues that were not priorities in the country and provided the example of the campaign in favour of gay marriages conducted in 2003 with seminars, international conferences and publications. Considering the problems that affect the country, commented Krasniqi (2004:70), this was not a local priority but a donors’ idea that local NGOs simply accepted.

Notwithstanding, the Albanian NGOs representatives, that I interviewed, often proposed self-reflexive analysis of their relationship with donors. Ledia Dhima, for instance, observed that initially in Albania there was an uncritical acceptance of any western import and that only later did people start to reconsider the proposed models and adjust them to the local reality. Most of my interlocutors underlined the initial displacement, the naiveté and the excess of expectations. ‘We did not know’ is the refrain of Vilma Kolpeja underlining their inexperience at the beginning of state-society transformations. ‘We had high expectations and a lot of enthusiasm.’ People valued the foreign know-how highly and the need to learn how to manage a different system was strongly felt but there was disorientation in relation to the new opportunities provided.

Considering themselves as experts of civil society, most of my interlocutors viewed donors’ lack of knowledge of the country as a sign that they lack professionalism. They did not articulate critiques which might resemble a critique of anti-politics, quite the opposite. Had western donors been professional, according to my interviewees, they would be informed about the recipient social, economic and political context and they would not have failed in their projects. Misha’s same well argued criticism of CSP did not concern its assumptions on how to transform state-society relations, nor the idea of foreign intervention. Misha’s argument centred, instead, on the idea that donors should know the local context in the first place: ‘There are no magical solutions but in order to intervene it essential to know the mentality, the culture, the reality of the country in question, if one is to address the needs of the country. One cannot introduce formal models that are valid for every place.’

In the effort to make one cultural environment understood, NGOs workers that I met often presented themselves as cultural mediators between donors and their beneficiaries: the role that they
carve out for themselves is that of explaining the complexity of their experience and adapting foreign imports to local circumstances.

While donors show a strong inclination to homogenize their idea of the local context, the local NGOs deemed it important to stress the differences. While donors show a strong inclination to homogenize their idea of the local context, the local NGOs deemed it important to stress the differences. Projects addressing a generalized idea of Albanian youth, for instance, did not distinguish between those living in the new sub-urban settlements of Tirana from those in a small town of south-east Albania. However, the experience of a new dweller of a shantytown could not be compared to that of the fellow villagers who remained in the countryside nor with that of a university student living in Tirana.

Beside the critique toward standardisation and homogenization, another central complain of local NGOs’ representative questioning donors’ approach addressed the frequent representation of Albanians as backward. What was often lamented was that the former ignores the radical transformations that socialism produced. As CSP is informed by the culture of modernization and its linear understanding of development, it reproduces anachronistic accounts of the other. Non-western contexts, highlights Chakrabarty (2001), are in the position of the “not yet”. Donors’ historicist thinking confronted with the heterogeneity of the world, between levels of economic prosperity, locates those that do not conform with them into different historical time. As a result certain societies or groups seem to be living in the past and in due course would move into the present. However, the peasant is neither an archaism nor an anachronism, neither fact nor in theory, stresses Chakrabarty. The ‘modernity at large’ in which mountain dwellers of Albania are integrated is neither a uniform context nor one in which people live diachronically.

The initial success of the CSP in the Albanian public sphere can be interpreted as an example of what Bakic-Hayden (1995) calls ‘nesting orientalism’. As already mentioned in the second chapter, Bakic’s analysis of the relationship between intellectuals from Central and South East Europe of their own societies, notices how the former articulated their critiques to the latter showing displacement and 'complicity' with negative Western portrayals, and their anxieties about belonging to Europe. According to the scholar this behaviour is due to the fact that these are representatives of peripheral societies. As one NGO practitioner, Juliana Hoxha, put it once during an interview: 'it is difficult to be Albanian. Foreigners come along and they do know nothing of our reality they think that we live like in Africa.' In this case, the need for recognition leads to derogatory views towards

239 Struggling against homogenization constitutes an important strategy to counter orientalism/balkanism, see Turner (1994).

240 Let me recall here that I take the expression ‘modernity at large’ from Appadurai (1996). The popular joke that introduces this chapter provides another example of the modernity at large that Albania live. Irony after all is maybe the best strategy of resistance and subversion.
someone else, the African continent in this case. But, as discussed earlier, in their problematic relations with their grassroots, local elites normally despise their internal other.

If the critical scrutiny of the donors view had important potentials, due to the power of western hegemony, there was also the risk of remaining trapped between different forms of ethnocentrism. Nesting-orientalism can be replaced by the ‘ethno-orientalism’ identified by Carrier (1991), that is to say by definitions of the self that are influenced by Western descriptions but that produce an idealized reformulation of indigenous political system or customary tradition. The claims of exceptionality, of the exceeding of epistemological categories, are long lasting features of ethnocentrism in the region.

Nationalism has dominated the regional political scene since the collapse of the socialist system.241 Even in Albania where it did not become a mobilizing force, as discussed later, the reference to the Albanian blood and its superiority has been common in the public sphere.242 In this regard, one should consider that on occasion, my interlocutors presented Albania as such a specific context that a foreign eye cannot capture its fundamental features and I was confronted with responses such as that “you cannot understand as you are not an Albanian”.

Finding examples of both nesting-orientalism and etno-orientalism in the Albanian public sphere is not difficult. According to Carrier (1991) these processes are not unproblematic results of a mechanical and non-political comparison of Them with Us, people find appealing and promulgate different representations according to the perspective, interests, and resources they hold within a society. In exploring this processes Carrier suggests looking at the interrelation of the different narratives paying attention to how a society is linked to the larger world and recognizing the way in which self-conscious traditionalism and active adaptation of western imports coexist (1991:206).

Local NGO representatives, trapped between the donor and their public opinion, and in response to the idea of the western model, generally referred to their specific social context but did not claim its authenticity as the experience of socialist transformation is seen as having radically changed the context and the controversial relation with their “internal other” did not easily allow it.

241 The consequences of violent nationalism in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s are well known but there were other forms of nationalism in the region that were less harmful. In the field of CSP see Saxonberg (2001).

242 Genealogical terms have been central in the self-definition of the Albanian nation, that is to say the nation was conceived historically as the most extended form of the family, gathering together all people with common blood ties. Scholars such as Bianchini (2003) stress the cultural influence of German Romanticism in the shaping of Balkan nationalism. The Albanian blood and its Arian connections are widely referred to in Albania. See for instance the book on nationalism by Kola (2003) who arguing how the problem of ‘great Albania’ is a faked one, nonetheless reproduced all over the book widespread essentialist narratives around the Albanian nation.
Let me then analyse the combination of nesting and ethno-orientalism in a few examples of criticism towards CSP that I encountered in the field. First I discuss the relevance of the idea of becoming cultural mediators, drawing from the examples related with gender issues and family relations. Later I explain in more detail about the relationship that my interlocutors establish with their grassroots when the transnational dynamics impinge upon already existing social cleavages.

5.2.1 The gender relations

Gender issues have been one of the most important aims of the CSP’s projects and consequently women NGOs spread in the country. At the same time, gender relations have been one of the fields in which western narratives encountered particular resistance for their scarce understanding of the past experience and the post-communist transformations.

Like the rest of the socialist regimes, the Albanian one promoted women’s emancipation as a public policy to accompany women entry in the workforce. The national-communism of Enver Hoxha needed women’s participation to its labour intensive modernization process. But contrary to other countries of the block (e.g. Verdery 1994), in Albania participation in the workforce coexisted with pro-natalist policies. Here abortion was forbidden and divorce was highly discouraged.

The post-communist de-industrialization meant that the loss of employment in the public sector was equally distributed between sexes (Vaugham-Withehead, 1996). But where husbands managed to find ways to supporting the family, many women considered early retirement as relief. There are no figures to say how many women wanted to be relieved from bread-winning but one can say that ceasing work was a common phenomenon in the post-communist world during the first few years of transition (Heinen, 1997:580). Clearly, women did not experience the retreat in the private sphere
homogeneously but only once I heard of nostalgia of the ‘emancipation’ under the Albanian socialist regime.²⁴³

The experience of coercion made the western liberal feminist narratives’ idea of work as independence alien to most women in post-communist Europe (Funk 1993; Heinen 1997; Saxonberg 2001; Ramet 1996). In addition, as discussed by Ivekovic and Mostov (2002) describing the re-traditionalisation of Balkan societies, during the 1990s the division of labour in the family was often presented as ‘natural’ in opposition to the communist imposed modernization in the local public spheres.

While Albanian NGOs representatives generally did not share the western feminist perspectives on gender relations, my interlocutors were concerned that the local experience of “emancipation” be understood. Reacting to western narratives around local backwardness, many among my interlocutors stressed ideas such as: “we all worked and had a place in society we are not backward”.

The different experiences between women in the east and in the west, made the reopened dialogue very difficult among women organizations in Europe. The contempt of western INGOs or IOs’ practitioners when hearing, for instance, narratives of women-men solidarity mirrored the irritation on the side of post-communist women towards feminism seen as an alien ideology to them.²⁴⁴ As stressed by the UNPD practitioner Valli Corbanesi, local NGOs in Albania are keen in using the term “female movement” as they want to distinguish themselves from the “feminist movement” and they mostly dealt with daily problems of women in the country: ‘They were exposed to Italian, French, English and American feminist movements and they say that these models do not fit them, they do not recognize themselves in their issues.’

But women NGOs representatives in Albania found themselves with a perspective on gender relations that differed both from western liberal universalism as well as that which they saw as ‘backward’ laywomen in the countryside. In spite of their uncomfortable location in the transnational public sphere, between the donors and the laywomen, Albanian NGO workers invested themselves of the role of cultural mediators between donors and their beneficiaries.

²⁴³ The exception to the rule was represented by the leader of a women NGO in Vlora, who used to work in the army and once interviewed in the documentary Ka Drita realized by the local youth centre, lamented the negative consequence of the transformation as limiting women’s freedom.

²⁴⁴ I faced numerous discussions with Albanian acquaintances debating these issues. Western feminists are easily depicted as a ‘bunch of lesbians’ and western men as dominated by all powerful women loosing their ‘natural authority’ over them. Similar situations are described by Saxonberg (2001) in the case of Czech Republic and Ramet (2005) for the whole region. Ramet argues that generally in post-communist countries contempt for feminism is associated with tolerance of sexual harassment (2005:4).
In particular, local NGOs questioned the compatibility of CSP projects with local dynamics and people’s mentality. According to many of my interlocutors, some of the projects implemented were inadequate, if not dangerous for peasant women. Where life conditions are already hard, it was argued, donors’ projects risk increasing the burden on the same women they wish to help.

This NGOs request to be recognized as mediators was neither necessarily successful - Kolpeja arguing that donors should be careful when promoting women’s rights in rural areas commented: “We are discussing and suggesting being more careful but they do not understand” - nor did it go uncontested with donors themselves. The scarce social rooting of local NGOs legitimated Valli Corbanese, for instance, to question the need for their mediation and she expressed strong criticism towards Tirana’s women NGOs and their desire to hegemonise the countryside. But she admitted that the activities financed by the UNDP in rural areas to empower women produced tension with the local male population.

Indeed, the presence of women’s NGOs partially contributed to enlarging the debates on specific gender topics, reducing the male domination of the public sphere. In some instances women NGO representatives put forward discussion around the reduced chances for women to be active in the public sphere, generally attributed to the widespread unemployment and the decay of public services in post-communism.245

However, overall, local NGOs found themselves in the uncomfortable position in between neo-traditionalist narratives at home and the foreign reproduction of balkanist stereotypes about their social context. When heated debates on the importance of re-traditionalising gender roles emerged in Albania, for instance, women NGOs preferred to withdrew from the public sphere and hide behind project management.

An example that I came across was a long lasting debate during the summer 2000 around the murder of a women by her husband, a police official, allegedly as a result of jealousy. While the heated debates in the media mostly presented neo-traditionalist tones, the donors’ representatives that I encountered displayed open aversion for the climate in the country. During the interview, for instance, the UNICEF foreign project officer that I spoke to harshly condemned Albanians for their attachment to violence and revenge expressing open despise towards them.

Fatos Lubonja, once again one of the few in the media to be in counter tendency, criticized Albanian NGOs for remaining at the margins of such an important debate. Technocracy in these cases, indeed, constituted an anti-political tool but it revealed itself useful to avoid the traps of the

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245 The data reported by Krasniqi (2004:49) show the following representation in parliament: 1996:15%; 1997:7,1%; 2001:5,7%. In the local election in 2003 out of 200 candidates for major no one was woman.
NGO condition. Lacking strong social support, my interlocutors used technocracy to find a location in between the despising donors and the ethno-orientalist public opinion.

Thus, once again, what my interlocutors could really appreciate working in the CSP field of gender promotion were the projects that allowed them to work around concrete issues and spread innovative practices, as for instance those initiatives aimed at facing the booming phenomenon of human trafficking or domestic violence. The late but considerable engagement of donors in these fields allowed the introduction of shelters for battered and trafficked women which met with significant local appreciation.

5.2.2 The family and familism

Another field where discrepancies in views between foreign donors and local NGOs emerged blatantly is that of the family. I mentioned in the previous chapters how there has been a substantial agreement between donors and local NGOs representatives on the fact that people do not participate to support civic issues since they are not accustomed to follow democratic rules and behaviour. This common understanding was lost once donors’ established a relationship between the lack of civil engagement and the attachment to the family. The narrative developed by CSP around familism clashed with the local experience of valorising this private space before and after the communist regime. The different experience here is once again a central aspect to consider when observing the local elites’ irritation towards donors that were seen as endangering the revered tradition of the family.

As mentioned, much of the western scholarly production presents Albanians as people whose trust extends only to their family members (e.g. Martelli 1998, Resta 1997). While in the first part of the XX century the Albanian state failed to impose its power over society, the communist state was able to achieve its dominance over the web-like society and it finally achieved total control over it by means of its despotic power. Thus, what is missing in the accounts on Albanian clannish traditions is the acknowledgement of two generations’ experience with state socialism and its

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246 After all, women were among those that paid the highest price of the turbulent transformation. For analysis of the relationship between poverty and trafficking see: Balkan Report, 23 June 2003, ‘Of Human Bondage, At the root of the problem of human trafficking is the feminisation of poverty http://balkanreport.tol.cz/look/BRR/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=9&NrIssue=1&NrSection=6&NrArticle=9907

247 I apply here Migdal’s definition of web-like society meaning societies where various social organizations led by chiefs, landlords, bosses, rich peasants, clan leaders, strongmen etc. resist state predominance (Migdal, 1988).
implication for family relations. But one cannot neglect the way in which the regime targeted the traditional Albanian family with its modernizing policies aimed at controlling people even within the domestic sphere. Indeed the regime used customary repertoires to control society and for instance it was common that a whole family would be punished when one individual was considered responsible of any anti-socialist crime. However, this intertwining between modernization and traditions cannot hide the radical changes that the former introduced. As Alfred Doja (2000:21) unequivocally put it in his introduction to the study on Albanian traditional family: “L’organisation de la société qui, jusqu’aux années 1930, faisait partie des modes de vie du paysage albanais, inspirant don nombre de récits et de voyage, ne correspond plus à la réalité sociologique de l’Albanie contemporaine”.

Another part of the western literature, that instead blames on the communist experience for the lack of a strong civil society, underlines the fact that, due to repression, for decades people could only rely on face-to-face relationships (e.g. Holland 1998; Schwandner-Sievers 1999b). Undoubtedly, as there was no space under socialism in Albania to develop dissidence and link-up with other movements in the rest of the block, the space of resistance was the private sphere, between friends and above all else within the family. Even more than in other communist countries, in Albania the family became the only arena of genuine social relations and protection from the regime control.

Attributing familism either to the pre-statist tradition or to the communist experience, the foreign observers attributed to it the origins of clientelism and corruption in post-communist Albania. In this line, developing civil society was considered a way to create the antidote to the predominance of ascriptive social ties. The SNV project director, Mr. Johan Te Velde, for instance, during a seminar organized in Tirana by ORT in September 1999 argued that problem of the Albanian society that it ‘functions on personal and informal relation’.

My interlocutors generally regarded the situation in opposite terms to western scholars and donors: the strength of the family has been an important asset before and after 1991 and should not be misinterpreted as producing a-moral familism. In this regard the leader of the Professional and Business Woman Association, Flutura Laknori, for instance, commented that ‘the family is important and does not prevent the emerging of public spirit among the population’.

The 1990s saw the Albanian family endowed with a new role of protection, this time not from party control but from radical post-communist transformations. Sevim Arbana observed: “if we

248 Dissidents theorizing about civil society in Central Europe gave as well positive appreciations to the role of the family in society. Cfr. Falk (2003).

249 Te Velde observed in addition that ‘new collective values’ spread after the breakdown of the regimes ‘did not emerge enough’. See the: ORT Follow-Up Report of the ‘Interaction Forum’, September 16-17, 1999 in Tirana p.5-6.
loose the family we are lost because we do not have a strong government and we do not have security. From the family we have our moral values”

As already mentioned in par.1.4.3, the first World Bank Vulnerability Study for Albania retrieved Banfield’s conceptualisations of “amoral familism” revealing once again the long lasting ethnocentric bias (La Cava 1999). As I have already noticed, familism is not ‘amoral’ per se, but based on another ‘morality’ than Banfield’s protestant ethic and contemporary liberal universalism. It is bizarre to observe that Banfield was very critical to Montenegrano’s people as they did not, among other things, have an enlarged patriarchal family. Today, instead, western donors condemn the enlarged family that Banfield saw as the last remedy for southern Italians in the 50s.

In this regards, Lawson’s study on peri-urban northern Albania highlights the centrality of the extended family but also neighbourhood relations in the local survival strategies (Lawson at al. 1999:10): “Great weight was placed on having good relations with neighbours, who were seen as being important to security and also for assistance of various kinds, particularly house construction and issues of water. Neighbours were a common source of short and occasionally long term loans. (...) cohesion of the village as a community was assisted by the tradition of giving gifts to families on the occasion of a life event. This practice provided a means of sharing emotional experiences as well as providing some practical assistance.”

However, this self-made safety-net system, according to the scholar, leaves behind those that are not able to reciprocate, reinforcing their isolation. Kolpeja, instead, remarking the different social context in the urban and rural areas, stressed how CSP projects in the welfare field introduced in these rural contexts risk ruining the social capital that exists locally: ‘Introducing community centre can work in Tirana but elsewhere they can endanger good traditions. Where communities are strong, neighbours takes care of each other without monetary exchanges, this mentality should not be destroyed. You risk bringing new ideas that imply more money in social services that are not necessary now.

Considering that reform of social services in Albania are still at the level of pilot projects initiated 15 years ago and that they cover only a limited part of the assessed social vulnerability, as described in paragraph 4.3, the modernizing western projects aimed at fighting “familism” do risk endangering the social equilibrium identified.

Indeed, the point is whether one can speak of equilibrium in post-communist Albania. Many among my interlocutors saw the family as threatened today. The same widely appreciated market economy was questioned in that it challenged the family. As Dhima stressed: ‘the business divides family in a way we were not used to and it is dangerous’.
Let us take the case of migration where face-to-face solidarity is fundamental and revealing of the existing social capital and the new role of the extended family. On the one hand, people accomplish migratory projects thanks to the support provided for the great part by family members, especially with regard to money lending to pay for illegal border crossing. On the other, migration shatters families as people experience long periods of separation, not the least due to the undocumented status of the migrant abroad.

The widespread narrative concerning family as a value was often hard to digest for western activists and IO professionals that I encountered. Nicola Mai, who wrote extensively on the issue of youth culture, after having worked in Albania with an Italian NGO expressed in various occasions its uneasiness with this aspect and claimed: “Albania never actually extricated itself completely from values and traditions which are typically of a pre-modern society” to refer to patriarchy in particular (Mai, 2001:96). Showing no particular sympathy towards patriarchy, I have to recall the modernity of patriarchy and the fact that extricating oneself completely from tradition is a modernist view.

One should take into account, that generally speaking the Albanian family has been under strain due to the social, cultural and economic changes of the post-communist decade and that its strenuous defence expressed my interlocutors might be read as the answer to the current situation. The sole institution that seems to represent an uncontested value in the country often fails to provide the protection it used to give and thus it is ethno-orientalised.

As a matter of fact, the family today in Albania constitutes a value but also a constraint, for young generations in particular. Urban Albanian youth mostly push to change family relations and often express needs for individual emancipation from their parents’ control and different morals (Benini 2000). But indeed can find completely different reactions to these conditions and one can find neo-traditionalist trends as well. Albanian youth is probably the most shattered by what Artan Fuga (1998) calls the “fragmentation of the reason” that follows the totalitarian experience considering how it is left along while old generations cannot provide them with the tools to interpret the challenging present context.

The same phenomena of women trafficking can be studied in connection with the need for freedom from patriarchy and for new opportunities in life that thousands of young women sought.

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250 In migration studies it is obvious to consider the power of social networks in achieving the project of migrating. As for what concerns post-communist studies and democratization studies this feature of social capital was not taken into account. Yet, despite the constant efforts of western countries to limit the influx of workers from Albania, about 15% of its citizens have managed to settle abroad since 1990 and their remittances provided a safety net for thousands of families in the country (e.g Melchionda 2003).
before remaining trapped in the trafficking networks. But local NGOs, experience the violent and deep social transformations of their country, had few chances to develop counter narratives to give accounts of phenomena presented in western media as the confirmation of the deviant inclinations of Albanians and to contrast such strong condemnations by foreign public opinions.

My interlocutors, aware of my background, normally highlighted how the phenomenon of women trafficking should not be disassociated from the economic restructuring that pushed many thousands people at the very margins of society. Yet, the shame in front of the world media presenting the ruthlessness of Albanian gangs dealing with human trafficking did not concede much space to argue about struggles for individual emancipation of young Albanian women attracted by the neighbouring western countries.251

Indeed Albanian families have been left alone in coping with their survival during the post-communist transformation. If CSP did little to support public policies in the field of social protection, instead western donors have been active in promoting new family laws, campaigning to raise awareness of children rights etc. as described in the previous chapter.

These results should not underestimated for their contribution in opening the public debates around the new challenges for the private sphere in post-communist Albania, and yet, as shown by the irritated reaction of my interlocutors when discussing family issues, western narratives have been experienced in their ambivalence: their emancipatory potential is reduced due to their propensity to misrecognise local experiences.

5.2.3 Harmonization and difference

I have observed how Albanian institutions have been generally keen to adopt western legal provisions. On occasion, however, this push towards harmonization encountered obstacles in the public sphere at large where voices were raised to defend the local cultural specificity against western interference. One case in point was the discussion on the death penalty suspended in order to enter the Council of Europe in 1995 and then abolished in 2000. Debates infuriated the country, they raged between those arguing in favour of the harmonization of the country to EU provision,

251 See for such interpretation of prostitution see the book by Carla Corso and Ada Trifirò (2003). The latter had a long experience in Albania working for the Italian NGO CRIC. See as well my book review and interview with Trifirò www.osservatoriobalcani.it
and other pointing at the USA as an example of modern western democracy providing legitimate grounds for the maintenance of the provision.\textsuperscript{252} Even the latter, however, explaining the local cultural features that justified the presence of death penalty, mingled ethno-orientalist references to blood feuds, traditional epic poetry, and the folk memories of peasant uprisings, with hostile references to the uncivilized local grassroots.

A common narrative, even among some NGO representatives, was that because of the specific features of the local culture, the death penalty is necessary since if the state does not kill, people will take revenge by themselves.\textsuperscript{253} This was the case with the young, committed NGO worker, Ledia Dhima, who criticized the decision to abolish the death penalty recalling the spectacular and dreadful public execution occurred in the town of Fier in 1992 when the president Berisha authorized the hanging of two brothers who, burgling an apartment, had exterminated an entire family. The execution was transmitted by public television and, in Dhima’s view, this had a deterrent effect on public opinion for a while. The Albanian parliament took the decision to uniform the law to the EU standards but public debates re-emerge regularly when violent crimes attract media attention since public opinion remains overall in favour of the death penalty.\textsuperscript{254}

The way in which the current issues are debated in the public sphere can be explained looking at how the regime shaped popular culture with its national-communist ideology. The violence used by the socialist state by far exceeded pre-statist social regulations and yet it appropriated the customary traditions for this purposes, according to Schwandner-Sievers (1999). One could add, that the Albanian socialism instilled the culture of violence with its constant exaltation of the anti-fascist resistance during the II World War, as observed by Hoepken (1998) in the case of Yugoslavia. While it could be noted that during the 1997 crisis the legacies of the regime emerged in relation to the practical arrangements of the regime: it was central in the dynamics of those months the fact that Enver Hoxha organized the ‘people defence’ and spreaded arms’ depots in different part of the country.\textsuperscript{255}

Once again however the combination of the past and present experiences is necessary to understand why for instance some my interlocutors justified the blatant violation of human rights by

\textsuperscript{252} See for instance the contribution to the debate of the writer today member of the Socialist Party Driterio Agolli who would define the death penalty an archaic institution that Albania no longer requires, Shekulli, 13 December 1999.

\textsuperscript{253} The death penalty was abolished 31 march 2000; in December 1999 the Constitutional Court ruled that the death penalty was incompatible with the constitution. In any case executions had been suspended since 1995 because of its incompatibility with the country's membership in the Council of Europe.


\textsuperscript{255} Similarly Bougarel stress this aspect of the territorial organizations of the Yugoslav army to explain the dynamics of the crisis in the 90s (2002:243).
police officers in the name of crime prosecution. In 2000 a specific case in Elbasan was widely discussed on the media. A head of the police was celebrated as cowboy or sheriff for his success in reducing criminality in the town with violent means after the 1997 crisis. According to Adrian Dhima of the Institute for Public and Legal Policies, a think-tank working in the field of legal harmonization, ‘People in Elbasan can remain out at night without fear, while in most other towns it is still impossible due to the presence of bandits (...) we are not ready for a democratic policy, we need a state first’. In Dhima’s view, the few who publicly criticized the police behaviour, were idealists remote from social and cultural realities’. To explain such strong position for a young NGO representative in charge of supporting the cognitive transfer of the *acquis communautaire*, one needs to consider the experience with the degeneration of public life during the post-communist transformation.

Particularly troubling for NGO elites has been the reappearance of customary traditions, and especially of the practice of the revenge, in northern Albanian during the 90s and its implications for the rest of the country once internal migration was set in motion. This phenomenon attracted a lot of attention of the side of western observers while creating embarrassment among most of my interlocutors. Piro Misha, for instance, stressed how western scholars mostly focus only on 10% of the population where customary traditions are still practiced while neglect the rest of the phenomena taking place.

The resurgence of customary tradition in the northern mountains of the country is generally identified with the Kanun that constitutes one of the written corpus of the customary rules. Albanian elites mostly despise the idea of the return of customary tradition and complain that their memory has been distorted and now they can no longer serve to regulate society. As often stressed by my interlocutors: ‘they now kill women’, something strictly forbidden by the Kanun.

The study conducted by Schwander-Sievers (1999) on the return to pre-statist traditions, strongly cracked down by the communist regime, confirmed how they re-emerged due to the weakness of state apparatuses in post-communism. What people experience today is a hybrid and deformed variant of customary tradition that is easily manipulated by criminal gangs to control parts of the country. Yet, regardless of their distortion, some customary rules proved useful in the problem solving of new phenomena that emerged in the transformation of Albania.\footnote{To provide a useful illustration of the phenomenon, one can consider the case of a car accident that cost the life of a person occurring at the beginning of the 90s. The newly introduced car insurance did not really function well and people found informal ways to solve the issues of reparation and justice. The guilty driver then would go to the funeral of the victim to present the condolences and offer a monetary compensation for the damage provoked to the family. Had the unintentional homicide not behaved this way he and his family would have been in danger of revenge.}
While some of my interlocutors argued about the necessary use of violence to discipline the turbulent “folk”, there has been one interesting example of local NGO working to in the field of reconciliation between families involved in blood feuds. The work done to solve those conflicts that emerged among families in the name of customary rules is an interesting example of looking within one cultural environment to find resources for change.\textsuperscript{257} This local NGO achieved interesting results distancing itself from standardized CSP issues and its models, even though its leader carried out a professional activity and presented himself with the outlook of a professionalised organization, not that of idealist working for the common good.

Once again the idea of expertise serves the NGO representatives to position themselves better in the local and in the transnational public sphere. Their professional outfit provides them with a legitimate ground for their CSP work: with their know-how they provide substance to the foreign projects by mediating between the donors and the grassroots unintelligible to foreign eyes. What local NGOs do not seem to realize is that, just like the donors’ professionalism, their own might turn out to be unprofessional: their expertise and connected privileges risk increasing the distance from laypeople, reducing familiarity and making unlikely any common form of mobilization, as discussed in the paragraph 4.3.3.

### 5.2.4 The interpreters of popular culture in the transnational public sphere

For CSP it is the legacy of the pre-communist and communist past that explained the crisis of the Albanian society rather than the post-communist troubled transformation. The present situation is seen as one where the NGO is a nascent sector that will increase in strength.\textsuperscript{258} Instead, all my interlocutors, that knew from personal experience the hardship of the present and had a clear awareness of its impact on social transformations, considered these troubles as providing important additional explanations for the lack of civic participation today.

However, the influence of the donors’ narrative about civic engagement and the implications for its weakness over the Albanian public sphere was overwhelming. During my field-work the idea of the absence of solidarity or weak social capital plaguing the country was among the most frequent observations. It was not infrequent that the ‘diagnosis’ used to explain many different social

\textsuperscript{257} This is also the interpretation suggested by Sampson (1996).

\textsuperscript{258} On this last point see the conclusions of the report of the World Bank ECSSD Social and Economic Impact of the Kosovar refugees on Albania \url{http://www.worldbank.org/eca/sdisee}
phenomena turned out to be inconsistent with each other or simply not particularly pertinent, as in the case of the shanty towns of Tirana described in paragraph 5.1.

Nano considered the lack of solidarity to explain the fact that people had never protested for concrete issues affecting the quality of their life, such as the lack of electricity, but only engaged in party politics: ‘in ten years of democracy we have never seen protesting because we regularly have shortage of electricity and water, because there is no garbage collection or because the roads are in bad conditions (...) there are no civil protests because people are not able to express solidarity’. This view basically coincides with western mainstream approaches in the 1990s that radically separate civil society from the political society and that consider only some form of mobilization as manifestations of civil society.

The participation through political parties, in this and on other accounts, is simply seen as negative and it does not account for participation, nor reveal a spirit of initiative. Some of my interlocutors even lamented what they considered an exaggerated interest towards politics in local public opinion. I often heard complaints about the newly acquired habit of public debate around politics as symptomatic of the stalemate of the country.

Considering the sequence of dramatic events that the country passed through, one could claim that for most of the last decade people in Albania did not have the time, the energy and, generally speaking, the resources to engage in unpaid voluntary work for the ‘common good’. Civic participation can only begin to emerge in Albania today when the political situation is gradually stabilizing and some people have a regular income. Unsurprisingly such trend concerns urban dwellers mobilized by experts NGOs such as the Mjaft or often simply self mobilized.

Yet, it is important to stress that the frequency and the dimension of public political rallies organized since 1990 show that voluntary participation existed beforehand. Even beside the original political conflict between the leaders of the two main parties Fatos Nano, for the socialist, and Sali Berisha, for the democrats that produced a lot of street protests, new political participation was

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259 Compare Nano’s analysis with that of the well know analyst Fabian Schmidt (1997) who commented: ‘Owing to a lack of tradition of civil society, most people are disinclined to fight for their interests outside the system of political parties and the patronage of those groups. Few are willing to organize themselves at the grass-roots level, to start local political initiatives or to defend their interests against either the government or big businesses. That passive attitude has been instilled by decades of authoritarian or totalitarian rule, during which people were unable to fight for their rights.’ A well informed observer such as Schmidt cannot escape the eurocentric view of post-communist political transformation influencing the local understanding of problems.

260 In my visit to the country in 2005 I verified that a number of protests were organized for ordinary problems such as road reparation in an unprecedented way.

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generated by the conflict internal to the Socialist Party. The protagonists of this in-fight tried to find support at the level of grassroots party cells and traveled around the country to discuss with party members the various political issues. In this respect the socialist party had the advantage to have inherited, from the former Albanian Labour Party, the party cells scattered in every corner of the country but the Democrats did not prove less able to move public participation. Thus, with the declining trust in party politics failing to deliver its promises, the country risks to remain without actors able to channel discontent considering that local NGOs generally have not achieved the necessary social foothold.

During the interviews I commonly challenged with counter examples the CSP-related explanations-assumptions of my interviewees. Among the examples I usually brought up there was the neighbourhood life that is still visible in most Albanian towns and the frequency of grassroots’ involvement in public episodes at different levels. Everybody minds the business of everybody else in the streets of Albania and this implies that you cannot have the smallest problem in the public sphere and avoid a collective interference that can also mean help.

The effect that I normally obtained was the captatio benevolentiae of my interlocutors whose surprise was already revealing. Hardly anyone argued that Albanian social capital was visible where CSP projects would not look for it. No one mentioned that in order make thousands of people migrating abroad against the Schengen wall required some kind of stock of social capital. No one considered the visible social networks at neighbourhood level as element of available ‘stock of social capital’ and when this emerged it was in response to my direct questions.

My interlocutors did all endeavour to explain to me the variety of situations that one could find in the country but in most cases the negative portrayal of their social context prevailed. Even those that referred to local specific cultural features did so mainly in negative terms as shown in the analysis of the debate around the death penalty.

Inter-subjective relations under highly unbalanced power relations become particularly problematic when touching upon issues where the polite, well educated, technocratic side of the west goes hand in hand with the disparaging, populist, xenophobic gazes such as when discussing migration issues. Thus it is especially difficult that Albanian elite described migration as resulting from available or newly created stocks of social capital allowing people to achieve the most necessary goal, even though breaking international rules.
The negative identification of CSP simply added up to the other transnational sources of negative representation of Albanian’s elites cultural background increasing the burden of the present. As discussed above, Western media, and in particular the Italian media, that had been so important at the turn of the 1980s for their ‘democratic contagion’, soon became a source of misrecognition.

While the Italian television described how the Albanian speed-boat drivers (the scafisti) as socially appreciated for their courage and their entrepreneurship that allowed people to cross the Otranto channel, local NGOs representatives could not claim the existence of stocks of social capital to describe the trafficking networks.

According to Misha the mirror effect also had implications the future hopes among elites: ‘for instance in the Foundation where I work people have good salaries and still in the last year 5 people have decided to quit the country and move to Canada. Many more people in the office have asked for a visa to Canada and they do not do it for money but since they miss the confidence in their future.’ It was not only a question of stereotypes, but also about media sensationalism. Under the different critical circumstances Albania faced during the 1990s, western media tended to provide an exaggerated description of the situation and the ‘mirror effect’ described by Misha contributed to spread fear and distress. In this regard, it is not surprising that I was often asked by almost everyone I met to question the negative image presented by Italian television.

As I explained above, the post-communist context was difficult to deal with for ordinary people as much as for elites. When Kolpeja observes that people under communist Albania were all equal and now some former rural dwellers “have houses that are better then mine” or when Frasheri comments that the new rich have never read a book, what emerges is the displacement of the intellectual elites in the new highly fluctuating context.

But for elites, the situation is rendered even more difficult by the fact that they have a direct relation with the external world: the wider the social space that they live reinforces the crisis that they go through. They lived through the devastating consequences of unbridled ideology of modernization and now are all presented as backward. They are ready to recognize that the country have remained ‘behind Europe’ but the state of impoverishment of the country do not justify foreign contempt. The injury done by this depiction as backward is not a problem of individual

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261 An Albanian student during a conference held in Forli in May 2003 where I was invited to speak about the Albanian transition expressed it like this: ‘You reached development before us and you are lucky. But you do not take into account that Albania has always been endeavouring to develop’. Interestingly, on this occasion many Albanian
psychology, it is a question of social relations in the enlarged social space, to use Fraser terminology (Fraser 1998: 25).

Let me provide one example of the reception of foreign descriptions of the local context. I refer to the internationally praised Italian film 'Lamerica', by Gianni Amelio, that continues to jar Albanian public opinion. Paradoxically, the film constituted a rare example of questioning the ‘otherness’ of Albanian migrants in Italy by intertwining the history of the two countries, highlighting the common experience of poverty and migration, recalling the fascist invasion of the country as much as pointing at the predatory behaviour of Italian business in the post-communist context (Iordanova 2000: 64-69).

However, due to the choice of representing Albania in the months following the collapse of the regime, Amelio’s description of the impoverished country was perceived as insulting in the neighbouring public sphere. Vehbiu and Devole (1996), in their analysis of the film, describe the polemics around it that emerged in the country. These discussions culminated around the harsh criticism of the main Albanian writer, Ismail Kadare, who considered the film deeply offensive to Albania and Albanians in that it described the country as remote and barbaric therefore unworthy of attention. The polemics around the film re-emerged on the occasion of the 2000 film festival, the first organized in the country after a decade. The committee that decided on invitees agreed that Amelio should not be invited, the media reported the debate and the overall impression it gave is that many people in the country approved of the decision taken.

In his book examining the experience with the film and its reception in Albania, Amelio explains how he realized later the extent to which, contrary to his intentions to problematise the Italian gaze of Albania, it represented a new ‘invasion of Albania’ (Amelio 1994). Once again the terminological choice is connected with that of the colonial domination, stressing the fundamental role of power relations in the sphere of identity relations that Amelio recognizes.

The fragility of the local public sphere that Albanians experienced in the course of their post-communist decade has been reduced in the last few years. It is no longer the case that Italian media emigrants in the room complained that my description of the 1990s was too gloomy, pointing that there are many aspects in which the country has improved.

262 Amelio (1994) observed that he came realized later how unwittingly the chances for Albanians to wash their dirty laundry in the privacy of their own home had been reduced by his film. His book narrates interesting episodes of Albanian authorities engaged in ameliorating the outlook of the settings where he was about to shot the film such as when a train that he wanted to show filled with destitute people ready to escape the country was renovated. In the book that collects the script of the film and the story of its realization, there are various points at which the topic emerges. Among others, a quotation of Amelio is particularly powerful in describing the hatred the young students of Tirana showed him when they had to play the refugees on the set in the bay of Dursit (Amelio 1994): ‘Mi odiavano, come se imponessi loro di guardare da vicino una fotografia che tentavano, ad ogni costo, di cancellare dalla memoria’.
thoroughly replace local one in people’s daily life. Now that the situation has improved information from abroad is mediated by local media, as everywhere else.

The paradox of the Albanian public sphere of the post-communist decade was that it could be clearly larger and smaller that that of the nation-state. Beside the donors direct interference in the country, the example of the foreign media show the strong interconnectedness of the debate on the main issues troubling the country. For their part, the Albanian citizens that emigrated abroad, generally have been following the developments in the country thanks to the new technological means at disposal. At the same time, considerable portions of the Albanian citizenry living in the countryside have only been reached by electronic media, national and foreign, but could not buy the local newspapers as they were not distributed where they live. What is more, the Albanian countryside has been long neglected by CSP as well as by local politics during the whole post-communist decade.

The enlarged social space in which identities are shaped is no longer only a prerogative of elites nor of CSP elites in particular. In this regards, it is not surprising to notice that Albanian migrants have been, together with NGO representatives, the most concerned with their negative identification abroad (Chiodi & Devole 2005). Both of them have been particularly exposed to the social interactions in the transnational arenas, but the latter are important for the whole of Albanian public opinion, as shown for instance the relevance given to the beatification of Mother Teresa of Calcutta in Rome, who was born in Skopje of an Albanian mother. In general Albanians who have success abroad constitute important confirmation of the collective worth at home. 263

Albanian elites have lost the possibility to ‘legislate’ social dynamics from above, and to use Bauman’s expression (1987) they have become ‘interpreters’ of popular culture. The asymmetry of power necessary to perform the role of legislator in charge of shaping human conduct (1987:48) is no longer possible under current conditions. In addition, for the Albanian NGO workers the role of interpreters moved into the transnational space due to their position in the aid-recipient country.

What I am discussing here is the ‘local civilizing process’ and the fact that it takes place in direct confrontation with that of the other, as discussed in paragraph 1.4. CSP is just one of the arenas of communication that exist. However, “building and stabilizing selves capable of interacting with each other in an orderly and productive way, thus producing vital and stable communities” was

http://www.osservatoriobalcani.org/article/articletype/2318/1/41/
difficult in almost all of them for post-communist Albania confronting the hegemonic west. In this respect CSP made things worse as it often increased the feeling of inadequacy without providing the means for local NGOs to work to change fundamentally the situation, as it has been argued so far.

Let me explore in detail, the Kosovo refugee crisis that in this respect provides an interesting example of the relationship between enlarged social space that Albanian NGOs experienced in their crisis ridden post-communist transformation and it constituted a positive exception for the NGO-grassroots relation.

### 5.3 The relationship with grassroots during Kosovo refugee crisis

That political instability, with its corollary of refugee waves, had a role in triggering western aid to Albania is evident. I mentioned from the very beginning in chapter 3 how CSP in Albania mingled with emergency aid. The Kosovo refugee crisis clearly constitutes the episode that that generated the most significant international support. On this occasion, the reference to civil society –nationally and transnationally - reached one of its peaks and contributed to increase the CSP resource flow to the country even after the crisis was solved.

My contention is that, due to its unusual character, this case is particularly interesting if one is to analyze the relationship between local NGOs and the grassroots, taking into account the role of the transnational space. The crisis constitutes an exception for what concerns the local NGOs relationship with the grassroots: for once, these Albanian elites showed pride towards laypeople and their own cultural background in the transnational arena instead of the shame or fear that they generally demonstrated. Seen from Albania, the Kosovo refugee crisis was a glorious parenthesis in the turbulent post-communist decade in which disorientation for the speed of transformation dominated.

The post-Kosovo refugee crisis was also the context in which I carried out part of my field work: I arrived in Albania in the Summer 1999 a few days after the greatest majority of the refugees from Kosovo had just left the country and I found out that a period of intense social mobilization and mass participation to face the crisis was closing. When I started my first round of interviews the crisis debate-effect-shock was still very strong. Enthusiasm about the collective experience lived was still palpable everywhere. I was then caught in gathering narratives of what went on there.

264 As soon as the NATO bombing ended, and Serbian military and paramilitary forces had left, almost all refugees returned back home.
during that period of time at societal level. I therefore focused this phase of the field-work on the impact of the refugee crisis on the Albanian society and examined the role of local NGOs in this context.

Let me recall some data useful to understand the dimension of the crisis in Albania. As of 9 June 1999, the government of Albania estimated that there were 480,000 Kosovon refugees in Albania, signalling an increase of 17% of population in the country. About 300,000 were hosted by Albanian families, 83,000 were lodged in tented camps and 95,000 lived in collective centers throughout the country, with a greater concentration in some areas, including Kukes, Tirana and Durres.265

Given that the refugee crisis occurred only two years after the state-society collapse of 1997, it initially gave raise to widespread anxiety with regard to a possible new social breakdown in the country (ICG 1999b). Groups of bandits were still active during the months that preceded the refugee flow and returned active right after but, during the spring of 1999, the security situation of the country was unexpectedly good. Clearly there was no dissent in Albania over NATO’s war against the rump-Yugoslavia in 1999 and even the fierce internal political struggle in Tirana found a period of truce during the months of war to start again right after the crisis was over.266 All in all, the evolution of the crisis was smooth and reverberated positively even Albanian public opinion in general.

What allowed the overcoming of the crisis was the logistic support to manage the emergency operations provided by foreign donors to the fragile local institutions together with the Albanian grassroots positive reaction to the crisis. That is to say, carrying out emergency operations was considerably facilitated by the fact that sixty percent of the Kosovo refugees were hosted in private houses by the local population.

Local NGOs for their part had a limited involvement in the relief activities and a marginal impact on the overall situation. Nonetheless, if examined in the context of the experience up to that moment, the crisis had a boost effect on local NGOs and the common opinion among donors was that they performed a significant role locally.267

265 Ministry of Information. Republic of Albania, Kosova Crisis, CD-ROM, 30.07.1999. Let me note here that I could rely on official data on electronic support as donors sponsored it. The need to report on emergency operation explains the result. Had it not been for this foreign implication there would not have been such information available.


Somehow, the 1999 crisis constituted a puzzle for CSP and much of the academic literature on Albanian society and should be analyzed for what it reveals of the post-communist Albanian society and on the role local NGOs there. As discussed above, most western narratives on the Albanian grassroots stress how they are organized around communities where trust in extra-communal ties is weak and people is organized around fragmentary interest groups along lines of personal affiliation. These features have been considered the dominant cultural feature hampering the emergence of a fully-fledged civil society (e.g. Resta 1996:55-82; 1997; 1999; Del Re 1997).

As discussed above Albanian elites generally accept western analysis of their grassroots but try to distance themselves from the latter. Thus, first of all I inquired to see if the traditional elite-grassroots divide hold in their analysis of the crisis. Taking the move from the reaction to the crisis, in the second instance, I questioned the ready-made analysis on the group-based trust-solidarity or clannish culture of the Albanian grassroots by asking to my interlocutors to explain how it was possible that thousands of refugees from Kosovo could be hosted in private houses.

There was a limited possibility of data gathering on the direct involvement of NGOs because of the variety of untracked financial sources made available to them by small foreign donors and the chaotic circumstances of the three-months crisis. However, it was common knowledge that local NGOs were active all over the country, mainly in refugee camps and collective centres. The refugee shelters located in the main towns were clearly the places in which NGOs were more visible while refugees hosted in remote centres (with the exception of Kukes's region, in the north of the country, where all humanitarian agencies were present) were less assisted by local NGOs since they were more difficult and expensive to reach.

Having said that, let me stress that Albanian NGOs had never been as active as during this crisis. My interviewees stressed that NGOs saw for the first time the potential for gathering volunteers when performing their activities. It emerged that particularly urban youth showed an inclination to participate on a voluntary basis in NGO activities; that women’s organizations were also well prepared to call for some sort of contribution, financial or in kind, from their members and acquaintances; that human rights groups were very active in gathering testimonies of war crimes that Albanians from Kosovo had lived during the conflict. The only exception was constituted by environmental NGOs since major donors considered their mandate less relevant in the context of the crisis and rather marginalized them in the field.268 When the humanitarian machine was not ready yet to provide the first help, local NGOs, and especially women NGOs, activated in

268 See the ORT Interaction Forum document; Tirana the 16-17 September 1999.
collecting food, clothes and medicines among the population and in distributing them in the collective centres where refugees were flowing.

It emerged clearly that beforehand Albanian NGOs had problems in motivating their members while the refugee crisis showed the potential and the advantages of participation. A frequent remark made by interviewees was that the quality of work carried on by their members was different during those weeks since the motivation was high and the emotional engagement substantially improved the results. The availability of organizations capable of channelling energies was crucial to direct involvement of part of the highly educated urban dwellers; on the other side the rest of the population participated directly even though in an unorganized way.

Even during the crisis the complex relations between local NGOs, public authorities and international organizations were relevant. A clear reciprocal distrust and competition for donors' resources dominated. For instance, Miranda Gace affirmed that "the institutions were not transparent during the crisis in using the money." Gramosh Dudushi made it even more drastic: "So far in our work we kept distant from the Albanian institutions while close with donors right to avoid any problem like this but once the work we do expand then there is no way to avoid it. But the problem of racket was a constant: local authorities were asking for money as well."

In relations with the coordination bodies established under donors’ supervision, such as the Emergency Management Group (EMG), instead, a problem that emerged was instead that only one umbrella NGO was selected to sit at the coordination table. Thus, this EMG choice produced strong complaints from the NGO community as the chosen umbrella organization did not represent them all.

Having said that, all my interlocutors stressed how the activities undertaken during the crisis gave local NGOs the chance to learn new skills. Some interviewees underlined the improvement of their financial and managerial aspects; Vjollca Meçaj focused on new ideas and new strategies they could adopt; Gjergj Trola stressed the importance of learning how to work under pressure; Tatjana Daci considered significant the team experience acquired. Most of all, they all agree on the fact that, thanks to the work they carried on, NGOs strengthen their position in the Albanian society.

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269 The EMG was a committee established by the Council of Ministers to coordinate the relief efforts during the crisis. It was headed by a former Deputy Prime Minister and staffed by key ministries, UNHCR, WFP, WHO and other relief organizations. It was a focal point and a mechanism for coordination for the Government of Albania and the foreign agencies. It played a role of coordination during the months after the end of the crisis in the field of rehabilitation.

270 The Forum was the first umbrella NGO to be born in Albania thanks to foreign funds but there were seven other umbrella NGOs organizations in the country according to Bortini (1999).
The significant increase in NGOs activities during the crisis, according to the interviewees, gave them the opportunity to gain reputation for the work that they carried out, to get closer to their potential beneficiaries inside their own country, and identify the target groups more effectively. The chance to gain trust among Albanian households was seen by NGOs representatives as closely connected with the possibility to offer services to the people. As a consequence, Sevim Arbana and Diana Culi representatives of women NGOs, underlined how in the post-crisis period they lacked the resources to address the need of the local population they had entered in contact with during those months.

As already discussed, the professional identification of local NGOs goes together with the aspiration to make a difference. As the refugee crisis put them closer to non urban contexts where social conditions were much worse then those they were accustomed to, their need for necessary resources also increased.

What is even more interesting, in my view, is that for once during the crisis the shame towards the ‘uncivilized internal other’ turned into the source of pride and positive self-identification. My interlocutors were well aware of their limited role during the historical moment as compared their society at large. They did not try to hide that they had remained at the margins but with enthusiasm pointed at their own rediscovery of their cultural background.

Such collective enthusiasm that I found after the devastating catastrophe drove me to inquire on its reasons, beyond easy shortcuts around Albanian nationalism. The conflict in Kosovo had been going on for years and no particular sign of popular participation to the destiny of the fellow Albanians had emerged up to the refugee crisis. Even in 1999, the Albanians ‘limited’ themselves to hosting refugees but there was no popular mobilization in the country to participate in a ‘war of national liberation’, neither among elites, nor among ordinary people.

When interviewing my interlocutors two main explanatory factors emerged which account for the societal reaction to such crisis and its implication: the awakening of the ethno-national feeling; and the strength of the customary tradition of hospitality.

A few preliminary remarks are necessary to preface the narratives around the refugee crisis that dominated the Albanian public sphere. The Kosovo Albanians are part of the Albanian ethnic group but had remained cut off the borders of the nation-state as defined in London in 1912 and incorporated in Yugoslavia. In 1999 the long lasting conflict between the ethnic minority and the Yugoslav authorities was internationalized by the NATO military involvement in the crisis. This

271 Other Albanian minorities were included in Yugoslavia but the Republics of Montenegro and Macedonia. The last group constituted the Albanian population in the region became Greek citizens.
could be seen as a concrete historical chance to redefine the Albanian “national question”, that is to say the problem of reuniting all the Albanians of the Balkans within the same nation-state (e.g. Malcom 1998).

During the XX century, Tirana was never in the position of endeavouring to redraw its border, with the exception of the few months experience of Great Albania during the Second World Ward during Nazi-Fascist occupation of the region. However, the ‘Albanian national question’ had remained an underlining topic of the political history of the country (Academy of Science of Albania 1998; Vickers 1997; Cabanes & Cabanes 1998; Spano 1998).

During the 1999 war, western control over the country had a role to play in disciplining local political elites. The debates in Albania during the Kosovo’s war were only about the different vision over the future of the relations between Albania and Kosovo while no open political reference to the construction of “Great Albania” was made. 272

My interlocutors chorally presented the conflict in Kosovo and the human catastrophe of the refugee as a persecution that Albanians faced the name of their ethnic belonging. Attachment to the nation was presented as a fundamental element to explain the reaction to the crisis as what was seen at stake in the spring 1999 was the survival of the part of their ethnic keens. As Adem Tamo put it, for weeks Albanians lived a moment of “national euphoria” and rediscovering the pride for one’s national identity reduced the dividing lines between elites and laypeople.

Introducing a note of caution to respond to widespread western fears of explosion of aggressive nationalism, many among my interlocutors evocated one of the most important national myth in the country, that is to say the Albanians traditionally show a defensive social cohesion or nationalism that emerges against external threats, but otherwise remains dormant (Schwander-Sievers & Fischer 2002).

In this regards, it should also be underlined that the relations between the Albanians and the Kosovo Albanians at the end of the decade were not such as to necessarily lead to a welcoming attitude of the biblical flow of refugees on the part of the local population. In the previous years the Albanians of Albania had not been substantially involved in the political developments in Kosovo.

272 On the political divide of the Albanian elites and their confrontational attitude and their possible consequence at regional level see among others: Nazi Fron (1999), ‘Un nouveau round du combat politique albanais à l’ancienne est sur le point de commencer’, Institute for War & Peace Reporting Rapport sur la crise des Balkans, N° 83, 12 octobre, http://www.iwpr.net/. It should be noted that at the political level the relations between the political elites of Kosovo and Albania were not smooth. The support that Sali Berisha gave to Ibrahim Rugova and on the other side the cooperation between the Albanian Socialist and the Albanian Liberation Army (KLA) led by Hasim Thaci created a tough dividing line. Rugova refused to meet Albanian government representatives during the whole year and did not publicly acknowledge the efforts of Tirana to host the half a million refugees.
despite their gravity since they were facing at the same time the hardship of their own situation. At a higher political level there were always references to the nation and its diaspora in the region but the century long separation between the Kosovo Albanians and the Albanians and their different political experiences had also created a gap between them. Family links were drastically interrupted for half a century, there were few economic relations and mutual misperception had grown.

Moreover, the 90s, instead of developing positive relationships, had brought frustrations among Albanians in the motherland that had discovered their dramatic economic situation even comparing to the unfortunate and politically repressed Kosovars. Moreover, a few of the latter, who had some capital to invest and had come to Albania after 1991, were accused of speculation over their poverty as few in the country had similar opportunities (ICG 1998). On the other side, the Kosovars, who had the chance to visit Albania during the transition, were very much disappointed with the general situation of their motherland and, particularly after 1997, had given up hopes for help with their political problems from this source.

Finally, during the 1997 crisis in Albania a north-south confrontation had emerged with the northerner supporting the government in power and the southerner revolting against it. On this occasion, the Kosovo Ghegs were on the side of the northern Albanians with whom they share a dialect and the attachment to traditions.\(^{273}\) Therefore, when the refugees were deployed all over the country there were anxieties of possible tensions with the local Tosk population of the southern regions of Albania.

During the year that preceded the NATO intervention, around 20,000 refugees had already fled from Kosovo to northern Albania. In that context the local population did not hide their irritation at seeing international aid coming in their remote region for the first time to help refugees while they had been facing the difficulties of transition all alone that far (ICG, 1998). However, the dimension and the nature of the crisis in 1999 clearly took over the dividing elements.

The second factor, that all identified to account for the phenomenon of hosting refugees in private houses, was strongly connected with the first. The interviewees, while underlining the relevance of the resurgence of national identity to explain the hospitable behavior, all stressed with pride that the population tackled the refugee crisis in a constructive way thanks to the Albanian

\(^{273}\) Gheg and Tosk are two variants of the Albanian spoken respectively in the north and in Kosovo (the gheg) and in the south (the tosk). See on this issue Raxhimi Altin, (1999), “Les freres sont devenus de lointains cousins”, AIM (Alternativna informativna mreža), 17 septembere, http://www.aimpress.org.
customary tradition of hospitality.\textsuperscript{274} Ermal Iljriani, for instance, during the interview narrated the traditional saying: ‘the house of an Albanian is of God and of the Guest and not of its owner’.

As already explained, generally speaking, the communist regime cracked down on old customs, and especially on power of the patriarchal family, but with its nationalist rhetoric upheld some traditions, among which featured hospitality. The political changes of the 1990s created a widespread perception among the interviewed that the moral system on which society had based for the centuries disappeared together with the rule of law during the transitions. As Tatjana Daci put it: ‘\textit{We have been ruined by this transition}.’\textsuperscript{275} With great and widespread satisfaction all my interlocutors underlined how during the crisis they rediscovered that some features of their ‘national characters' were still alive. Some of them stressed the historical continuity with World War II experience when Albanians on different occasions sheltered Italians, Greeks and Jewish in trouble.\textsuperscript{276}

The pride showed for the event of spring 1999 should be seen as linked with the misrecognition experienced in the transnational public sphere during the 90s. During the interview Ermal Iljriani synthesized this point by saying: “\textit{During the recent years we Albanians ended up identifying ourselves with our wrong side and we were ashamed of our own traditions}.”

This resurgence of positive cultural features was underlined with pride even when defined as the fruit of the ‘backwardness’ of the Albanian mentality. For instance Elsa Ballauri commented: “\textit{Hospitality is stronger in primitive societies like this, rather than in the west}”; while Genci Mucollari observed that: “\textit{this kind of things can still happen in Albanian while do not occur any more in the West}”.\textsuperscript{277} Some suggested, with Piro Misha, that a country where civil society institutions are stronger would not have reacted the same way: ‘\textit{This is not yet an egoist modern society, it is only a disoriented one}’.

Reversing the usual dispise of the grassroots’ backwardness, this time NGOs the elites demonstrated pride towards their cultural milieu and they associated themselves to the hospitable

\textsuperscript{274} All the bodies of customary norms traditionally regulating the life of Albanian communities in the centuries foresaw particular rules for the treatment of guests. According to the anthropologist Schwander Sievers’ explanation, the guest in the Albanian tradition is a “potentially threatening foreigner” who - through a ritual of incorporation - becomes part of the family: “caring for”, “honoring,” “protecting” and “controlling” of the guest seem to be one and the same thing. The guest is under protection of the house and challenges its honor, and, ultimately, life of the family, if anything happens to him. See Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers (1999b).

\textsuperscript{275} Similarly Ermal Iljriani commented: ‘\textit{We were afraid of having been totally transformed by the transition}.’ Etc… This view does not refer to the resurgence of customary practices in the northern mountains of the country that instead is seen by most of the Albanian educated elites as a sign of the state weakness and to the return to backward practices as explained above.

\textsuperscript{276} On the protection of the Jewish during War World II see: Kotani (1994). They referred to it during the interview Diana Culi; Arbjan Mazniku; Ornela Abazi; Linda Spahia; Ermal Iljriani; Elidon Lamahi.

\textsuperscript{277} In a similar fashion argued Kristo Frasheri; Elsa Ballauri; Viollca Mecai.
laypeople. Elidon Lamahi stressed: ‘Before 1990 we had a strong sense of community but the worsening of the economic situation and the lack of security made things difficult’. However, as modernization was conceived as inevitable path, my many among interlocutors bitterly commented on how the good Albanian traditions were doomed to disappear with the fast paths of changes in the society.

The '99 crisis allowed even for a partial reformulation the poverty that had thusfar lived as shameful. That lay Albanians are accustomed to extended family life, lack of privacy and poverty was underlined by some interviewees as an important element to account for the generous hospitality. An Albanian proverb ‘share your poverty but not your wealth’, was quoted by national papers and was often mentioned during the interview to explain the reaction of the Albanians towards refugees.278 Some described themselves as people who knew what suffering means and therefore were sensitive towards the Albanians from Kosovo.

Yet, as mentioned, the two peoples never experienced life under a common nation-state and the different historical trajectories emerged as divisive during the encountered generated by the crisis. When I asked if conflicts had emerged between hosting families and refugees, I received a unanimous negative answer. Clearly when refugees arrived three months earlier no one could predict how long they would remain but only Fatos Lubonja observed how the fact that the crisis did not last long was as an important reason for the absence of serious tensions between guests and hosts.

Nonetheless, as everyone reported, regardless of the hospitality received, the Kosovars underlined the poor living standards of their hosts. Albanians were humiliated by many observations made by their guests about the low level of infrastructures, their housing condition, and often balanced these negative appreciations with the claim to be better off in terms of education and even moral values.279

The mechanism behind this hospitality of common people was not described by my interlocutors as a sign of public participation. Yet, Artan Hohxa and Gjergj Trola observed that there were also cases of informal organizations at micro level to coordinate the assistance to hosted refugee families among neighbours. In connection to this, Viollca Mecai, Ermal Iljriani and Tatjana

279 This came out clearly from the interviews carried out by a team of researchers of the World Bank during the month of the crisis. See the report: ECSSD, Social and Economic impact of the Kosovar refugees crisis on Albania http://www.worldbank.org/eca/sdisce
Daci underlined one aspect that they few would be ready to acknowledge the year later, that is to say that generally speaking in the country neighbourhood cooperation still holds.

Now, instead, they were ready to explain how his face-to-face solidarity had suffered during the process of transition and was rediscovered during the crisis. When asked how to reproduce such a social reaction to benefit the life of the country under ordinary circumstances the answer was that it is impossible because this collective behaviour emerges only under dramatic circumstances.

According to official sources and widespread public perception, the level of criminality in the country diminished during the crisis.\textsuperscript{280} According to Linda Spahia the decrease of the crime rate during the months of crisis correlated to the widespread involvement in the crisis of the entire population while only Remzi Lani, among my interlocutors, underlined the impact of the NATO forces deployed in the country in discouraging criminal activities.\textsuperscript{281} The political truce during the crisis was highly appreciated but none of the respondents indicated that citizens developed better trust in their institutions as a result. As a matter of fact, the political fights re-emerged as soon as the situation calmed and two main political parties came back to old patterns of confrontation.

What is more, few weeks after the departure of the refugees, none of the respondents considered the possibility of a new lasting sense of self-esteem among the Albanians. Artan Hohxa synthesized this idea as: ‘This new feeling of pride after years of frustration was lost immediately. We pass from a high emotional status to the low one of the daily hardship of life. There were again high expectations on the post-crisis situation that were bigger then reality.’ People forgot about their problems for a while in front of the national tragedy but, once the refugees left, people is too busy with their survival strategies to be able to feel better about themselves. In this regards, once again for many the remaining hope was the support that the donors could provide to the country.

The self-esteem of being identified as hospitable people was linked to the role of international media in the local public sphere. Finally receiving positive appreciations by foreign actors was especially important for local NGO representatives constantly in contact with the former. For the first and only time my interlocutors expressed pride towards their people and could identify some positive cultural heritage to present to the transnational public sphere.


\textsuperscript{281} The AFOR, Albanian Force, of NATO numbered at its peak some 8,300 troops helping the United Nations-led relief operation cope with Kosovo refugees who poured across the border into Albania.
Significantly what was generally underplayed by my interlocutors in the analysis precisely their role of media. The rhetoric of “national solidarity” transmitted through newspapers, TV and radio during the crisis instead clearly had a role in evoking the re-discovered national pride and constituted a powerful motor to generate readiness to help. The media had already started in 1998 during the first refugee exodus to deepen their interest in the tragic situation of the Kosovars. When the refugee crisis took its overwhelming form in 1999, there was already a prepared socio-psychological audience on top of which the media endorsed widespread emotional involvement of Albanians in the destiny of their peers. The media, by celebrating the rediscovered national solidarity, and by exhibiting the generosity of ordinary citizens, presumably reinforced the wish of individuals to participate to the national efforts, hospitable behaviour and the pride connected with it.

Notwithstanding, among my interlocutors only Gamosh Dudushi stressed how media were concentrated on the reporting of the crisis for weeks. He highlighted that media were so extensively covering the events that, for example, every film on TV was subtitled with a long list of names of refugees looking for someone they had lost during the escape from Kosovo. Such emphasis, according to the NGO representative, made: "some very poor families think that they could help the refugees as well even if they had no money nor space to host them."

Finally another explanatory factor to account for the phenomena of hosting refugees into private houses that was not mentioned by interviewees was the economic one. According to the result of a World Bank study carried on through 600 household interviews about 52 percent of the refugee families accommodated in apartments or houses paid rent: about 72 percent of them spent less than 200 US per month, while 27 percent spent from $200 to $500 per month. The international NGO Refugees International estimated in another study that two-thirds of the approximate number of the Albanian Kosovo refugees living in private accommodations paid rent. The same source referred to an average of around 250 deutsche marks paid per month.

It emerges then that part of the hosting families took economic advantage from the refugee presence and it is interesting to observe the geographical distribution of rent payers. Refugee International’s findings showed that the highest number of rent payers were in Tirana, Durres and Skodra. The lowest, instead, were in Korcia were the number of refugees was limited. Even in terms

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of the amount of money paid, Tirana and Durres were at the top: some refugees there were asked for between 500 and 600 marks per month.

It was in small towns and villages that the number of payers and the rent paid were significantly lower. These findings confirmed the distinction in attitudes and life style between the highly urbanized areas of the country (Tirana, Durres, and Skoder), from the rest of the rural areas that did not experience a similar experience of uprooting. The economic opportunity of hosting refugees during the crisis was therefore an incentive particularly where the life style of the people had been the more affected by the socio-economic transformation of the nineties. ‘Hosting’, that was also a question of prestige among the closed Albanians communities in the past, remained a value in the most rural areas which are the most deprived in economic terms (Schwandner-Sievers Stephanie 1999b).

The underplaying of the role of media and of the economic benefits can be explained considering the need of my interlocutors to stress to me, a foreign observer, the positive features of their cultural background. That Albanian elites could re-evaluate for a moment the worth of their difference cannot be understood without taking into account the role of the transnational social space where individual identities depend on the collective ones. It is the power of western hegemony in the transnational public sphere that put local elites in such an ambivalent position.

As my interlocutors highlighted, the country found strength in the specificity of the social capital and relied on their own sense of social commitment. In this sense, the crisis proved the epistemological critique to be correct: the CSP understanding of civil society disregards social networks based on ascriptive belonging such as family, clan, ethnic group or traditional forms of loyalty, but this social capital exists and can be mobilized.

Yet, only temporarily did my interlocutors idealize their own grassroots to counter the misrecognition experienced in their daily contact with CSP and western donors. The refugee crisis was a short parenthesis in their experience and the CSP idea of civil society had strongly influenced their conceptualization of the context. However they clearly expressed the need for a positive self-identification in the transnational public sphere.

A year later, during my second round of interviews the enthusiasm had vanished and the relationship between NGO elites and their people had become problematic once again. By 2000 it mention of the experience of the refugee crisis as sign that there were potentialities to be explored was almost entirely on my own part.

The refugee crisis was undoubtedly an exceptional moment in Albanian history that cannot be considered indicative of an ordinary situation. However, it provided specific insights on the
characteristics of society that had remained hidden up to that point in the transnational public sphere. That Albanian elites benefited for once from the positive identification of their society in the enlarged social space, confirms the role of transnational arenas of communications.

After all, the efforts to nationalize the grassroots that Albanian elites had carried out for a century worked. Once stimulated by the media many people responded to one of the most powerful myth in the country: that of the national identity and solidarity proving once again the power of nationalism in bringing closer urban elites and laypeople. Let me then inquire more specifically into the development of transnational cooperation from the bottom up as emerged during the crisis and generally speaking during the post-communist decade.

5.4 Transnational civil society

The example of the Kosovo refugee crisis brings me to another aspect of CSP: that of the controversial idea of creating a transnational civil society. During the crisis Albania saw a very high mobilization of western citizens and organizations in the relief operations. Everyone knew in Albania that the foreign donors support was needed in the organization of the relief activities. But what mattered the most to my interlocutors was the transnational solidarity and the positive identification of the country in world media, something that reflected into the personal pride of my interlocutors, as discussed above.

However, the appreciation of the transnational solidarity went hand in hand with complaints about the unfair competition of INGOs during the relief operations. During the crisis around 200 new international NGOs arrived in less then two months in Albania and local NGOs. Most INGOs were new to the country and lacked pre-existing relations with local counterparts. Thus they showed a tendency to look for recruitment more than partnership with local actors. Thus, according to my interlocutors, Albanian NGOs’ performance during the crisis suffered from the donors’ attitude of neglecting their experience in the field and of favouring of external expertise.284

Juliana Hoxha, whom I interviewed twice in 1999 and 2000, was very firm on this point: there was an unfair competition between local and international NGOs since donors’ would give most of

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284 My participant observation at the ORT Interaction Forum hold in September 1999 confirmed the centrality of these complaints. The forum consisted of 154 attendees, representing 85 Albanian NGOs, 29 international NGOs, 20 donor organizations and 5 government representatives. The idea of the forum was conceived during the Kosovo crisis when the partnership between local and international NGOs showed its weaknesses. The Forum was organized by ORT Democracy Network Albania with the support of ORT/USAID, UNHCR and OSCE in Tirana the 16-17 September 1999.
the resources to the latter during the crisis. Some kind of resentment was perceptible in the Diana Culi, representing one of the better established woman NGOs, on this same issues: ‘the main obstacle we faced during the refugee crisis was the attitude of foreign donors that neglected our capacity and relied mainly on foreign NGOs. But this does not leave much behind. In many senses it was a missed opportunity to strengthen our local capacity.’ But Culi was certainly not the only one complaining in this respect among consolidated local organisations. Miranda Gace, for instance, observed that even the impact on local population was less than it could have been since ‘INGOs were more visible’ because they had the greatest part of the funds donors made available to take care of refugees. Trola lamented especially how foreign NGOs instead of co-operating with local ones, would pay the personnel of the latter as interpreters and carried out initiatives by themselves.

While I cannot deal here with the wide discussion around the role of “humanitarian interventions”, and the mingling of power politics with the struggle for human rights as it would lead me faraway, I wish to stress that both under emergency crisis and ordinary aid relationships, transnational civil society is a terrain of “unequal power relations fraught with structural impediments and misunderstandings” to use the wording by Grugel (1999).285

Indeed, there were as well cases of INGOs who arrived in the country for the first time during the refugee crisis but then decided to remain to implement projects in the areas that they came to know. In other cases, already established transnational networks were able to bring more support to the local partners thanks to the mobilization of western public opinion. This was the case of the youth association in Vlora that, for example, received additional support from some smaller donors of the Italian decentralized cooperation via a pre-established relation with a bigger Italian NGO. But overall, my interlocutors lamented the unfavourable dynamics between themselves and their foreign counterparts.

Under ordinary circumstances, as well as during the emergency, newly borne NGOs in Albania were generally happy to establish partnerships with foreign NGOs in order to access foreign resources, but once established local NGOs instead asked for more space to manoeuvre in their projects for implementation than their role of partners allowed for. Interestingly, among my interlocutors, those that worked for newly established NGOs and generally welcomed the experience of co-operation with western NGOs.

Underlining the novelty constituted by social services in the country Eva Hasani, for instance, explained how important it was for her to work with foreign INGOs and observed that: ‘since social

work is a new field in Albania, for us the experience with foreign partners has been particularly important. They bring experiences that do not exist here, they bring new way of thinking about the organisation of the work, new ideas of family and childhood. Some people may tell you the opposite but I see it every day. The influence of foreign NGOs has contributed to many positive changes.

The idea that foreigners can have a positive influence was shared even by an external observer like the young journalist Etiola Kola: ‘it is a good thing when you have this type of co-operation between a local and a foreigner. The first knows the reality better and is important because you might have the best idea but then you face specific problems that pertain to the local context. Therefore the co-operation between them is extremely important and foreigners are not only those that bring money they also bring many new ideas.’

The importance of transborder coalition-building was not only seen in terms of financial resources and expertise transfer but also at personal level. Young practitioners reflected on the widespread desire to open and learn from foreigners. Ledia Dhima, for instance, referred to the personal level: ‘yes, foreigners brought expertise that we miss but they also helped people like me to emancipate from complexes of different kind, to become more pragmatic and think that you can improve. This is what I learned staying in contact with foreigners’. In addition, she observed that the laymen trust foreigners more than local NGO activists. Not only the political class needed foreign brokering to settle disputes, ordinary people as well relied more on external actors than upon local ones.

Conversely, the well established local NGOs preferred forms of distant co-operation without a direct intervention in the hosting country. As Sinan Tafaj put it: ‘we took their experience, we have tight relations, we visited each other and during this period of time they supported us also financially.’

Moreover, under ordinary circumstances, my interlocutors stressed that it was better when, by going abroad, they directly gain the experience they need and come back home with new ideas on what to do, as Mustafà Nano observed: ‘I think that new ideas in most cases come from Albanians that went abroad and brought back their experiences there much more than from foreigners coming here. Albanians with good experiences abroad that come back know the local context. Foreigners might be more intelligent, more educated but they do not know the situation here. This is why I think that are more useful Albanians rather than foreigners that come with good intentions but do not know the country… there are so many foreigners speaking about Albania without knowing the real one.’
Many Albanian practitioners criticizing INGOs raised examples of mismanagement, corruption, superficiality, the recourse to bribery of public officials and the like. Some of my interlocutors referred to negative cases of INGOs that Misha defined as made up by ‘adventurers’ that go to a country like Albania to seize a possibility to make money and spoil the work to build civil society locally. Not only that, Juliana Hohxa criticized the cases in which INGOs set negative instead of positive examples for local organizations: ‘you expect that the international NGOs give the good example, the good model on how they work abroad, and instead sometimes they give a bad one’.

None of them would deny in principle the need for fruitful relations with INGOs but they would point to the unevenness of the outcomes and their contingency, just as is the case with local NGOs. What is more, many of the problems highlighted by mainstream analysis of local NGOs can be transposed to analyse western NGOs activities in aid recipient countries such as lack of coordination, donors’ dependence etc (e.g. Mendelson 2002).

But what is more, the three denunciation of CSP analysed above find as well interesting verifications in the current developments of transnational civil society. Due to the long lasting isolation of Albania, during the 1990s transnational networks had to be recreated from scratch and often they resulted from CSP projects rather then from the bottom-up.286 The availability of donors’ funds created strong incentives for INGOs to work in the country and when they were reduced, as it occurred in the last few years, the level of their engagement sharply decreased.

As a consequence of the lack of previous networks and the donors’ dependence, there was a greater chance that INGOs entertained closer relations with donors than with their local partners. The representative of UNDP, Valli Corbanesi, observed how: ‘the presence of Italian NGOs in the field allowed me to count on them to do part of the monitoring.’ In cases such as this, the justification for the presence of INGOs in a foreign polity in term of transnational solidarity and of establishing connections between civil societies across borders is questionable and the problem posed by the first critique to CSP emerges powerful.

The anti-political critiques finds confirmation when considering the readiness of INGOs to become implementing agencies or as some of my foreign interlocutors put it: they make sure that “the money given by our taxpayers” is well spent. Regardless of the possibility of misappropriation of funds that affect both local and foreign NGOs, this attitude shows that INGOs, considering themselves responsible to foreign actors, prove right the second denunciation of colonization: they give up their role of advocates of citizenship rights and in the transnational space to undertake the

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286 In other areas of the world the situation can be different. Especially in Latin America many transnational networks originated in political alliances established by western civil society organizations and local one. This is still the case for grassroots transnational mobilization for Chiapas in Mexico.
professional profile of the implementing organizations. Professionalised INGOs do accept to be turned into actors that improve the efficiency of international cooperation by lowering its costs, and this way they betray their political drives to struggle for justice and redistribution at transnational level (Karagiannis 2004).

Applying the categories suggested by Boltanski and Thevenot (1999) in their analysis of the forms of justifications, one can say that INGOs accepted modes of evaluations different from the civic and moved from the civic cité to the market and the industrial cité. Besides of the concern towards efficiency one can easily trace the problem of renown, to use Boltanski and Thevenot’s terminology. Marketing strategies and the problem of visibility are becoming more and more important for INGOs with the decreasing of ODA and the need to fundraise among private actors and public opinion at home.

Interestingly, according to the isolated voice of Fatos Lubonja the best contribution to the country’s social transformation arrived not from the professionalised international NGOs but instead from what he called ‘missionary type’ NGOs (in Romano 2000). Lubonja, when speaking of missionary types did not want to emphasise their religious profile, instead he stressed the opportunities which people living in Albania and sharing the hardships of laymen in the country have to establish transnational solidarity by getting in close contact with the transformation taking place. Here one could find echoes of the epistemological critique considering that the average foreign practitioner in aid recipient countries has only a rough idea of the country where he/she works since he/she moves from one country to the other with the professionalized INGOs and applies standardized policies of support.

However, as the sources of social power are unevenly distributed in transnational public sphere, even those actors who consider themselves as the true offspring of transnational civil society, in as far as they have a political instead of a technocratic approach, may find considerable obstacles to their action. The most serious obstacle for people doing politics in the transnational arena emerges as that of recognition. As already mentioned, the different experience lived during the XX century across the iron curtain continues to divide and render difficult these encounters.

What in the 1980s used to be the transnational social movement led by pacifists on the one hand and by dissidents on the other, assumed new features with the experience of the “new-global”

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287 Even though it was considered a genuine case of transnational civil society, as Kaldor (1998) noted, even during the 1980s, there were different approaches to civil society East and West. After the collapse of the communist regimes, western activists converged into the humanitarian movement that dealt with the war in former Yugoslavia (Kaldor 2004). As for the former Eastern European dissidents, they were very much engaged in the building of the local post-communist public sphere (Falk 2003: cap.8).
social movement at the turn of the 1990s. The participation of eastern Europeans in such movements proved rather limited for both logistical as well as political problems. First of all, the lack of money and visa restrictions meant that very few Albanians were involved in the European Social Forum, organized for the first time in Florence in November 2002. Interestingly the few that reached the Forum, all belonged to local NGOs working for CSP projects and were brought there by western counterparts.288 This was basically the only opportunity for Albanian civil society organizations to participate at the event.

In addition, there were also political constraints that limited the participation. In actual fact what was missing from the Social Forum agenda was some kind of reflection around the experience of real socialism. This was due to the fact that few organizations from post-communist countries took part in the event but also that western European civil society was no longer interested in inquiring into the failed political experiment and its aftermath. In my field-work at the Forum, I encountered Fatos Lubonja, the most popular Albanian intellectual among radical groups in Italy, who had been invited for the occasion. His ironic comment: ‘this is a bit too revolutionary for me’,289 accompanied a speech at the convention aimed precisely at explaining the specific experience his country went through. Someone like Lubonja, who was detained for 17 years in prison in communist Albania and became one of the leading public intellectuals after 1991, asked his audience to go beyond ready made explanations around communism and post-communism in the Balkans and took the occasion for an open dialogue.

The underlining issue at the Forum, that is to say the denunciation of the neo-liberal globalisation, could find interlocutors among the Albanian activists present at the Forum in as far as they experienced its consequences on a daily basis. However, they would be very cautious in sharing radical critiques to the market economy as such, since its re-institution constituted a widespread aspiration in their own country shattered by alternative experiments.290 Moreover, pointing at the criminalisation of the Balkan peripheral economies as a consequence of their integration in the global economy (Chossudovski 2000), revealed itself as problematic, leaving very little space for any other social dynamics, and the Albanian activists felt the need to stress how post-communist Albania could not be reduced to illegal trafficking.

288 Beside the case of a few public intellectuals that live out of their contribution in the media, for the rest the people that wish to remain active in the public sphere work for CSP as I explained before.

289 I had many similar experiences with post-communist citizens in different contexts. In Florence in particular there was a Rumanian NGO activist invited there to speak about freedom of movement and the European visa regime. In our conversation he expressed his irritation about the presence of red flags all over the place.

290 It is troubling to notice that in search for anti-capitalists and anti-imperialist allies in the region, some western radicals identified Milosevic as a counterpart. See for an Italian case the web site of Ex-Jugo http://www.exju.org/.
Beside the European Social Forum, another clear case of cultural-political divide between radical western activist and Albanian elites had emerged in the occasion of the 1997 crisis. In Albania the experience of social upheaval was deeply traumatizing as the protests degenerated in violence and the state collapse left citizens at the mercy of criminal gangs. Western radicals enthusiastically celebrating the multitude upraising were disappointed by the normalization of the crisis and by the appreciation of the western military intervention restoring peace in the country.\(^\text{291}\)

As Albanian grassroots generally did not leave much space for enthusiasm around the emergence of new revolutionary subjects before and after 1997 this issue has been neglected by western radical activists. During the 90s it was relatively difficult to find volunteers to go to Albania as compared to other troubled spot in the world even among the rest of the western INGO workers, with the only exception of crisis period when western media mobilized the public opinion.\(^\text{292}\)

Many issues simply have been dividing Albanians and western activists in the transnational public sphere. Even though nationalism did not generate collective action, it remains a powerful narrative in the local public sphere and it can hardly be a match for radical and liberal western narratives of emancipation. Even after the NATO strikes in Kosovo, when the Serbian minority had been expelled from the country, I was repeatedly asked in Tirana to explain the reason why someone in Italy could be against the so-called humanitarian war. Leaving aside the evaluation of the NATO intervention, my interlocutors generally showed a selective interpretation of the human rights violations in Kosovo considering only those concerning their own ethnic group (e.g. Mertus 2001).

Equally problematic has been the dialogue with specific subcultures such as the queer or the feminist western movements who do not really find fertile ground in Albania for the time being as we shall see further below. If Albania is one of the least fertile context in this respect, as here not even small NGOs of queer or feminist could successfully establish, as observed by Flam (2001)

\(^{291}\) Let me just mention here that, for instance, the politically ‘radical-left’ Italian periodical Derive e Approdi that 1997 devoted one issue to the Albanian crisis and welcomed the revolt of the ‘multitudes’ in Negri’s terminology. As this idea did not stand historical scrutiny when bandits took over the situation and people were soon too frightened to express their voice, then Albanians were returned to their role as symbols of ruthless criminals. The complex socio-political context in the region has often been simplified by western analytical frameworks and, even a serious the paper, such as the Italian Il Manifesto, ended up displaying quasi-racist anti-Albanian tones in the analysis of the main regional issues involving them.

\(^{292}\) This problem emerged for instance with the Italian INGO ICS that was borne with a strong political orientation during the time of the mobilization for the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina when about 20.000 Italians had been active in pacifist campaigns and relief support. See Kaldor (2004) for an account of the mobilization at the time. Albania did not attract the same attention until during the 1999 crisis the Italian media changed the approach, abandoning the usual negative representations and sensitising the public opinion. The preoccupation among Albanians for their image abroad then emerged as justified even in relation to transnational solidarity.
even in central Europe after 1989 they turned into interests groups, lobbyist or expert groups, and were evidently marginalized in the homophobic and neoconservative social and political contexts of the local post-communist societies.

To conclude with the examples of the limits of the “political” approaches as opposed to technocratic or liberal democratic ones, let me refer to one episode of my field-work during the summer 2003. A summer school had been organized in Tirana by a young Albanian PhD student in Budapest, Altin Ilirjani. With the financial support of the Open Society Foundation he had managed to invite to Tirana a number of renowned scholars in the field of democratisation, development and Balkan issues. I joined the seminars on occasion and witnessed the debates among students, most of them Albanians. During the lecture of Isa Blumi the readings proposed included Ferguson’s ‘Anti-politics machine’. While students had gladly participated to lessons such as Philippe Schmitter’s on democratisation, no one seemed to understand the point of the anti-developmentalist scholar. The chance of communication between Blumi and his students were limited: the one willing to highlight the contradiction of the idea of development and the risk that technocratic bodies depoliticise central decisions; and the other ashamed of technological backwardness and economic crisis of their country, striving for its take-over and willing to become technocrats themselves and expressing repulsion toward local politics.293

The criticism of anti-politics could not be more alien to them: what is wrong with modernization? Why should we be like a third world country? Let Africa find alternative ways to develop, our project is joining the EU. As a matter of fact, Schmitter’s liberal democratic narratives proved more in tune to the students’ ears during the seminar in Tirana, due to the above discussed desire to be recognized as European as much as due to the need for these students to find a new position as experts in their society.

If CSP did not deliver its promises due to its Eurocentric bias, highlighting the negative implication of the anti-political machine does not save one from the risk of producing different forms of intellectual colonization. The experience with communist modernizing ideocracy created a strong barrier to the political dialogue between Albanian elites and western activists and radical scholars. The latter would not be ready to acknowledge the past and present experience with politics as well as with the state institutions in post-communist societies, nor would they be available to share the new idea of expert philanthropy affirming itself in the transnational public sphere.

293 Seminar organized by the Albanian Political Science Association, at the hotel Shato Linza, Tirana, summer 2000.
While the problem of colonial domination is a Gordian knot for many areas of the world, post-communist Europe has a different history of relations with the west that would not justify the straightforward shifting of interpretative tools. It would be a paradox if the critique of western renewed drives for domination became a tool of new forms of misrecognition.

This brief overview of the transnational civil mobilization touching Albania reveals a second important limit of the political critique: in the transnational public sphere as much as in the local one, the struggles for redistribution requires that for the recognition of difference. When a standardized civil society is proposed as much as when weak relationships are established due to political divergences, the recognition of the other as interlocutor and as a consequence the opportunity to work for the much needed transnational redistribution is absent.\textsuperscript{294}

This is why, as discussed above, the Albanian elites that I encountered expressed the wish to become “cultural mediators” in the transnational public arena. They identified the importance of making their social context understood to foreign interlocutors and wished to influence foreign policy making, seen as indispensable to overcome the difficulties of the present. One could argue that in doing this local NGOs endeavoured their struggle for recognition.

\textbf{5.5 The circularity of the problem}

The opening of the public sphere in Albania has been a major gain whose importance should not be underestimated. For the most part, western observers, me included, have been impressed by the unfolding of socio-political crisis and the devastating economic situation left over by the regime rather then looking at the positive signs of transformation and the newly acquired freedoms.

Enjoying a public dimension freed from regime control was an extraordinary achievement in term of communication as well as for the reformulation of public spaces in general. One of the few foreign witnesses of the last days of the regime, the Eurodeputy Alex Langer (Langer, 1996: 228 and 231) in this vivid and sympathetic description about the situation in December 1990 reported that people expressed the hope of turning Enver Hohxa’s mausoleum, a pyramid built in the middle of the capital city, into a disco bar. The desire became true right after the collapse of the regime and the history of this mausoleum became paradigmatic of the reformulation of public spaces. The dictator Enver Hoxha in 1992 was reburied in the civil cemetery of Tirana. The luxury building build, designed by the son in law of the dictator, after the fall of the regime the pyramid was used by kids to slide down its steep marble outside-walls turning the place of sacredness for the memory

\textsuperscript{294} See Boltanski (1993) for a wide discussion on the limits of the political engagement.
of the ruler into a playground. A part of the interior of the building was turned as a disco-bar another was rent to the Soros Fundation to open its first bureau. Later on, some of the rooms were used as bureau to coordinate the humanitarian operation during the Kosovo refugee crisis in 1999. Now it accommodates the offices of the Ministry of Culture, the International Centre for Culture and lodges expositions and public meetings.

Indeed, the collapse of the regime liberated considerable energies, passions and interests in social life. Freed from fear, people fully explored the new opportunities provided. In the capital city, for instance, one can hardly buy a newspaper after 9.00 o’clock in the morning, since these sell out so quickly. Certainly, TV has become very much a catalyst of public opinion after its liberalization (Romano 1999), though it does not replace life in public spaces. Neighbourhood life in urban areas has always remained lively and streets crowded with people. Only when the minimum level of security was not guaranteed as, for instance, during a few weeks in 1997, did street life disappear.

A café explosion took place with the totally unregulated opening of hundreds of so-called kiosks where one could sit and enjoy private conversation as well as discussions about current political events. The café has a long tradition in the region linked with the long Ottoman period that even the regime did not cancel. Yet, today the bar has taken up a new centrality with the explosion of the desire for entertainment. Money laundering has often been done by opening bars or restaurants, for many years the only developing economy. It is interesting the observation of Vehbiu (1997) around the social role of cafés: “The only palpable form of civil society which has largely profited from the loosening of social links in Albania is the café. The post-communist Albanian café is typically a gossip-producing place where loose groups of idle males socialize -- on the basis of inert habits, casual solidarity and insignificant principles -- to reciprocally calm down their worst fears and anxieties. Paradoxically enough, this eloquent monument to passivity and parasitism has become the only place where people can hope for their dignity to be socially recognized.”

As mentioned already, the fall of the regime brought the shutting down of all cinemas, theatres and social centres. The first cinema to reopen showed only pornographic movies and finally in 2000 the first brand new cinema was inaugurated in Tirana. Today things are improving slowly thanks to a combination of private, public, and western donors’ initiatives and Albania inaugurated in 2003 the First Film Festival. Gradually, with the improvement of the general situation, all places of socialization have been regaining space, even though only in the capital city.

In this context CSP introduced a new lexicon and allowed for the creation of a privileged group of NGOs practitioners in the Albanian public sphere. Donors’ idea of promoting civil society via
local NGOs did clearly find its main obstacle in the elitist nature of the organizations that emerged. As Misha commented, foreign funded civil society constituted a living paradox as it is made by ‘elites that are supposed to enhance the creation of civil society’. Misha added: “Some have a more active presence today but we missed the debate on what is civil society in this country, a real public debate.’

The missing debate around civil society in Albania, however, cannot be conducted within CSP narratives since these mostly generate self-descriptions by defaults, as argued by the epistemological critique. As a matter of fact, the unsatisfactory results of CSP in post-communist Albania fed-back into narratives of the weakness of civil society among local elites. The effect has been that of reinforcing the ready-made explanations on the cultural legacies of communist regimes: lack of solidarity, social capital, familism all conducive to weak civic participation.

That the number of registered non profit organizations in post-communist countries remains lower as compared to other context such as for instance in Latin America as noted by Janos (2000) as well as by Rueschemayer (1996) does not imply a straightforward confirmation of the weakness of civil society or the lack of social capital. It is the western reductionist gaze to make the growth of NGOs one of main indicators of the progress of civil society and democratisation.295

Yet, questioning the eurocentric bias of CSP’s idea of civil society does not entail the idealization of the local context. Rather it reveals how the hegemony of donors’ CSP agenda in the intellectual production everywhere (including the IUE) and the crisis of Albanian academia, leaves observers unequipped to explain many of the dynamics taking place in the country.296 We still do not have in depth analysis of social cleavages, political representation and the like shaping the social realm of the Balkan country. The same political rallies that from the beginning of transition mobilized many people in the country have not yet been studied.

The little research carried out in the field of political affiliation and political clienteles would suggest that this field, as much as any other, is ‘under construction’ and that cleavages are not consolidated. The frequent reference to a north-south divide in the academic literature -whereby the northerners vote for the DP party while the Socialist have their strongholds in the south of the country and that this cleavage is based on the linguistic divide between the two main dialects spoken in the country- requires further confirmation in the result of electoral competitions that were

295 Interestingly for Ruli (2003) there are even too many NGOs in Albania considering 800 organizations a big number.

296 The latest project of research of Balkan societies that I came across proposed the new idea of ‘particularism’ as the sign that people do not trust anyone outside their family and groups of kin. See Mungiu-Pippidi (2005; 2006)
held so far. To my knowledge the attempts at verifying this hypothesis found only partial confirmation (Pihet 1998; Ilirjani 2006).

A number of studies have pointed out how in the post-communist world, articulating interests in general is particularly difficult since the radically new and rapidly changing situation makes it hard to formulate collective goals, which appeal to new and uncertain constituencies (Lane 1999). This observation led some scholars to introduce balkanist views even of party formation in Albania where the tradition of the *fis* is considered the reason for their resilience to modern liberal democratic policy-making. The highly personalized party politics in the country requires, however, further scrutiny, taking into account the role of the media as much as the institutional weakness and the troubled economic transformation.

The study of the development of new powerful economic actors itself would be extremely important considering precisely their control of the media, their connection with the political elites and their questionable source of wealth (e.g. Altvater 1998; Padget 1999). As underlined by Misha: ‘behind journalists are the owners that are unprincipled people that might just use the newspaper or television they posses to attack those that put obstacles to their money-making’.

Fifteen years after the transition started the business sector still lacks representative organizations. It is often difficult to see economic actors as distinct from the political class and therefore it does not make sense to speak about ‘organized business associations able to lobby the government’ as the CSP’s phraseology goes. It would be important instead to verify if political elites, with their consistent engagement in the economic activities, can be performing their function of mediator between the interests groups and the citizens. 297

As for trade unions, CSP and its literature tended to consider them as conservative social forces that obstructed the necessary changes in post-communist countries. A similar opinion is spread in the recipient country as well. Albanian trade unions gained some power for a few months between 1990 and 1992, and among my interlocutors, Kolpeja, underlining that they used to be run by high ranking party members and serve as tool of power, qualified these first years as ‘the golden age’ for unions. The latter, however, faced a sharp decline due to the economic catastrophe in the following years and were marginalized in the new private sectors that emerged (Sigma 1998). 298

297 Cfr. for instance the description provided by Lubonja interviewed by the Italian paper *Il Manifesto*” on the 13 gennaio 2003: «*Ma Tirana annega nell'illegalità*» intervista di Claudio Bazzocchi.

298 Figures presented by Vaugham-Withehead (1996) show the trend that could not be inverted: in the state sector the workers unionized in industry fall from 93% in 1994 to 50% in 1996. In the service sector the difference between state and private property is of 5% unionization in the private enterprises compared to 72% in state owned enterprises. Nowadays the number of workers organized in trade unions is very small outside the public sector. See a recent article
Only strikes held by public employees, among which school teachers’, were widespread since the collapse of the system. Yet, among my interlocutors, these were never qualified as civic participation. Rather often, the people I that interviewed spitefully commented that strikes had become “fashionable” among public employees. In the post-communist public sphere privatization was seen as the only solution to problems and the resistance that public officials made to transformations that everyone was experiencing was considered selfish in as far as it procrastinated the crisis.

In Vaughan-Whitehead analyses’ (1996, 1999) the many strikes to obtain wage concessions among workers of the state sector were due to the lack of mechanism for collective bargaining while in the private sector the lack of control by the Ministry of Labor entailed no regularization of the workforce and lack of respect of the new Labour Code.

CSP permeated the local public sphere with its own narratives examining the problems in the country and suggesting the solutions. It is clear that the hegemony exercised by donors in Albania made these foreign gazes particularly powerful. As always, these narratives were particularly successful where local know-how to construct counter arguments was weaker, such as in the definition of the policies of economic liberalization, or where they touched upon the core problems of the country, such as in the case of the weakness of organized groups in society.

Most surveys conducted around civil society issues in post-communist countries, Albania included, underplayed trade unions’ role in civil society. As a result, they have been left behind resource wise and CSP projects did not really try to address their problems. Let me use the World Wide Web as indicator of the relevance given to trade unions in the transnational arena. Searching for references to Albanian civil society one can find projects of every kind concerning the weirdest local NGO, and flamboyant web pages, while almost no reference to project in the field of unions can be found. While the representatives of women associations are invited to conferences over the world, Albanian trade unions have been receiving little support by their western counterparts.

Yet, it is clear that NGOs cannot have an equally strong bargaining power with the state and economic actors as trade unions have. Whatever role local NGOs might be able to take up in the on the issue confirming that the situation has not changed Osservatorio sui Balcani, 31.05.2006, “Sindacati in Albania: Manca il dialogo con il governo” http://www.osservatoriobalcani.org/article/articleview/5759/1/41/.

299 This approach can be seen as reflecting the situation in western Europe where the critique to the neo-corporatism of trade unions was widespread even among new social movements in the 1980s. This view hides the role of trade union in empowering other forms of civic participation.

300 It is curious to note that the major Italian trade union, CGIL has an organization working in the field of international cooperation called NEXUS. In Albania the organization is active in Elbasan with ordinary projects of cooperation in the welfare sector. Only recently, another Italian trade union, CISL, initiated some transnational cooperation with Albanian counterparts: information provided by Rando Devole who was involved in these activities.
future, it is difficult to imagine that they alone can constitute the backbone neither of the local civil society, nor of the transnational civil society: functioning state-society relations require a dynamic between social forces that small associations normally cannot provide. As reminded by Rizza (2002) the no-profit sector is simply a synecdoche of civil society. Both at local as much a transnational level any think-tank or environmental NGO, as much as many of them together, face the competing powerful firms, political parties, religious movements and the like.

Together with the cultural legacies of the regime, one should consider the gigantic retrogression in state functioning that made informal arrangements prevail. While no functioning taxation system on revenue is in place to augment the state budget and allow for public expenditure, people pay directly the service they need when they need it, that is to say by bribing public servants to obtain all possible services: from birth certificates to health care.

Indeed, one could distinguish different approaches among donors over the issue of corporatist groups. The EU and Western European donors show instead more interest in this field in the case of candidate countries (Iankova 2002), as compared to American donors while the latter tend to prefer the sponsoring of NGOs activities in the field of monitoring public official. Even here, however, USA donors invested only in the last couple of years have. As the result today there are two NGOs working in the field that is to say the: Citizens Advocacy Office (CAO) and the Office for the Registration of Property.

As among CSP assumption there is the idea that local NGOs can play a ‘disciplinary role’ in relation to the state by enhancing public accountability to politicians and administrators. What this entailed in practice was almost only the organization of roundtables, seminar and the like, all activities that thanks to donors’ press releases have some kind of visibility in the media. Of the very many NGOs working in the health sector none has been active in protecting citizens from briberies. In the last few years, though, the successful Mjaft campaigns seem to have produced positive effects in terms of public scrutiny of governmental action. Yet, there is still quite a lot of space for local NGOs to engage concretely in defence of citizens rights.301

One might wonder to what extent the high sensitivity in the public around the issue of corruption, and the frequency of scandals brought up by the media, create the conditions for change or rather anaesthetise the public in front the decay of public life.302 The distrust toward institutions

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302 For an example of newspaper article describing the problem of corruption among hospitals’ doctors see for instance: Alban Gjoni, Koha Jone, 4 maggio 2000, (trad. it), ‘Due giornalisti hanno finto di essere pazienti
that eroded the socialist system from within is hampering a post-communist successful transformation. It has been noted that post-communism transformations produced a strong identity crisis among professional groups. As Kostov’ observed: “What remains untold is the destruction of the old professional classes. The loss of status no less than the loss of income determines the hostile attitude that huge groups of people feel toward the new dispensation. Balkan societies are infected with “status panic” (2002:47). In Albania, this status panic among professional groups might indeed have been the reason for the spread of corruption in the public sector.

Yet, debates around these issues often slip into moralizing narratives that easily arrive at the conclusion that socialism had spoiled the “soul of the nation” (Kola, 2003). In addition to that, one can frequently find reference to the loss of pride of Albanians who have become individualist. This is especially evident when discussing migration. For years the phenomenon of the brain drain has occupied public discussions around the question whether it was a form of betrayal of the nation or not. While migrants are charged with too many responsibilities, the widespread overtaking in the country of private interests over common newly established rules by the population at large is undoubtedly problematic.

Moralizing narratives are frequently brought up by donors as much as by the local public opinion. What is often missing instead is the reference to legal or institutional solutions. Yet, citizenship rights are about legal entitlement and not primarily a moral issue. As commented by Ehrenbegr: ‘Good feelings, volunteerism, nostalgia and community constitute civil society in an anti-political period’ (1999: 233).

When for instance debates infuriated on the risks of urban devastation of Tirana due to private speculations, reference to legal issues was hardly ever made. Moral problems emerged, power struggles were discussed, but no one seemed to think that a regulatory plan existed and might be the object of the debate. I followed closely the debates in 2002 around the economic interest of new powerful construction firms that sacked Tirana and almost never did I find reference to any regulatory plan to be revised maybe but then to be respected. Even Lubonja, normally going against the tide in the public debates, did not put the problem in these terms, but addressed his criticism...
around the “Personalizimi i institucionit” (the personalization of institutions) mainly with the aim to criticise the major of the capital.304

As emerged in the analysis that I carried out, the centrality of institutions for the empowerment of civil society and the struggle for citizenship has long remained neglected in the post-communist transformation of Albania. Soft technologies of social engineering promoted by foreign donors, argues Evans (1996:1122), can contribute to bring the state to engage positively with civil society. State-society relations can be mutually empowering but it should be kept in mind that the former has more power then the latter and the limits to cooperation are located most of the time in the governments rather than in societies.

However, soft-technologies of social engineering produce unsatisfactory results when the actions taken do not fit the context. In this regard, the combination of the epistemological and anti-political critique proves important. Yet, if technocracy takes away the space of politics and with it the chance to discuss which policies are better suited to the local context, one should not underestimate the reasons for the appreciation of anti-politics that I encountered in the Albanian public sphere.

One should be aware, as pointed by my interlocutors, that when “voice” was expressed in post-communist Albania, devastating episodes of social disruption took place. In the last few years, the academic interest around contentious actions in post-communism focused on its “uncivil nature”. According to Kopeky (2003) populism, nationalism and other antidemocratic mobilizing factors impose a rethinking of the idea of civil society if we are to fully understand the nature of public participation in the region.

While Albania may not have raised interests in academic circles as nationalism have not been the driving force for popular mobilization and we totally lack studies on the issue, it is clear that highly disruptive social mobilizations, driven by political forces and internal political power struggles, regularly alternate with more ordinary forms of grassroots contentions all over the country.

It is not surprising then that the Albanian NGOs elites feared new experiences of social disruptions and distrusted political forces for their recent political performances. What is more, it is not surprising that they saw as inevitable the resorting to donors’ financial support to carryout soft-

304 See for instance one the many articles that appeared on the press in that period when the topic was particularly hot: Fatos Lubonja, ‘Një përrallë e lashtë dhe fenomeni Rama’, Shekulli Ndryshuar: E Mërkurë, 22 Maj, 2002, Viti i VI Nr. 138 (1438).
technologies of social engineering as there are not enough resources in the rundown Albanian state to provide for citizens rights, both formal and substantial.

One should not neglect the fact that CSP has been policy with a considerable visibility but that entailed the investment of limited resources. According to the renowned international think-tank ESI an acceleration of the process of integration of South East Europe is necessary to increase financial support. The aid policy that worked for central Europe – what they name as the of “member state building” - is seen as different from current policies of institution building in the region as the amount of financial resources engaged increased the leverage that Brussels could use with local elites (ESI 2005).

Increasing the available resources can have the effect of strengthening the autonomy of local public sphere and alleviating the problem with western hegemony that constrains the political imagination of the Albanian elites. The role of cultural mediators that local NGO representatives have been carving out for themselves, regardless of its ambivalence, is a positive sign in this respect. The possibility to replace the blind acceptance of western imports with the self-reflexive scrutiny of the foreign policies penetrating the local public sphere, after all, has been connected with the increased stabilization of the country itself occurred in the last few years.

The circularity of the problem of CSP is that it requires a functioning local public sphere able to interpret it, but where CSP is most needed, and least contested, it faces the most serious problems to work. A stable country with a growing economy has more chances to appropriate and direct the foreign incentives of CSP even though it is generally able to promote civil society and look for foreign exchanges by its own.

6.1 Concluding remarks

My ethnography of Civil Society Promotion in Albania aimed at reconstructing the implications of this transnational policy during the post-communist transformation of the Balkan country. The interests in studying CSP grew from the acknowledgment that it constituted an innovative policy in the history of western engagement in aid recipient countries, that increased the chances to control the latter with a direct penetration of the local public spheres but it had the potential to pluralize the
local and the international public spheres and that of creating opportunities of transnational redistribution.

The first findings of the research revealed that the CSP’s outcomes in Albania were similar to that of other aid-recipient countries in the world, that is to say the transnational policy resulted in the creation of local NGOs that had limited influence over the development of local state-society relations. Rather than concluding with the mainstream approaches that the failure to export civil society was to be identified in the aid-recipient’s social features, I questioned the policy itself and its assumptions. Thus I drew from the literature developed by the so-called third world studies that instead attributed to the donors the responsibility for the CSP’s disappointing results and denounced its colonizing implications. I identified three main strands in the available works pointing respectively at: the problem of control, that of the technocracy and finally at the heuristic value of western categories.

These critiques to CSP offered interesting analytic perspectives but, as I found out during my field-work, they did not reflect the reception of the policy in the Albanian public sphere. One cannot say that CSP was ever thoroughly scrutinized in the country, as indicated by the scarcity of publications on the issue, but in my findings the policy was initially highly welcome in Albania and, when criticism emerged, what was contested were not its aims or means but its capacity to help with the difficult post-communist transformation.

Thus I endeavoured to confront the academic analysis around CSP that I identified with those that emerged in the Albanian public sphere. I looked in particular at the reasons why the different understanding of colonization that emerged in the literature did not match the sensitivities of my interlocutors. In addition, while discussing the validity of the three denunciations of the colonizing projects, my dissertation reconstructed the different phases of CSP’s policy making in Albania. As I argued, paying attention at the relations between the donors’ and the recipient’s public spheres, one could overcome the deadlocks of the debates between the supporters and the detractors of the policy itself.

First, I confronted the critique of CSP as instrument of control with the reasons for the generalized appreciation of western donors’ interference in Albania. The attraction to the west and in particular the desire to be recognized a part of the European political space as much as the crisis of the Albanian polity, all converged to explain the initial widespread appreciation of the western penetration in the country.

As I studied the inter-subjective relations between the donors and the recipient as one between bounded but plural subjects I could highlight how, even if generally the Albanian elites appreciated
the consistent foreign involvement in its social development, instead the political elites had a harder
time in coming to terms in particular with CSP. Acknowledging the difficult process of political
democratisation of the country, I highlighted how this discrepancy in the reception of the policy
could be interpreted as a positive sign of pluralisation of the local public sphere. After all, the local
political elites had an ambivalent approach towards foreign control and generally welcome all kinds
donors’ projects. Yet, if they did not seem to appreciate in particular the presence of potential
challengers in the local public sphere, local NGOs had not acquired such an important role in the
country as to thoroughly explain the political elites’ hostility towards CSP. Moreover, the Albanian
political elites’ critical stances towards CSP reflected the generalized disappointment in the country
towards its results. Thus I took into account the possibility that, as argued by the first detractors of
the policy, the newly empowered local actors might be merely co-opted in a foreign project of
control of the aid-recipient country.

To verify this hypothesis my work explored outcome of CSP Albania in detail, the role of local
NGOs in the public sphere and the reasons why, after the initial welcoming of the policy, its
outcomes in terms of growth of local NGOs have been widely considered unsatisfactory. What
emerged from my inquiry was that the main criticism towards CSP that was raised in the Albanian
public sphere was that its real beneficiaries turned out to be local NGO representatives themselves
while society at large did not really benefit from the foreign support in the field.

My empirical findings confirmed how, in the troubled post-communist transformation, the
transnational policy indeed worked as safety-net for part of the urban elite. One could appreciate
this limited result in as far as the donors’ funds allowed socially committed people to remain active
in the country during the worst years of the economic transformation. Moreover, whether or not
CSP aimed to control the local public sphere via local NGOs, the goal was not reached. The latter
remained at the margins of the Albanian public sphere and what is more there was no need for such
organizations to influence local public opinion as western hegemony occurred strongly independent
from CSP policy making.

As the problem of constructing some kind of social legitimacy accompanied local NGOs in the
post-communist decade, I analysed the way in which their representatives interpreted their role and
confronted it with the wider debates in the public sphere. Donors became a fundamental source of
social power for the Albanian NGO representatives but, as I stressed, their lives took place in the
locality and they needed to find justification for their work. Thus I considered it worth analysing
their approach to CSP beyond the identification of their interests at stake in supporting the policy.
To start with Albanian NGOs professionals that I interviewed saw themselves as the experts of their society and justified the work of their organizations as that of advocates for their society at large, as professional organizations active around issues of public concern instead of ordinary citizens. As discussed in the first chapter donors efforts at strengthening intermediary groups in aid recipient countries, among other things, aimed at generating stability by channelling participation. Thus, in as far as the self understanding of local NGOs was concerned, CSP achieved a successful transplant of its idea of civil society.

Undoubtedly, after the traumatic totalitarian experience, Albanian civil society found CSP and was influenced by its presence, both in terms of the opportunities provided as well as by its narratives; one cannot consider the local context in isolation from it. As I described, local NGOs representatives indeed echoed western hegemonic narratives but they selectively adjusted them to the local circumstances.

Therefore, I explored in depth the reasons why CSP’s idea of professionalised social engagement resonated well in Albania thus contributing to its success. That Albanian NGOs saw themselves as the experts of their society, I argued, cannot be explained only in instrumental terms. It is important to understand the reformulation of the western policy making by local NGOs in connection to the wider transformation of Albanian elites in the country during the post-communist troubled transition. As it emerged, the expert-status gave to the Albanian NGOs a new role in society while the sources of social power were radically transforming during the post-communist decade with the effect of marginalizing urban intellectual elites.

This finding made me question the viability of the anti-political critique towards CSP as a straightforwardly disempowering enterprise. Rather CSP turned out to provide an important source of identity for the Albanian elites involved in CSP during the post-communist transformation: as much as most people saw in the market the best allocator of resources in opposition to the failed planned economy, local NGOs saw their technical role in opposition to the ideological past.

Moreover, looking at Albanian public opinion at large, one finds evidence of a widespread appreciation of the idea of technical expertise in the social field even when the results of CSP are not appreciated and local NGO practitioners are harshly criticized. The experience with the over-politicisation of the communist regime and the post-communist violent power struggles provided a certain receptiveness to technocracy. As I argued, one cannot disentangle this success of technical expertise in the Albanian public sphere from the past experience of the party-state and its legacies in the post-communist transformation.
In this regard, the only achievement of CSP that was commonly identified in the Albanian public sphere was the creation of think-tanks. Paradoxically, while the academic critique of CSP as instruments of control stressed the increased penetration of the local public sphere and the possibility for donors to directly influence the local policy-making especially via think-tanks. What emerged from my field-work instead was the appreciation for the know-how transfer that CSP allowed. Indeed western donors supported the creation of such NGOs as they needed local expertise for their project making but local elites themselves appreciated the fact that in this way CSP contributed to the formation of a social scientific knowledge that was scarce in Albania.

Interestingly, in common with the anti-political critique, local NGOs lamented the standardization of the CSP policy-making that they considered problematic in as far as it could not really address the specific problems of their country. However, in contrast to this second denunciation of CSP, my interlocutors in the field did not attribute to the technocratic way of proceeding the reason for the standardization. On the contrary, they argued that donors showed limited professionalism in applying similar measures to different contexts.

If the gap in reciprocal knowledge resulting from the isolation of the country during the communist regime did indeed compromise the transnational policy making on numerous occasions, what local NGOs failed to see the connection between the indifference to local dynamics and the technocracy that they enthusiastically embraced. What is sure, however, is that the idea of returning to politics to counter technocracy and the cry of the authoritarian nature of technical expertise, advocated by the anti-political critique, did not fit the local understanding of the challenges of the post-communist transformation.

The anti-political critique did not find a receptive environment in Albania, not only for that which concerns the idea of politics but also that of the state. The anti-statist core of CSP found a receptive environment in Albania as the experience of the regime had produced a generalized alienation towards public institutions. It is fundamental for Albania to grasp the most problematic legacy of the party-state’s experience, that is to say the occupation by the party of the bureaucracies constructed to support the modernizing project. The implication during the post-communist transformation has been that the state became the natural place of a spoil system, clientelism, corruption etc.

In this field, what emerged from my inquiry is that CSP in Albania could not counter, or simply neglected, the crisis of governance of post-communism, however it could not be argued that it generated it, as claimed by the first critique to CSP. Indeed the plethora of western donors’ projects carried out in Albania were mostly disconnected from one another and frequently failed to be
implemented due to the lack of the basic legal provisions in the so-called non-profit sector. However, if on one side donors created confusion by pulling local authorities in different and contrasting directions, on the other local NGOs could take advantage from the diversified donors’ presence in the field to increase their bargaining power. Finally, if CSP confirmed itself as a foreign project, one can also note the scarce local political commitment in coordinating the CSP policies in the field.

This is especially clear considering the field of the social protection that in my findings was neglected by foreign and local decision-makers throughout the 90s. Once again I problematised the relationship between the donors’ penetration of the local public sphere and the curtailing of social protection, as established by the first critique to CSP. Exploring the trajectory of CSP in Albania it emerged that the policy started out as a way to expose people to democratic values but later on came to cover the field of the welfare state reformulation. The transformation of the transnational policy that I identified shows the gradual adaptation of western donors to the local circumstances both in terms of knowledge of the context and widths of their involvement. If the emphasis that western donors placed on democracy and civil society in their policies of support to Albania did not replace their security concerns before and after the turn towards social protection, the strategy to achieve the goal changed. What did not really change instead was the local political elites’ lack of engagement in the field of social protection.

What emerged during my interviews with Albanian elites was that my interlocutors did not establish a connection between CSP and the fact that they found themselves without social protection during the radical post-communist transformation. The scarcity of welfare provision instead was seen as deriving from the poverty of public resources to invest in the field. Furthermore, while the ascriptive and informal relations replaced the state in the field of social protection, they continued to express mistrust towards public institutions in the field.

Local NGO representatives, for their part, appreciated the CSP’s turn towards social services and welcome the idea of developing a ‘third sector’ to contribute to reformulation of the welfare regime. My interlocutors then reinterpreted their function in connection with the new possibilities offered by CSP and presented themselves as ‘civic innovators’, an idea that integrated the idea of civil society experts.

While I encountered a widespread appreciation for the CSP turn towards social services among NGO workers due to their awareness of the distressing level of social vulnerability, with this idea of innovation my interlocutors did not mean to engage in bottom up struggles for redistribution. Rather they enjoyed the idea of resembling experts’ charities. As emerged during my field-work, the idea
of equality had lost legitimacy in the Albanian public sphere at large and the idea of public-private partnership in the welfare field was welcome in a context where the state had been experienced as inadequate provider both in the past and in the present. Once again the idea of civil society promoted by western donors revealed itself as more in tune with the Albanian elites’ understanding as compared with critical theorists’ views.

Subsequently, I explored the complex relation that Albanian NGOs entertain with their grassroots to understand if they contributed to explain the ideas of social engagement that I identified. In this regard, I explored the transformation of the role of the elites in the country and its connection with CSP. While it is clear that the transnational policy failed to manufacture intermediary groups able to channel social participation, one can hardly argue that this derives solely from its professionalised culture. Rather I concluded that the urban elites’ historical detachment from their grassroots is neither a problem that CSP creates, nor one that it solves.

In particular, the denunciations of CSP as colonization neglected the turbulent and highly polarized public sphere, where NGO elites found themselves in Albania. Regardless of the CSP claim that the post-communist public opinions are passive, what Albanians experienced were repeated disruptive episodes of contentious actions. This explains the claim of local NGOs that their work is important to improve the problem of stability and achieve some kind of social order after the crises that ravaged the country.

As I noted, after a period of blind imitation, Albanian NGO workers started questioning the idea of “western models” proposed by their foreign interlocutors. They showed how the most powerful critique to CSP can be seen as that pointing at the epistemological colonization of the recipient country. Indeed Albania has been overwhelmed with narratives of civil society and their western model instead of experiencing the open confrontation with different historical experiences and the solutions found in the always precarious dynamics between social forces.

Interestingly, my interlocutors expressed the need to be recognized as ‘cultural mediators’ between the donors and their grassroots, explaining to the former the cultural background of the latter. The claim of being mediators reveals one of the main aspects that they resented, that is to say western lack of understanding of the specific local experience, settings and social relations. The problem with misrecognition in the transnational public sphere emerged in relation with western governmental donors as well with western activists active in the country. It is clear that Albania missed social actors or movements incarnating the idea of civil society as the locus of resistance to
western hegemony and this entailed that, even in western counter hegemonic narratives, Albania has been regularly represented with the balkanist stereotypes of violence and corruption.

The effort to carving out of spaces for themselves that NGO workers made has been important but not unproblematic. The country dwellers that Albanian elites endeavoured to nationalize throughout the XX century, after the collapse of the regime generated a strong sense of alienation among NGO elites that experience with their daily work an enlarged social space. Here I showed how they remain trapped in between donors’ narratives of backwardness and their own uneasiness with their “folk”, especially with rural and mountain dwellers.

Analysing the epistemological critique in this context, I stressed how due to western hegemony in the recipient social context local NGOs representatives are pushed back and forth between etno-orientalism and ethnic-orientalism. By generating self-identification by default, CSP’s hegemonic narratives can been seen as challenging the Albanian NGOs capacity for critical response. This pattern of local NGO reaction is shared in the local public sphere as Albanian elites moved from the role of “legislators” to that of “interpreters” in the transnational public sphere and their identities are constructed locally as well as transnationally.

Yet, the validity of the epistemological critique does not offer solutions to the unbalanced resource redistribution in the international arenas. Moreover, one could notice how the gradual adaptation of CSP in Albania during the post-communist decade resulted from the critical scrutiny of the policy in the transnational public sphere. Such public scrutiny of CSP emerged in the western academic literature and in the western media as well in the local public sphere.

Undoubtedly, the Albanian elites’ possibility to participate to the transnational public spheres is considerably limited by their lack of resources. The structural inequality intrinsic in the aid-relationship also hampers their participation in the transnational arenas of communications and makes them vulnerable to western hegemony. As highlighted in my work, it is fundamental to acknowledge how the struggle for recognition cannot be disentangled from the fundamental problem of redistribution. The resource divide is what generates the epistemological colonization.

One can also trace positive examples of transnational cooperation established when, in the context of concrete CSP’s encounters, the technocracy of the aid industry has been adjusted to the local context by the actors involved. The outright rejection of CSP in the name of colonization neglects the positive examples of transnational redistribution that can be identified when shelters for battered women are introduced in the country with CSP projects, when new approaches to mental
disabilities are stimulated, or some hundred orphans receive transnational aid via NGOs and so on. Rather it is CSP’s limited financial engagement that did not really contribute to solve the problem of the insufficient resources available to tackle the enormous problems of social destitution that exist.

In this regard, one should ask if, rather than a question of renewed colonial domination, the problem with CSP is that it was very powerful at discursive level while in practice it could only make a limited difference. As highlighted by my interlocutors, foreign aid was and remains a necessity for Albania. The problem with local NGOs then would not be they followed donors’ priorities but rather that they had limited means at their disposal. At best they could work as experts, civic innovators, or cultural mediators but that the donors’ engagement has been well below the possibility to allow them to make a difference.

More important than the weakness of NGOs, however, is the generally problematic articulation of interests in the post-communist Albanian public sphere. The latter is connected with the radical economic chances as well as with the lack of a consistent institutional commitment to govern them. In this regard, western donors did little to stimulate the local authorities to take a proactive role nor did they consider the reformulation of the social protection a priority in their support to the country’s transformation. Moreover, the support given local NGOs, however, did not necessarily impede it. If donors’ civil society became a false friend of the dissidents’ civil society in the whole post-communist world, this had to do with the fact that western countries did not wish to consistently engage in its post-cold war transformation.

In addition, the denunciation of the colonization of aid policies pushed CSP’s critiques is close to the neo-liberist view that in the meantime suggested abandoning the inefficient transnational aid. This convergence allowed the overall curtailing of Official Development Aid to pass unnoticed and the hopes for a ‘peace dividend’ after the cold war to dissolve. Fewer people were there to denounce the disengagement of the west from the necessary redistribution of resources during the 1990s.

But, contrary to the fears of colonization, the increased western engagement in Albania had the effect of strengthening the autonomy of local public sphere. The possibility of replacing the initial blind acceptance of western imports with the subsequent self-reflexive scrutiny of the foreign policies, increased with the increased western involvement and the stabilization of the country at the turn of 2000. Alleviating the problem with western hegemony that constrains the political imagination of the Albanian elites then required more rather then less foreign aid.
The constant increase of aid to respond to the Albanian troubled transformation confirmed the existence of a common interest in overcoming the difficulties of the latter. It could be suggested that Albanians were naïve in expecting the support from abroad or that western governments had too many illusions about the possibility of keeping the Albanian trouble spot faraway. With the stabilization of the local public sphere, once the worst crises periods pass and with the beginning of the process of EU integration, foreign support will increase and most of all change the nature of the aid relations. If there is still space for pure power politics in the relation between Albanian and its donors, it is clear that the EU makes the political relations much less vulnerable to old nation-state power politics and it gives a new meaning to the foreign interferences.

My inquiry stressed the role of the transnational arenas of communication, endeavouring to reformulate the debate around the international dimension of democratisation. Superseding the nation-state, both in political and analytical perspectives, I stressed, should be about questioning the ideology of state interest or security but does not require hiding the locality. As my work shows, in order to establish communications in the highly unbalanced transnational public spheres that are created, the different experiences lived and the different sensitivities elaborated cannot be neglected. What is more, it is only when the other is recognized as interlocutor that the responsibility of redistributing as well as the space for common political projects regardless of the existing differences is created. Both at the national and transnational level it will remain impossible to disentangle the struggles for recognition and redistribution.
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Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions.* Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press,


Annex 1: A basic chronology

1912 – The birth of the Albanian state
1939 – Ahmed Zogu self-proclaims himself the king of Albania
1939 – Italy invades Albania
1945 - The People’s Republic of Albania is established
1948 - After the Tito-Stalin split, Albania chooses to side with Stalin’s Soviet Union
1959 - Tirana breaks with the destalinized USSR and Beijing becomes the new ally
1978 - Tirana chooses international isolation after the changes in the Chinese international policy
1985 - Enver Hohxa dies
1991 - The collapse of the communist system in Albania
1992 March – The Albanian Democratic Party (PDsh) wins the elections. Sali Berisha becomes the Albanian president
1996 May – The DPA wins the general election in a climate of violence and thanks to electoral frauds
1997 February, March – The fraudulent pyramid schemes collapse and the country falls into chaos
1997 June, July - The Albanian Socialist Party (PS) wins the elections organized under a foreign supervision and in the presence of a multinational peacekeeping military force
1999 March, June – Albania is overwhelmed by 500 thousands refugees from Kosovo
2005 July – The DPA wins the new electoral competition and return to power

Annex 2: List of interviewees

Unrecorded interviews (carried out during summer 1999) with:

Chiodi, Luisa (2007), Transnational Policies of Emancipation or Colonization?: civil society promotion in post-communist Albania
European University Institute
10.2870/25233
NGO representatives:

1. Altin Goxha and Genci Muçollari, Albanian Youth Council, President and Vice president
2. Arbian Mazniku, Debate Program of Soros Foundation, Director
3. Artan Spahiu, Executive Director, Albanian NGOs Forum
4. Diana Culi, Independent Forum of Albanian Women, President
5. Elidon Lamani, Youth Center Vlora, Coordinator
6. Elsa Ballauri, President, Albanian Human Rights Group
7. Ermal Iljriani, DelfiXS Youth Center Tirana, Coordinator,
8. Flutura Laknori Xhabija, Professional and Business Women Association, President
9. Gjergj Trola, Young Artist of Scene, Director
10. Gramoz Dudushi, Crystal Club – Social Action, Executive Director
11. Ledia Lazeri Hoxha, Counseling Center For Woman and Girls, Counsellor
12. Miranda Gaçe, Society for Democratic Culture, Executive Director
13. Sevim Arbana, Useful to Albanian Women, President
14. Shyqyri Shubashi, Albanian Red Cross, President
15. Tatjana Daci, Albanian Health for All Center, President
16. Valentina Leskaj and Ornela Abazi, Family Planning Association, Director and Project Coordinator
17. Vjollca Meçaj, Women Lawyer Association, President
18. Adrian Vaso, Acquarius, Environmental Organisation
19. Arben Puto, Albanian Helsinki Committee, Director

Public officials:

20. Alfred Kociolari, ONG department, Ministry of Labour
21. Adem Tamo, Faculty of Social Science University of Tirana, Dean

Intellectuals:

22. Kristo Frasher, Academy of Science, former Vice president
23. Fatos Lubonja, writer

Journalists:

24. Linda Spahia, Reuter, Correspondent
25. Remzi Lani, Albanian Media Institute, Executive Director
26. Rudina Xhunga, TV Klan, Journalist

Think-tanks:

27. Artan Hoxha, Institute for Contemporary Studies, Research Director
28. Vasfi Baruti, Independent Center of Sociological Studies Eureka, President

INGOs representative:

29. Nicola Mai, ARCS, Youth Center Supervisor

IOs representative:

30. Penny L. Martin, NGO Liaison Officer, OSCE
31. Terry Pizner, Community Service, UNHCR
32. Valli Corbanese, UNDP-UNOPS, Chief Technical Advisor
33. Eleonor Monbiot, Humanitarian Information Center HIC, UNHCR

Albanians representing IOs:

34. Juliana Hohxa, ORT/USAID Democracy Network in Albania, Country Director
35. Piro Misha, Book House Open Society Foundation, Director

Recorded interviews (carried out during the summer 2000) with:

IO representative:

1. Corbanese Valli, Chief Technical Advisor, UNDP-UNOPS;

INGOs representatives:

2. Patterson Kenneth, Country Director, International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC);
3. Marteen, Volunteer, Balkan Sunflowers;

Albanians representing donors:

4. Tola Dritan, Delegation of the European Commission in Albania; Phare programs
5. Hoxha Juliana, Country Director, ORT Albanian Democracy Network Program;

Albanian Officials

7. Dragoti Edmond, Vice Chairman, Tourism Development Committee
8. Zoto Naim, Spokesman, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs;

Journalists:

9. Kola Etiola, Journalist, Gazeta Shqipetare;
10. Nano Mustafa, Columnist, Shekulli;
11. Koda Saimir, Speaker of the program Radio Mania, Top Albania Radio;

NGOs representatives:

12. Hasani Eva, Director of Administrative Council, Social Dimention for Youth;
13. Dhima Ledia, Loan Officer, Albanian Partner in Micro-credit (P.Sh.M);
14. Tafaj Sinan, Vice-President, Association of Blind People of Albania;

Think-tank representative:

15. Kolpeja Vilma, Research Director, National Albanian Center for Social Studies (NACSS)