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# The Political Voice of the Czech Women's Movement

A Study of Gender Oriented Organizations in the Czech Republic and Their Channels of Influence

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# Abstract

The history of gender equality in the Czech Republic is long and diverse. This thesis aims to provide a concise mapping of its development, with the purpose to illustrate and explain factors that have consequences to this day. The principal focus of the study is the civic women's movement. Some attention is given to its historical development, but the main discussion concerns its current structure, activities and contributions to making Czech society more gender sensitive and gender equal.

Using a methodological framework based on theories of collective action and political influence, the thesis examines which strategies – formal and informal – Czech women's nongovernmental organizations and other gender oriented civic groups use to influence policy makers, as well as the public opinion. The analysis shows that the actors in the movement use a wide range of tactics and choose different strategies for different occasions. Thus the study supports the theoretical suggestion that the choice of strategies and working methods depends on the conditions in which the strategy is to be used.

Further, the study shows that the Czech women's movement is a very important driving force in the pursuit of gender equality in the Czech Republic. The lasting impression of the analysis made, is that more cooperation and better coordination between organizations and various activists would favor the movement as well as its cause.

*Key words:* gender equality, feminism, collective action, social movements, the women's movement, nongovernmental organizations, political influence, the Czech Republic, the European Union.

# Resumé

Historie rovných příležitostí mezi ženami a muži v České republice je dlouhodobá a různorodá. Cílem této práce je poskytnout výstižné zmapování vývoje rovných příležitostí se snahou popsat a vysvětlit faktory, které mají dopad dodnes. Hlavní pozornost této studie je zaměřena na občanské ženské hnutí. Částečná pozornost je věnována jeho vývoji, ale hlavní diskuze se zabývá současnou strukturou, aktivitami a přínosy hnutí, jež se podílejí na vytváření citlivějšího vnímání otázky rovných příležitostí v české společnosti.

Za použití metodického rámce, který je založen na teoriích společné solidarity a politického vlivu, tato práce zkoumá, které strategie – formální a neformální – používají české ženské nevládní organizace a další občanské skupiny zaměřené na problematiku rovných příležitostí, k ovlivnění zákonodárců (politiků) a veřejného mínění. Analýza ukazuje, že účastníci hnutí používají široký rejstřík taktik a pro různé příležitosti vybírají různorodé strategie. Tím tato studie podporuje teoretický názor, že výběr strategií a pracovních metod závisí na podmínkách, za kterých se strategie používá.

Kromě toho studie poukazuje na to, že české ženské hnutí je v záležitosti rovných příležitostí v České republice důležitou hnací silou. Nejdůležitějším aspektem v závěru provedené analýzy je, že samotnému hnutí, jakož i celému procesu, by prospěla větší spolupráce a lepší koordinace.

*Klíčová slova:* rovné příležitosti, feminismus, společná solidarita, společenská hnutí, ženské hnutí, nevládní organizace, politický vliv, Česká republika, Evropská unie.

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# List of Abbreviations

CR	the Czech Republic (Česká republika, ČR)
CSDP	the Czech Social Democratic Party (Česká Strana Sociálně Demokratická, ČSSD)
CSWU	the Czechoslovak Women's Union
CSWC	the Czechoslovak Women's Council
EU	the European Union (Evropská unie, EU)
GCEOWM	the Government Council for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (Rada vlády pro rovné příležitosti žen a mužů)
GCHR	the Government Council for Human Rights (Rada vlády ČR pro lidská práva)
GFP	Gender Focal Points
MLSA	the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (Ministerstvo Práce a Sociálních Věcí, MPSV)
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
SMO	Social Movement Organization
UN	the United Nations (Organizace spojených národů, OSN)
WNC	Women's National Council (Ženská národní rada, ŽNR)

# 1 Introduction

When discussing gender equality and women's political influence in society, the main focus often is on women's political participation in the formal – typically representative – political structures of a country. As important a measure as this may be for analyzing women's position in a society, it fails to capture the entire scope of political action and societal influence. I believe that in order to fully understand, and properly value, women's actions and place in the public sphere, an expanded conceptualization of “the political” is required, one that does not focus exclusively on legislatures and party politics, but attends as well to a wider range of fora, in effect the civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In the Czech Republic (CR), where women comprise about 70 percent of NGO members while the official public realm is masculinized, and where gender related issues have a very low priority on the official political agenda, this is even more necessary (Ferber *et al.*, 2003: 421).

No analysis of a post-Communist society can refrain from taking into account the peculiarities of State socialism and the traces which such a system leaves behind. Following the overthrow of Communism, the CR, as well as the other countries in the region, has experienced an important shift in the power relation between the official political sphere and the civic sphere. Before 1989, the parliament had relatively large numbers of women members, but it was a weak political institution (real power was centered in the inner circles of the Communist Party, which were dominated by men) and women's political power was thus rather illusory. The political activity within the civil society on the other hand, which at this time in practice was equivalent to the underground dissident movement, was in many aspects the men's arena. Prominent dissidents were mostly men and it was they who articulated the meanings of civil society and of the so called anti-politics<sup>1</sup> against the state. Women were primarily support personnel, crucial, but less visible and less acknowledged. After the velvet revolution, as the parliament was turned into the dominant political institution, quite different gender arrangements emerged. The overwhelming maleness of parliament, as well in membership as in discourse, now contrasts with the relatively greater presence of women – and women's issues – in the NGOs and groups in civil society. (Gal *et al.*, 2000a: 95)

Taking this situation as a point of departure, this thesis will examine the

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<sup>1</sup> An expression coined by Hungarian writer György Konrád, referring to a form of passive resistance and a method of dealing with reality that shuns actual confrontation. (Konrád, 1985)



gender oriented section of Czech civil society and its political voice.

## 1.1 Purpose of the Study and Research Problem

The study has several purposes. One is to provide a general description of how feminism has spread in the Czech lands throughout history and how the situation regarding gender equality has evolved. As literature covering this is already available, this is not the principal contribution of the study. Nevertheless it constitutes a necessary backdrop for the main analysis to come.

The principal object of study in the thesis are Czech gender oriented civic organizations and their activities. My study begins with a mapping of the development of the modern women's movement in the country. While the general outline of feminism and gender equality in the region stretches back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the description of the gender oriented activism is narrower in scope. It begins after the end of World War II, since it is these recent decades that most distinctly have shaped the form and function of today's women's movement.

Having described and explained this development, I continue to the main purpose of the study, which is to examine the methods of action and strategies for gaining political influence of the organizations in question. This part of the thesis is what makes this study stand out in comparison to other works on the subject, since, as far as I can tell, no other systematic examination of the methods of action of the Czech women's movement has been made.

The explicit research questions that I will work with are:

- How has gender equality and feminist thought developed in the Czech lands throughout history? How does this affect the women's movement today?
- In which context did the modern Czech women's movement evolve and how have different conditions affected the structure and role of the movement? How is the movement organized today?
- How do Czech women's NGOs work to influence policy making? Which channels of political influence are available, how are these channels used and with what effect? Are some channels more effective than others and, if so, why?
- Can any conclusions be drawn regarding the role of women's NGOs in the quest for gender equality in the Czech Republic?

By focusing on these questions, this case study seeks to examine and analyze the Czech women's movement specifically, but also to make a contribution to the general literature on NGOs and social movements. For example, by studying and discussing the ways in which Czech NGOs interact with government institutions, this study will yield insight into the ability of NGO based women's movements to influence state policy and thus contribute to the general literature on state – NGO linkages. In the same manner, the other channels of influence analyzed in the

study – such as influencing the public opinion, lobbying and electioneering – each contribute to increase the general knowledge of NGO and social movement activity. This contribution is especially valuable since the study of women's movements is rather marginalized in comparative social movement scholarship (Beckwith, 2000: 458). By focusing on a women's movement, this study, although not comparative in scope, may thus indirectly contribute to even out this imbalance.

Furthermore, this research may be valuable from yet another perspective, namely within the field of transition and democratization studies. Without the independent activities and organizations in civil society, it is said that democracy is not likely to be consolidated in newly democratized societies. For this reason the civic sector is widely regarded as an integral part in any democratization process. Applying a gender perspective, as I do in this study, is one way of evaluating the quality of the democratization process. While this perspective will not be discussed further in the study, the thesis may be of value for research on that subject.

Last but not least, a motivation for the subject of the thesis is of course gender inequality in itself. Not until the goal of gender equality (thus making the normative assumption that that is the goal) is fulfilled, will the relevance of this subject disappear.

## 1.2 Material and Method

The material which has been used for the empirical parts of this thesis is of both primary and secondary character. The theoretical part of the thesis on the other hand is based entirely on secondary material. I have studied an extensive number of literature and articles in order to create a theoretical framework relevant for my research problem. The texts that have been used are written in Czech, English or Swedish.

In connection to the discussion on the material below, some methodological considerations will be presented. A more detailed description of the method used however, is made in chapter two.

### 1.2.1 Primary Material

The primary material consists of seven semi-structured expert interviews, carried out in the CR in 2006 and 2007. Choosing interviewees was primarily done by identifying persons with extensive knowledge of the subjects of gender equality and feminism, as well as with good insight into the work of women's NGOs in the CR. Finding out which persons would be suitable as sources for the thesis was not very complicated, since it was actually rather obvious, judging from the academic literature and media coverage on the topic, who are the most prominent activists and experts in the field. I purposely refrained from choosing interviewees who

solely represent the civic sector, in order to secure differing and wide-ranging perspectives and views of the research problem. In order to narrow down the planned number of interviews to a manageable number, I decided to categorize the potential respondents according to the main public arenas in society: the political, civic and academic.

I had understood from the literature that the political interest in gender issues is generally very low in the CR and therefore I restricted the number of interviews with party political actors to one. Having done that, the choice was close to evident and fell on Mrs. Anna Čurdová, MP for the Czech Social Democratic Party, Chairman of the Governmental Council for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in 2002-2006 and a gender equality advocate of many years.

In choosing respondents from the civic sector, two NGOs stood out as particularly suitable for my study. One of these was *Gender Studies*<sup>2</sup>, which has been the most important platform for gender issues in the country since 1989, where I interviewed the Director at the time, Alena Králíková. The second organization was *Fórum 50 %*, which is a rather new organization that has grown fast and received much publicity. There I spoke to Director Lenka Bennerová. In addition to these Czech perspectives from the civic sector, I wanted to get a picture of what role international women's NGOs have played in the country after the Communist breakdown. For this reason I turned to the *Open Society Institute*, which is a private operating and grant making foundation created in 1993 by George Soros and working to shape public policy to promote, among other things, gender equality, civil society and international cooperation. There I interviewed Program Development Officer and lawyer Monika Ladmanová.

Last but not least I turned to the academic sector, where I was fortunate enough to arrange interviews with three of the country's most distinguished researchers on gender issues. They are Hana Havelková and Petr Pavlík at the Department of Gender Studies at Charles University and Hana Hašková at the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. While Havelková belongs to the handful of women who revived the feminist movement in the country in the 1990s, Hašková and Pavlík belong to a younger generation of feminist scholars. Hašková's main focus is within the field of gender and sociology, and Pavlík has specialized in gender and the media as well as gender politics in the CR and methods for implementing gender equality.

Practically all of the interviewees have extensive experience from the civic sector, as participants in it or from cooperating with it and/or conducting research about it. They have been able, and most willing, to provide me with highly satisfactory information that not only refers to their specific area of activity, but which has been most valuable for providing a nuanced description of the current situation as well as the historic development.

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<sup>2</sup> In this context the term "Gender Studies" refers to a specific NGO. In other parts of the study the same term is used to refer to the academic subject.

All respondents live in Prague, which is the unquestionable center for the Czech women's movement. They all, since many years, work with questions concerning gender equality in one way or another. Thus they are all close to the research problem, both in time and in space.

There were certainly other actors that could have been interviewed as well, but because of time and space constraints I decided to limit the number of interviews to seven. As time and interview sessions passed, I became increasingly convinced that seven interviews would suffice. Although new information emerged in each interview, a clear pattern of answers developed fairly early in the process, which has contributed to securing the validity of the analysis.

In principle, all interviewees were asked the same set of core questions, with only slight modifications to make the questions suite the respondent's background and area of expertise. As I sought to evoke personal thoughts, reflections and opinions from the interviewees, my interview technique centered on *open* questions, which gives the respondents the opportunity to develop their own lines of argument and allows for unexpected perspectives and aspects to emerge. All interviews were conducted in English, in order to make them accessible to a wider public. The core questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

### 1.2.2 Secondary Material

As for the secondary material, the literature used is predominantly from the period after the velvet revolution, although some older books have been used for the historical section of the thesis. New forms of political participation in the East Central Europe, including the CR, have received considerable scholarly attention since the 1990s. Within this scholarly work, the role of women in politics has also been discussed and documented. In this field of literature, two major trends can be discerned. The early years of post-socialism saw a growing literature on rather ideological discussions on feminism and gender structures in Czech society, represented by authors such as Jiřina Šiklová, Alena Heitlinger, Marianne A. Ferber, Phyllis Hutton Raabe, Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller. In the recent decade the focus has shifted to more pragmatic issues and practical aspects of gender equality and women's voice in society. Among authors who have published significant works in this category are Alena Křížková, Petra Rakušanová, Susan Gal, Gail Kligman, Amanda Sloat and Martin Potůček. As for the most prominent researchers on gender issues in the CR, such as Hana Havelková, Marie Čermáková and Hana Hašková, they have typically followed – and in many cases led – this development from one main focus to another, and important contributions from these authors can thus be found in both categories.

Aside from the literature just mentioned, this study is based on the literature and theories of collective action and social movements as well as on a political science perspective concerning the possibilities of social movements to influence political action and society. This combination, which is further described in chapter two, is not unique in itself, but as for the Czech context it does not appear – to my knowledge – to be examined.

### 1.2.3 Methodological Considerations and Delimitations

Is it possible to acquire any absolute and objective knowledge or should research rather be seen as the subjective thoughts and analysis of individual scientists? This question, illustrating the origin of the positivistic and hermeneutic debating schools, is considered as the most fundamental question within the field of social sciences. (Bjereld *et al.*, 2002) I believe that the result of this thesis has been colored by my personal assumptions, reflections and interpretations, and hence a hermeneutic viewpoint is taken. The evaluations and analysis I have carried out during my work, relies on my previous knowledge, experiences and understandings of the world. However, by consciously acknowledging this, I am confident that I will be able to keep the distance required for obtaining scientific validity.

This said regarding my general scientific perspective, I now turn to discussing the methodology of interview based research. The most fundamental principle for interview based research is to supply a framework which makes it possible for the respondents to express their own opinions in their own words (Petersson, 2003: 41). For this reason, the interview questions for this thesis have been constructed as open questions, as was described in section 1.2.1. However, a completely objective framework does not exist – not even the most confirmed positivist would suggest that – and a certain influence from the interviewer is inevitable (*Ibid.*). Therefore, it is necessary for the interviewer to have this in mind at all times and at least strive to be as neutral as possible during the interview.

Another complication in interview situations may be the risk that the respondents reply in the manner which “sounds best” to them or what they think the interviewer wants to hear. This is connected to what the respondent may think that he or she is expected to answer, given his or hers nationality, political color, gender, age or some other characteristic. (Petersson, 2003: 47) This complication is too difficult to evade, and must therefore be taken into consideration in the researcher’s analysis and evaluation of the respondent’s answers.

Yet an important aspect of interview based studies is whether the interviewer has an inside or outside perspective. It is to be expected that an interviewer from another environment and background will get certain types of answers – or at least answers expressed in a certain kind of way – than an interviewer who is working in his or her own milieu. In the second case the respondent and the interviewer have common frames of reference to rely on and thus the respondent’s answers will most likely be more straightforward and, perhaps, closer to the true opinion of the respondent. Closely connected to this problematic is the tendency that responses to questions vary depending on the personal characteristics of the interviewer vis-à-vis the respondent, again regarding aspects such as age, gender and differences in the societal hierarchy. (Petersson, 2003: 47-48) In the case of this study, the fact that I am a woman was a clear advantage in practically all of the interview sessions, since it gave me a common framework of reference with the (female) respondents, which created a sense of mutual confidence. And although I was not born and raised in the CR, my strong connections to the country and good knowledge and understanding of Czech society also helped to

bridge the gap between me as an interviewer and my respondents. Apart from this, the unexpressed, but unmistakable, understanding that both interviewer and respondent believed that gender issues are important matters and the mutual support for the feminist perspective, also contributed to creating a favorable atmosphere during the interviews. As I soon learned from the interview sessions, the fact that I live in Sweden – which in the CR generally is considered to have come a long way concerning gender issues – also seemed to have an effect on the manner in which the respondents acted and formulated their answers. While comments initially tended to take as their point of departure a comparison between the Czech situation and the Swedish – often in a rather excusing and uncomfortable manner – my showing an understanding for the specific Czech context seemed to ease the mood and make the respondent's attitude more straightforward.

In order to maintain the extent of the study within the scope of a bachelor's thesis, some delimitation is necessary. In time the focus of the study lies on the development following the overthrow of the Communist regime in 1989, even if a look in the rear-view mirror is necessary in order to fully grasp the recent and current developments. Another delimitation is connected to the political structure of a country, or – if you will – geography. In general women's movements tend to have a strong emphasis on national mobilization, as opposed to local or regional activities (Beckwith, 2000: 451). This is true also for the CR, which is why the study only concerns activities at state level (controlled and initiated from the capital city). Furthermore the focus lies on the Czech context, although international influence and partnerships are included to some extent because of the crucial role they played particularly in the 1990s.

## 1.3 Central Concepts

Before concluding this introductory chapter, it is necessary to identify and define the most central concepts of the thesis, in order to clarify, and avoid misinterpretations of, the usage of them. While some terms will be defined in this section, others will be dealt with in the chapter on theory.

### 1.3.1 Collective Action and Social Movements

*Collective action*, which is at the heart of any civic activity, is a term which has formulations and theories in many areas of the social sciences. In this study I will focus on the theories used within sociology and political science, which define collective action as “the pursuit of a goal or set of goals by more than one person” (McLean *et al.*, 2003: 89).

One type of collective action is that which takes place within *social movements*. One of the most prominent scholars of social movements, American political scientist and sociologist Sidney Tarrow, defines them as “collective

challenges to elites, authorities, other groups or cultural codes, by people with common purposes and social solidarities” (Tarrow, 1998: 4). Expressed more plainly, social movements can be defined as political formations, in which people are organized around certain ideas and beliefs and seek to bring about social change. (Silliman, 1999: 47; McLean *et al.*, 2003: 499)

Social movements typically have loose and informal organizational structures, yet they are not simply protests, demonstrations or riots, but more sustained than that. However, they are less institutionalized than for example political parties and trade unions. (Barry *et al.*, 2007: 353) Maybe the easiest way to describe a social movement is as a kind of network, which may either include formal organizations or not (della Porta, 2006: 26).

Social movement researchers usually distinguish between “old” social movements, which focused mainly on the issues of labor and nations, and “new” social movements, such as the women’s, environmental, lesbian and gay, and animal welfare movements of more recent decades. New social movements consist of numerous *social movement organizations* (SMOs). (Hilson, 2002: 239) In line with Martin (1990: 185), I define an *organization* as “any relatively enduring (existing for more than a few sessions or meetings) group of people, which is structured to pursue goals that are collectively defined”. SMOs are often labeled *interest groups*, *pressure groups* and *nongovernmental* or *nonprofit organizations* (McLean *et al.*, 2003: 266). I will make no distinction between these terms, but use them all interchangeably, but with a special liking for the well established and handy abbreviation for nongovernmental organizations, NGOs.

### 1.3.2 Feminism and Women’s NGOs as a Social Movement

The normative ground of this thesis is based on feminist theory. Defining feminism is not easily done in just a few sentences, since it is a broad, multifaceted political orientation, rather than a single ideology. In an effort to keep the operationalization of the concept as simple as possible, I agree with Katzenstein, as cited in Martin (1990: 184), that “feminism is (minimally) the recognition that women, compared to men, are an oppressed group and that women’s problems are a result of discrimination. Women’s status is shaped by processes of structural inequality, not individual actions or circumstances.” Feminism’s ideological perspective may be liberal, radical, socialist, Marxist, lesbian or other, but they are all pro-woman and favor change (be it by different means) to improve women’s collective status, living conditions, opportunities, power, and self-esteem. (Martin, 1990: 184, 191)

The collective activity connected to women’s rights and gender equality goes far back in history. Generally, feminist activism is however identified with two waves of heightened activism in Europe and the USA. The *first wave* appeared towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuing into the early 20<sup>th</sup>, demanding civil and political equality. The *second wave* refers to the development of new demands and a new rhetoric which grew strong in the 1960s and 1970s, concentrating on sexual and family rights for women. (Barry *et al.*, 2007: 355)

Following that the women's movement is a social movement, its successes do not depend just on political action, but also on the way in which the ideas associated with the movement has led women, and ultimately men, to rethink hitherto accepted and largely unchallenged notions about the roles of women in society, thus providing a means of introducing new ways of thinking to the political agenda (McLean *et al.*, 2003: 500).

Since the object of study in this thesis is the activities of Czech women's NGOs, I must also define the concepts of *feminist organizations* or *women's organizations*. Again following Martin (1990: 185), I perceive an organization as feminist, if it meets any one of the following criteria: a) has feminist ideology; b) has feminist guiding lines; c) has feminist goals; and/or d) produces feminist outcomes. Of these four, criterion c) needs some further attention. These feminist goals can be *internal*, helping members see women as an oppressed group and/or encouraging women to change by improving their political awareness, knowledge and/or self-esteem, or *external*. The external goals can either be to serve women generally, through providing education or services such as political education, personal counseling, health care, and shelter from batterers, or aiming at improving women's status and opportunities in society. (Martin, 1990: 190, 193) As will become evident later on, I must adapt this definition slightly, in order to make it applicable to my object of study. Therefore I add "intentionally or unintentionally" to the fourth criterion, thus making it d) produces feminist outcomes, intentionally or unintentionally, since many Czech women's NGOs do not explicitly work for feminist outcomes, which will be explained further in section 4.2. Another adaptation to the Czech context is that I will refrain from using the term feminist in describing these organizations and will instead refer to them as women's NGOs or gender oriented NGOs. The reason for this will become clear in sections 3.5.3 and 4.2.

## 1.4 Disposition

This study is divided into seven chapters. As has been mentioned already, chapter two describes the theoretical framework of the study. Chapters three and four provide a historical overview of feminist theory and action in Czech society and in the civic sector in particular. These chapters also provide the empirical base for the analysis in chapters five and six, which are structured to correspond to the chosen theoretical framework and seek to discuss and evaluate the strategies and activities of the Czech women's movement. The last chapter contains concluding discussions of the research questions and a note on future research.



## 2 Theoretical Framework

To answer my research questions, I will use a qualitative approach and interpret my primary and secondary material against the backdrop of a theoretical framework which comprises civil society's channels of political influence. The theoretical framework of the study and the method of procedure are described in this chapter.

### 2.1 SMOs and Channels of Political Influence

The channels of political influence available to SMOs can be divided between *formal* (institutionalized), and *informal* (non-institutionalized) channels. Further, both of these can be divided between *direct* and *indirect* channels of influence, leaving us with four categories in all. (della Porta *et al.*, 2006: 28)

#### 2.1.1 Formal Channels of Influence

Of the two formal channels, the direct channel consists of different *institutionalized mechanisms for dialogue*. Examples of such mechanisms are councils and commissions (often advisory) made up of representatives of government and SMOs. Another example can be found in the area of labor market regulations, namely the tripartite corporatist structures for collective bargaining between the government and the two parties on the labor market. (della Porta *et al.*, 2006: 28; Öberg, 1997: 68-69)

The indirect channel on the other hand, is representative in character and essentially is equivalent to *elections*. From the NGO or social movement perspective, seeking political influence through the formal channel of elections requires a formalizing of the movement, in other words reorganization into some sort of political party, and for it to run for public office. (*Ibid.*) Although this is not the most frequently used strategy, it occurs from time to time. A recent example from a national women's movement is the establishment of a feminist political party called *The Feminist Initiative* (Feministiskt initiativ) in Sweden. (Internet 5)

Although these formal channels may allow social movements to become quite influential, they are generally not as accessible to NGOs as the informal channels are, and thus not as common (della Porta *et al.*, 2006: 28). This is simply because civil society actors are not institutionalized and part of the "system", but independent from it.

### 2.1.2 Informal Channels of Influence

The direct informal channel of influence is made up of what is often referred to as *direct action* towards politicians and policy makers, whereas the indirect informal channel consists of strategies and methods for *influencing public opinion* (della Porta *et al.*, 2006: 28).

Talking about direct action, one can distinguish between two main tactics, *lobbying* and *protest* (della Porta *et al.*, 2006: 165; Hilson, 2002: 239). Lobbying can be defined as attempts to “exert influence on the formation or implementation of public policy” (McLean *et al.*, 2003: 314). While attempts to influence the formation of policy are directed towards the elected officials in the legislative arena of parliaments, influencing the implementation of policy is done by lobbying executive actors, such as civil servants in government authorities (McCarthy *et al.*, 1996: 291, 300). Protest, is often described as a political resource of the powerless and of outsiders. A characteristic of this method is its capacity to mobilize public opinion and put pressure on decision-makers through unorthodox forms of action, such as demonstration, petition signing, occupation and boycott. The tactic has been successfully used in for example the American civil rights movement as well as in the peace movement and the global justice movement (often referred to as the anti-globalization movement). Protest activities may of course influence public opinion as well and thus the tactic borders to the indirect informal channel of influence. (della Porta *et al.*, 2006: 165-166)

The informal indirect channel of influence and its various methods for influencing public opinion mainly takes place in the public arena. This is the most accessible arena for SMOs, since it is decentralized and allows the organizations to use a wide range of tactics in their work. One common strategy among NGOs to influence public opinion and change social norms is to work for generating grassroots education by arranging conferences and seminars, distributing literature and newsletters, by door-to-door canvassing or by rallies and open-air meetings. Activities whose characteristics may differ in detail, but which serve the same purpose. (McCarthy *et al.*, 1996: 294-295, 303) Using PR campaigns and advertisement in the media is another important, although not entirely uncomplicated, strategy for organizations and pressure groups in their efforts to get their message across to the public. Being an expensive method, its usage may be limited where funding is scarce, which is often the case for NGOs. In spite of this, the method is rather widespread, specifically among actors who lack other means of access to policy makers. (Öberg, 1997: 86) However, paid advertisement is of course not the only way to influence public opinion through the media. By getting journalists to cover the topic in question, or by writing polemical articles themselves, SMOs can obtain widespread publicity for free. In addition, articles have higher credibility, and more readers, than advertisements. Writing press releases and turning media’s attention to published reports, opinion surveys and other types of material is therefore a common strategy for SMOs. An important window of display, and thus a possible source of influence to others, is of course the NGOs’ own web pages. In order for the general public to find their way to

these pages, media attention and/or advertisement and campaigns are however essential. (Baumgartner *et al.*, 1998: 34, 152) As for the above mentioned reports and surveys, many SMOs indeed make valuable contributions on this part. An important partner in producing this sort of material is of course the academia. In the case of the women's movement, the academic sector has an additional value for SMOs by having established gender studies as a scholarly field. The academia thus makes important contributions to raising public awareness on gender issues in two ways: by conducting research which highlights salient issues and by spreading knowledge through education. Teaching, then, should be considered as a sort of activism too. (Pavlík, 11-27-2006)

## 2.2 Analytical Framework of the Study

Based on the variables explained above, the analytical framework to be used for discussing the strategic alternatives for Czech women's NGOs can be illustrated graphically as below. The formal strategies of influence will be examined in chapter 5, while the analysis of the informal strategies can be found in chapter 6.

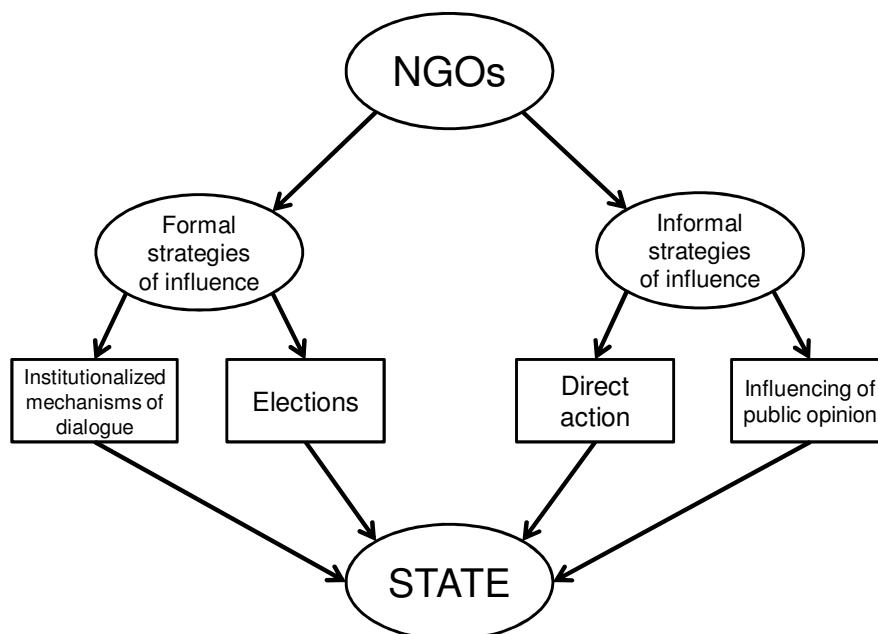


Figure 1: Analytical framework of the formal and informal strategies of influence available to NGOs.

## 2.3 Choice of Strategy

The choice of which strategy to use typically differs from situation to situation, depending mainly on two types of factors: *internal organizational characteristics* and on the *external political context*. Examples of organizational characteristics

that are expected to affect the choice of strategies are aspects such as resource availability (i.e. finances) and the personal predispositions of staff members, such as professional and educational background. Political context may include for example the receptiveness of the government to the group's position and the importance attached to the issue by the public. (Hilson, 2002: 240; Baumgartner *et al.*, 1998: 162-163) Depending on how these internal and external factors combine, the range of tactics actually available for SMOs to exert political influence varies across time and space. Organizations must therefore adapt their strategies according to these changing circumstances. To minimize the risk of missing an opportunity to bring about change, organizations should organize across multiple political venues and be ready to employ a mixture of tactics. (Beckwith, 2000: 447-448)

I do not intend to analyze all internal and external factors connected to the Czech women's movement systematically since that lies outside the scope of this thesis. However, certain factors, which have a particularly important impact on the work of Czech women's groups, will be discussed as they occur. These are funding, public opinion and government receptivity to an NGO's position. Of these, the third needs to be explained and developed a bit further.

A government's receptivity to an NGO's position is connected to the government's overall attitude towards the civic sector in general, which may differ, depending on the ideological base of the government. Any government has the power to contribute to the resources of the civic sector, by passing suitable legislation and creating a favorable political atmosphere that promotes civic sector development and by providing public money to support this sector. Whether a government is actively willing to use this power or not is thus a crucial issue. (Potůček, 2000: 111) At the same time, while the readiness of a government to provide good conditions for SMO activity is helpful, it is not sufficient. For social movements to be able to affect public policy, political elites must also be receptive to the actual claims of the SMOs and willing to change policy accordingly. (Hilson, 2002: 242) For this reason, the political views of politicians or influential officials are key to the success of an SMO's seeking of influence, and an important strategy is thus to seek allies inside the system. One way of obtaining this is through a tactic usually referred to as *double militancy*, which is particularly used by women's NGOs around the world. By locating sympathizers or women activists in political parties or in the government, the strategy is to transform the non-feminist venue in question internally, by introducing feminist thinking from the inside. Aside from spreading a feminist perspective among colleagues, the activist, simply by being in the public eye, has excellent opportunities to draw public attention to gender equality issues. As, statistically speaking, the main prospects for allies to the women's movement are women, it is important that women are active in the representative political institutions of a country. (Beckwith, 2000: 442-445)

## 3 Gender Equality, Feminism and Feminist Action in the Czech Lands

In order to understand the current standing of gender issues in Czech society and the environment in which women's NGOs work, a peak in the historical rear-view mirror is necessary.

### 3.1 Early Egalitarian Thinking

Women have played a crucial role in several significant events throughout Czech history and the tradition of egalitarianism stretches far back. As early as in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Hussite movement emphasized equality and demanded that everyone be educated to read and understand the Bible, which should be available in the "language of the people". (Hanáková, 1998) The founder of the movement, Jan Hus, was specifically interested in teaching and educating women, who in many aspects gained particularly from the developments in this period. (Johansson, 2002: 52, 67) As a consequence of the demands of the Hussites, a strong tradition in education developed in the Czech lands. In later times the necessity of education for both sexes has often been taken for granted as vital for the good of the nation. (Wolchik, 1996: 526)

During the Czech National Revival, between the 1770s and the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, women had a chance to participate very actively in the forming of the country's history. The revival was a reaction to almost 300 years of foreign rule under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, during which German was the official language, which had led to that the Czech language and culture was on the verge of disappearing. The revival quickly grew to a massive cultural movement, which in a few decades managed to resuscitate both the Czech culture and language. During this period as well, the importance of education for both men and women was stressed. One of the most prominent female figures of the revival was Božena Němcová, author of the novel and national treasure *Babička* (*The Grandmother*) as well as many folktale collections and short stories. Němcová was an unconventional and emancipated woman and together with her husband she was active in nationalist circles at the time. (*Ibid.*; Hanáková, 1998)

While the position of women in society was improved through the activities of these movements, it was, however, never the central theme, but rather a kind of "bonus" that followed more or less automatically. A Czech women's movement in its own right first arose in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The approach to women's concerns differed though, and the movement was actually divided in two

fractions. The first, following in the footsteps of the national revival, had obvious nationalistic motives. Its principal task was considered to be fostering Czech women into good mothers, in order to help the male part of the population build an independent nation in the future. The main objective of this fraction thus was national independence, rather than women's liberation and equal rights. Parallel to this nationalistic fraction, a movement striving explicitly towards gender equality developed, opposing the view of women as men's "helpers". Although the ambitions of this fraction were more in line with those of modern women's movements, the nationalistic fraction for long was the dominant of the two and thus cannot be dismissed, in particular since it actually was very successful in areas such as women's education and women's entrance into the labor market. (Věšíňová-Kalivodová, 2005: 423)

### 3.2 The First Republic and Her Feminist President

The above mentioned aspirations concerning women's education and involvement in the labor market and society in general, were shared by the founder and president of the first Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Highly influenced by his wife, American feminist Charlotte Garrigue (whose maiden name he adopted as his middle name, a practice unheard of at the time), Masaryk supported education for women, lectured on women's issues and defended their rights as early as in the 1880s – his essays may even be considered the actual beginnings of Czech feminist political writings. (Ferber *et al.*, 2003: 411) As president, Masaryk played a vital part in making Czech society more gender equal, by, among other things, supporting making higher education accessible for all women in 1918 and entitling women the right to vote in 1920 (Hanáková, 1998). Thus, Czech women did not have to fight as hard for these political rights as the suffragettes and others and they achieved rather easily a status that women in other countries reached only after bitter struggles (Ferber *et al.*, 2003: 411).

This does not mean that there was no civic activity in the country. Parallel to the interwar developments in the political sphere, a vibrant civil society emerged, which, as opposed to the women's movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, focused explicitly on gender equality. Many associations were founded, which worked to support women in society, lobby for women's rights and promote women's education. Although women's issues were now at the core of these ambitions and activities, the pattern of the two distinct fractions lived on. Separated now along the lines of ideology, one fraction was liberal while the other was to be found at the other end of the political spectrum in groupings and associations connected to the socialist and Communist movements. (Věšíňová-Kalivodová, 2005: 424) The liberal fraction was a kind of extension of the recently described fraction that had sprung out of the national liberation movement. Its main organization, the *Women's National Council* (WNC), became the established center of the Czech women's movement and the leadership of the council was closely linked to the liberal democratic politics of Masaryk. (Feinberg, 2003: 214)

### 3.3 The Nazi Occupation

The German occupation during World War II brought about many setbacks for gender equality in Czechoslovakia. Following the invasion in 1938, the National Assembly was dispersed and political parties and many civic organizations (including the WNC) were banned. The political institution that replaced the democratic parliament was only open to men. And as there were no elections and no other way for the public to influence the political process, the exclusion of women from this institution effectively excluded them from politics entirely. In one fell swoop, Czech women were deprived of the political equality they had gained at the beginning of the interwar period. (Feinberg, 2003: 220-222)

In addition to the curtailment of women's political rights, women's position in the labor market also deteriorated during the occupation. For instance, all married women working in the public administration were dismissed, based on the argument that they were needed in the homes to raise healthy children for the "sake of the nation". Then, the German declaration of total war in 1941 again changed women's professional circumstances, since they now were needed in the factories. This resulted in a double work load for women, as they were expected to take the main, often full, responsibility for the work in the household at the same time as participating in the labor market. (Feinberg, 2003: 228) As Czech women were about to learn, this was not the last they would see of this double burden.

It is important to note however, that the deteriorating level of gender equality during the war, was in general not conceived by Czech women (or men) as the consequence of patriarchy and male oppression. Rather, the threat was seen as gender blind and coming from an external enemy, who worsened the conditions for men and women alike, may it be differently in detail. Women and men thus faced this oppression side by side and in general the fight for women's rights was again fought as part of a national liberation movement. (Hanáková, 1998)

### 3.4 The Communist Regime and Gender Equality: a Clash between Ideology and Reality

As a consequence of the development during the war, the socialist fraction of the women's movement grew stronger in the years following the liberation in 1945. Feelings of betrayal related to the Munich Agreement and the ensuing orientation towards the Soviet Union paved the way for the Communist takeover in 1948. The party's calls for equality and emancipation sounded attractive and promising for many women – particularly those in the socialist faction of the women's movement. (Věšíňová-Kalivodová, 2005: 424) As was to become clear however, these calls were neither as persuasive, persistent nor candid as many female voters would have wished. Rather, and in line with Marxist Leninist ideology, the question of gender equality in Communist policy was subordinated to equality

between the classes, and it was simply assumed that the former automatically would entail the latter. Accordingly, the question of gender equality was soon overshadowed by class equality. (Gal *et al.*, 2000a: 5)

The following sections describe the conditions of women in the Communist system in Czechoslovakia.

### 3.4.1 Women's Position in the Labor Market and in the Home

After seizing power, in the face of war losses and in the interest of industrialization, a massive propaganda campaign was launched by the regime, aimed at getting both sexes to enter the workplace and increase production. This was also part of the broader Communist commitment to homogenize and equalize the population, with the intention to eliminate all social distinctions, including gender, and construct "the new socialist man". No distinction was thus made between men and women – both sexes were defined primarily as workers. This produced a vast, sometimes forced, entry of women into the ranks of paid workers and the *right* to work in practice turned into an *obligation* to work. (Gal *et al.*, 2000a: 47) Married women were excepted from this obligation, but since one income was not enough to support a family, most women did not have a choice. (Hanáková, 1998) Even if this policy to some extent made women and children less dependent on husbands and fathers, they, together with men, became dependant on the state instead. Moreover, the conditions for men and women in the labor market were hardly equal. Even though many women went to work in heavy industry and took jobs considered unconventional for their sex, traditionally female occupations – such as light industry, office work, teaching and health care – still absorbed most of the women and thus maintained a segregated labor market. The law guaranteed equal pay for equal work, but, nevertheless, at the bottom of the scale were the branches where women made up the majority of employees. Within any given branch, the same was true – women's wages were at the bottom while men's were at the top. The statutory equality guarantee thus did not work in reality. (Scott, 1976: 2)

In the constant competition and mutual supervision that characterized the Cold War, not even the private sphere was safe from ideological intrusion. While the West promoted the nuclear family as a symbol of the "free world", the East moved in the opposite direction, embracing the collective. (Gal *et al.*, 2000a: 48) Washing machines, vacuum cleaners and other technological devices aimed at facilitating household chores, were soon found in each home in the US and western Europe. Here gender roles were clear and distinct and women's responsibility for the home and household was often her only responsibility, neatly presented in the *à la mode* concept of housewives. In the Communist bloc on the other hand, the "right" choice for women was paid labor and the state set up public childcare facilities and socialized tasks such as laundry and cooking in order to facilitate what today is often referred to as the "everyday puzzle" of combining a professional career with a family. (LaFont, 2001: 206) This should not be understood as an attempt to break down patriarchal structures, such



arguments had no place in state policy at the time. (Scott, 1976: 106) The traditional division of labor in the household remained intact and women continued to bear a double work load, which left them with less energy to make efforts in their professional lives. Many women consciously chose not to strive for ambitious professional careers in an attempt to balance their professional and private life. A parallel development took place within the family, when couples began to have fewer children. This was not so much for feminist reasons, but rather a consequence of economic hardship and a general disillusion and lack of faith in the political system and the future. (Věšíňová-Kalivodová 2005: 425) The declining birth rates in the 1960s and 1970s gave the regime reason to reevaluate the one sided propaganda image of women as dutiful workers. Worried party officials reinstated motherhood as a crucial responsibility of women to the state. The political emphasis thus shifted from policies of homogenization to policies that identified women as *different* from men, with special obligations to the state. By raising childcare benefits and prolonging maternity leave, the party hoped that more women would choose to have more children. This new policy came to increase the inequalities between the sexes even further, for two main reasons. The first is connected to the actual consequences of longer periods of maternity leave. Although the extended maternity leave was voluntary, the societal norm was such that mothers in general took care of their children rather than put them in nurseries and kindergartens. Furthermore, even if women were guaranteed their employment back after the leave, the long period of absence from the labor market obviously affected their career opportunities negatively. Also, the new policy contributed to deepen traditional gender roles, with obvious negative consequences for the equal standing of women and men. (Gal *et al.*, 2000a: 49)

### 3.4.2 Women in the Communist Political System

Officially, the Communist political system was designed as any modern democracy, with separate legislative, executive and judicial functions and a constitution which defined the responsibilities of each branch of government. In reality, however, all three branches were controlled by the Communist Party and its main political body, the Central Committee. Women figured in the committee only marginally, holding approximately 12 percent of the seats. (Rakušanová, 2003: 23) The same was true for the government. Between 1948 and 1969 there was never more than one woman minister at the same time and between 1970 and 1989 there were none at all. (True, 2003: 137) In the legislative branch, the statistics were better. Following the example of the Soviet Union, quotas were established in order to ensure at least a 30 percent representation of women in parliament. The quotas, however, were abused and served as a maximum limit, rather than a minimum level. Furthermore, as parliament's role in politics in the Communist system was largely symbolic, women's political role was most limited. (Rakušanová, 2003: 21)

The women who *did* appear in the party and the governmental elites differed from their male colleagues significantly. They generally came from lower socio-

economic backgrounds and comprised a disproportionate share of leaders who were workers or peasants. (Wolchik, 1996: 533) This provides a reason to believe that the quotas were abused in order to ensure a symbolic representation of women and “the rule of common people”, instead of being used for the purpose of supporting the participation of women in politics. (Rakušanová, 2003: 21) Furthermore, fewer women than men had lengthy careers in the Communist Party’s apparatus, and those whose careers were centered in the party served at lower levels than their male counterparts. Women also tended to have less influence than men in all of these bodies. (Wolchik, 1996: 533) The conclusion then must be, that the official political scene in Communist Czechoslovakia, as elsewhere in the region (and in the world for that matter), was dominated by men and that the Communist Party did not make much effort to change this imbalance.

### 3.4.3 Confused Emancipation

What did four decades of state socialism result in, regarding gender equality and women’s position in society? A recurring answer in the interviews made for this thesis circles around the term “confused emancipation” (Ladmanová, 12-07-2006; Králíková, 01-08-2007; Pavlík, 11-27-2006). Communist leaders (and ideology) were deeply ambivalent and often contradictory regarding the so called “woman question”. The regime introduced, or rather imposed, an ideal of feminist emancipation, which in reality was rather artificial as in practice women were marginalized in society. The equality that was proclaimed by the party simply translated into women working like men in the labor market and since no “counter equality” existed for men’s involvement in the domestic domain, Communism, instead of liberating women, doubly exploited them. Feminism became associated with the Soviet system, in which *emancipation* meant forced labor and *equality* meant that women had to enter the workforce and adapt to male norms, in addition to upholding the traditional gender roles in the home. (Saxonberg, 2003: 221) As a consequence, feminism was thoroughly discredited as an ideology and basis for political action. (LaFont, 2001: 205; Montgomery, 2003: 6) Another result was that the double work load created a sense of omnipotence in women. The logic “I’m a woman, I can manage everything” was prevalent and women took pride in their ability to manage paid employment and at the same time take care of their families. This often changed the power structure within families, since a significant part of the economic power and a decent living for the family was dependant on women. (Pavlík, 11-27-2006; Hanáková, 1998) Women’s exceptional position and indispensability in the home resulted in improved self-esteem of many women, which in turn lead to that many women tried their best to handle their lot as successfully as possible, rather than think about and oppose its injustice. (Gal, *et al.*, 2000a: 53) The low interest in equal opportunity issues is also connected to the fact that the majority of women did not (and still does not) feel that they were worse off than men, whom they perceived as being equally oppressed under the Communist rule. Men and women therefore often – again – became more like allies than competitors. (Hanáková, 1998)

## 3.5 Following the Velvet Revolution: Progress with a Cumbersome Legacy

In 1989, as socialism was discarded for good, what little talk there was of the gender regime, was couched in the rhetoric of markets and capitalism. The dominant ideology after the velvet revolution was "Friedmanite"<sup>3</sup>; essentially holding that if the market rules were correctly put in place, then all other rights and freedoms would follow. (True, 2003: 53) In spite of the experiences with Communist ideology, many Czechs believed that the Neoliberal agenda had the cure to all that was ill in Czech society. In other words, one "grand solution" was to replace another.

### 3.5.1 Women's Position in the Market Economy

The expansion of the global market to Central and Eastern Europe brought both positive and negative consequences for the women in the region. Much of the gender centered research that has been conducted on the subject, especially in the early 1990s, has focused on the negative aspects and depicted women as losers in the transition to capitalism. These scholars (e.g. Funk *et al.*, 1993; Einhorn, 1993 and Moghadam, 1993) saw women in post-socialist countries as bearing a disproportionate burden of the social and economic changes and stressed women's loss of significant rights to work, childcare and welfare, as Neoliberal austerity caused the state to withdraw from its previous commitments to social equality. From another perspective however, the transition brought specific advantages for women, not least in the shape of widened employment opportunities. The knowledge that women, in larger numbers than men, had acquired during Communism, including higher education, foreign language skills and experience from the service sector, were revaluated in the 1990s and became an asset for women in the labor market. (True, 2000: 89)

In spite of such advantages, statistics show that unemployment indeed affected women more than men. Between 1990 and 2000, unemployment climbed from 0,7 percent to 7,9 percent for men, whereas for women the increase was from 0,8 percent to 10,4 percent (Fultz *et al.*, 2003: 109). In the latest (gendered) statistics available, from 2004, men's unemployment rate was 7 percent and women's 9,9 percent. (ČSÚ, 2005: 53) Some scholars have argued that these figures to some

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<sup>3</sup> After liberal professor in economics, Milton Friedman, whose political philosophy stressed the advantages of the marketplace and the disadvantages of government intervention. His laissez-faire ideas on privatization, deregulation, taxation and monetary policy were embraced by the mainstream, especially during the 1980s and by the administrations of Ronald Reagan in the U.S. and Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain.

extent can be explained by the active choices of some women to willingly exit the labor market. The argument goes as follows: Remembering that under Communism work was a duty, most Czech women did not consider themselves to be liberated by state socialism, but rather overworked, and therefore welcomed the freedom of choice in the new system. Since the patriarchal division of labor in the household persisted, women who had the option of being oppressed by two systems, domestic patriarchy and the discriminatory labor market or by only one system could certainly construe staying home as liberating. (LaFont, 2001: 215) At the same time, other research has shown that few women were willing to actually give up the positive aspects of employment, such as the opportunity to use one's knowledge and skills, and the social aspects that follow from having colleagues. As a result, women did not withdraw in large numbers from the labor market. (Věšínová-Kalivodová 2005: 426) The comparatively higher level of female unemployment is therefore widely considered to have structural reasons. Another typical indicator of this, wage disparities between men and women, points in the same direction. Again the latest statistics available are from the year of 2004, in which women received on average 80,9 percent of men's earnings. (ČSÚ, 2005: 70) This difference however, can be found in all western societies (in varying degrees) and is not specific to the Czech context.

### 3.5.2 Women's Engagement in Politics in the New Democracy

As was explained in chapter 2, political parties and persons in high positions may serve as institutional carrying agents for advancing women's issues and improving women's status in society (Beckwith, 2000: 439). The velvet revolution, while destroying the Communist superficiality of women's political power, allowed for the emergence of women who were assuming positions of real power and thus a move in the right direction. For example, in the early post-socialist period, female former dissidents were appointed to posts such as chairperson to the Czech National Council, advisor to Prime Minister Václav Havel and top ambassador to the United States. (Weiner, 1997) Seen from a broader perspective however, these women were exceptions. The overall presence of women on the political scene diminished after the fall of Communism.

Even if statistics suggest that the last decade has shown an increase, overall the level is still low. After the first democratic elections in 1990, only 11 percent of the parliamentary deputies were female. In the following two elections, in 1992 and 1994, the percentage decreased to 9,5 percent. The negative trend reversed in 1996, when women received 13,5 percent of the votes, and then continued to rise, to 15 percent in 1998 and 17 percent in 2002. In the 2006 elections women's political representation however declined again, to 15,5 percent. The proportion of women in the senate, the Czech upper chamber, has increased over the years from approximately 11 percent in the first senate elections in 1996, to 14,8 percent in the 2006 elections. (Rakušanová, 2003: 20; Internet 6) In terms of governmental portfolios, the post-socialist period has seen only 12 female ministers, compared to 144 male. For some periods, there have been governments entirely without

female representation, more precisely the right-wing government in 1992-1996 and the social democratic government in 1998-2002. The current right-wing coalition government, in power since 2006, has appointed four female ministers, which is more than any prior government. Furthermore, for the first time a woman now holds one of the true power positions in government, namely that of the Secretary of Defense. (*Ibid.*; Internet 4) One should be careful not to overestimate the significance of this though, since none of the four women appointed to the government pursue gender equality issues. Furthermore, two of the original four women have resigned. (Bennerová, 01-16-2007)

Although the focus in this thesis is set to be at national level, one glance at the situation at local and regional level is in place here. In contrast to the parliament and senate, women's representation in small cities and towns has been significantly higher. This can be explained by the simple fact that political posts at these levels are not as prestigious as those at national level and, consequently, men tend to be less interested in them. (Čurdová, 01-11-2007; Hašková, 12-11-2006; Bennerová, 01-16-2007)

To sum up, the democratic order introduced after 1989 brought about new opportunities for gender equality in politics, but in large these opportunities have not been seized. As the public sphere of politics (and business) have gained in value, women have been assigned to the private sphere of the home, which has lost the heightened value it gained under Communism as an anti-totalitarian sanctuary. In other words, women were guaranteed representation when representation was only little more than a formality, and now that the political arena is being empowered, they are poorly represented.

### 3.5.3 Czech Women's Attitude to Feminism

Western second wave feminism emerged as a part of the 1960s human rights movement. Since demands for human rights were suppressed in the Communist countries, there was never room for the same refinement of the human rights demands as in the West. This way, second wave feminism practically missed Czech society completely, even if some of its demands were implemented through state policy (while typically not for feminist reasons). This meant that modern feminist thinking to a large extent came to the country not until after 1989 and literally out of nowhere. By then, the image of Western feminism in Czech society had been colored by decades of one sided portraying in Communist mass media. Even after the fall of the Berlin wall, the media tended to portray Western feminism in a stereotypical manner and ignoring its theoretical and political variety (Heitlinger, 1996: 78, 86). Therefore, most Czechs still are not familiar with feminism and are not aware that it is not one single ideology, summed up as a "war" of women against men. Instead, feminism is, simply put, still widely interpreted as anti-family, anti-men and anti-feminine and still quite likely to be met with ridicule and hostility. (Šiklová, 1999)

Those Czech women who *are* familiar with Western feminism on the other hand, criticize it for its ideological nature as well as for the manner in which it

tends to propose a “universal solution” for the problems of women all over the world. Having lived through Communism, a disbelief and distrust in radical socialism has developed among Czechs, which explains why the leftist air of feminism triggers skepticism among many Czech women (Hanáková, 1998). Slogans like “sisterhood is international” remind them of the Communist discourse and the slogans they used to hear about the working class. (Šiklová, 1999) Also, the mere fact that feminism is an “-ism” leads to negative connotations due to the country’s experience of both Communism and Nazism (Sloat, 2005: 442). Furthermore, due to the Communist legacy Czech women tend to associate feminism with forced, top-down, emancipation, through state intervention. What was missing for many women during the Communist years was the right to *choose* between being a worker, a housewife and politically or socially active. The policies and discourse of the Communist Party, which aimed at standardization between the sexes, led to a feeling of lost gender identity. This is why special women oriented television programs and magazines became very tempting for many women, even the highly educated, once the regime fell. This new world of cheap sentimentality simply presented the choice they used to be forbidden to take and it became quite popular to revel in recognizing one’s femininity. (Hanáková, 1998) The urge for femininity was not only evoked by new trends and influenced from the West. Traditions of male chivalry as the base for the relationship between men and women go long back in Central European history, a tradition in which a woman’s strength is considered to lie in her sensuality, femininity and ability to motherhood. (Beck, 2000: 88)

These kinds of expressions of emancipation clashed with the message Western feminists were trying to convey after 1989. The debate soon emerged on whether Czech women simply were still to be enlightened by their Western sisters or if there was need to talk of a specific, regionally oriented, “Czech” feminism. Because as much as Czech women have rejected Western feminist theories and hesitated to label themselves as feminists, they generally see themselves as very emancipated. Talking to Czech women about women’s issues, the phrase “I am not a feminist, but...” followed by a detailed declaration regarding women’s rights and gender equality, is a common phenomenon. (Havelková, 12-07-2006) Irrespective of the fact that many Czech women may not *feel* as victims of patriarchy, in real life the inequalities between the sexes permeate the society in which they live. The consequence of their reluctance, or even aversion, to identify with these inequalities, is an inability to recognize any need to debate and promote gender equality issues. (Ladmanová, 12-07-2006) Lastly, it should be added that the pattern described above is widespread among the women who grew up under Communism, while younger women tend to have a more open-minded attitude towards feminism and gender equality issues. (Šiklová, 1999)

## 4 Czech Women's Civic Organizing

Following the more general description of the theme of gender equality throughout Czech history in the previous chapter, this chapter offers a closer look at the development of the Czech women's movement, essential to the subsequent analysis. The origins and early development of the Czech women's movement was covered in the first sections of chapter three and this chapter takes the development after the World War II as its point of departure.

### 4.1 Overt and Covert Organizing during Communism

Aside from women's responsibilities with respect to production and reproduction, being a good socialist citizen also required participating politically and socially in society – sometimes referred to as women's third burden (LaFont, 2001: 205).

Immediately after the end of World War II, the WNC re-established its role as the chief body for representing women's rights in the CR. But the council would not last long. As in any socialist society, the Czech Communist Party insisted on a monopoly of power and doctrine and any potentially autonomous political force was regarded as a threat. As a consequence, the state prohibited the free association of citizens and practically all existing associations were replaced with state-controlled organizations, whose activities and ideas were in line with Communist ideology.

These changes also affected the women's movement. Most of the feminist associations, including the WNC, were forced to integrate into the *Czechoslovak Women's Council* (CSWC), which led to that the movement became less dispersed and more easily controlled. However, among the members of the CSWC were people who still – and openly – endorsed ideas that were unacceptable to the regime and therefore the council was soon replaced by the more hard line *Czechoslovak Women's Union* (CSWU). Those who did not fit there, were simply forbidden to organize at all. The CSWU was explicitly directed at reinforcing state ideology and its ruling bodies were occupied by women from the Central Committee. A specific purpose of the union was to obtain women for work in agriculture and industry, another was to organize cultural and social events. The latter was particularly popular, since many of the most active members of the organization came from the countryside, where the opportunities of cultural and social life were limited. (Hašková, 2005b: 1079-1080)

After 15 years of existence even the CSWU was dissolved, to be replaced, following the Soviet model, by so called “women's committees”. The committees were set up as auxiliary bodies of municipal, district and regional party councils

and their duty was to bring the masses of women workers into contact with the party. By being close to the party, it was argued, these committees would be able to play a much more direct role in solving women's problems. Among their responsibilities was assuring that more services for women were organized, that shopping hours suited women's needs and that after-school care for children was satisfactory. (Scott, 1976: 101)

In 1967 the Communist Party revived the CSWU. At this point however, winds of reform swept across the nation and unlike its predecessor, the new organization was officially autonomous of the party structure, which made it unique with respect to its legitimate role in publicly expressing opinions on social and political issues from the perspective of women's interests. In the spring of 1968 a new leadership was elected, which made the organization an active part in the developments of the Prague Spring. After the Soviet invasion however, associations and organizations autonomous of the state were banned again and the CSWU went back to being a Communist organization. (True, 2003: 40-42, 158)

As for the underground movement, the feminist struggle did not fare much better there. Women played a significant role in the activities of Charter 77 and other dissident groups in the late 1970s and 1980s, but women's rights and the equality of men and women were rarely discussed in these fora. (Wolchik, 1996: 533) In part, this was a matter of attitude. Czech women in general did not consider themselves suppressed by patriarchy, but rather by the political system. Solidarity among men and women therefore was forged against a common enemy, the socialist state. (True, 2003: 135) As many female dissidents found the Universalistic concepts of human rights and human liberty much more relevant to women's circumstances than the ideas of Western feminism, there never emerged any women's organizations dealing specifically with women's issues within the underground movement. (Hašková, 2005a: 37) Furthermore, since society in the Communist bloc differed (politically, economically and culturally) from that in the West, Western feminist explanations and attributions of blame often had no empirical credibility in the East. Several of the demands of Western feminist movements during the 1970s for equal educational and employment opportunities, childcare facilities, access to abortion and extended maternity leaves, were already implemented – and taken for granted – in state socialist Czechoslovakia. (Šiklová, 1999)

## 4.2 The Development during the Transition Period

The velvet revolution shifted the locus of political activity out of the private sphere, where the dissident movement had been restricted to, and into the public space. While a majority of the male dissidents entered the political realm after 1989, very few of their female counterparts did so and the path of the sexes thereby parted rapidly, once the revolution was over. Men focused on traditional political platforms and soon dominated the official political sphere. Most female dissidents on the other hand did not participate to the same extent as men in the



process of institutionalization of power. Instead they carried on the civic initiatives of the pre-1989 opposition movement, taking advantage of the new political environment by forming NGOs and other forms of associations to address their concerns. Studies show that women headed no less than 84 percent of all Czech NGOs in these first years following the overthrow of Communism. (Sloat, 2005: 439; True, 2003: 141, 147) Aside from the prominent positions in these (unisex) NGOs, women also seized the opportunity to unite around issues of specific importance to them as women. After only a couple of years, there were more than 70 women's NGOs in the country. (Chaloupková, 2006: 30) There was a wide range of organizations, including self-help groups and groups oriented around social problems and health issues, professional organizations, branches of international organizations, interest groups, as well as women's groups connected to political parties, churches, charity or the academic scene (Hašková, 2005b: 1083). Their areas of interest at first concerned topics such as women's maternal role and issues concerning single mothers, ecology, minority and lesbian rights or professional issues. After a couple of years, new topics emerged as a response to societal developments and organizations which worked against domestic violence and trafficking gained a particularly prominent position among the women's NGOs. (Ladmanová, 12-07-2006; Chaloupková, 2006: 30; Wolchik, 1998: 171)

A distinctive feature of a majority of the women's NGOs at the time of the transition period was that they explicitly renounced any connection to feminism; many even denied that they were political at all (Heitlinger, 1996: 78). This was to a large extent a direct consequence of the authoritarian past and the experience of the infamous Communist puppet organizations, which caused a widespread aversion among women against organizing politically or belonging to formal feminist organizations. (Beck, 2000: 186) Even if quite many groups did not view themselves as political, they nevertheless served an important function. By bringing women together to share their experiences, they provided a forum for discussion which had the potential to lead to collective action to articulate and defend women's interests. (Wolchik, 1998: 171)

The awakening of an explicitly gender oriented movement in the CR was led by a handful of feminist activists, such as Hana Havelková, Jiřina Šiklová and Marie Čermáková. (Ladmanová, 12-07-2006) In 1991 the organization *Gender Studies* was set up in the flat of sociologist and former dissident Jiřina Šiklová, with the aim to introduce gender studies at Czech universities. Among the co-founders were several other female university pedagogues and researchers. The organization was originally founded as a gender library, based on the personal library of Šiklová and in the years that followed, the organization received much attention from feminist NGOs in the West, and many donations to the library, which to this day has remained one of the most important areas of the work of the organization. (Králíková, 01-08-2007)

The founders of many women's NGOs, feminist as well as non-feminist, usually had much experience from the West, either as former emigrants, through the academic world or as members of organizations with much exchange with western counterparts. This contributed to a development in which Czech women's NGOs joined and focused on developing supportive networks with foreign and

international organizations, rather than developing lobbyist networks with the governmental and party structures and other means of communication and influence within the country. Another characteristic of the NGOs at this time was their independence, not to say isolation, in relation to each other. This lack of collaboration was caused by mutual feelings of distrust and rivalry between them, which in turn was a result of the fact that they did not arise from a clear philosophy but from individual initiatives, as well as by the divide between feminist and non-feminist organizations. (Hašková, 2005b: 1083, 1086)

Many of the women's civic groups, with the exception for the *Czech Women's Union*, CWU, (the reformed, non-Communist, heir of the Communist CSWU) and some special groups connected to churches or political parties, were very small in size (often no more than a dozen or two members, of whom maybe only two or three were active) and entirely based on voluntary work (Hynková *et al.*, 2006: 131). Legislation changes brought about by the right wing government in the mid 1990s put larger organizations at an advantage and, consequently, the total amount of women's NGOs decreased rather drastically, to approximately 30 (Heitlinger, 1996: 78). The organizations which did survive typically became dependent on foreign financial support. Again the exception was the organizations that were connected to churches or political parties and the CWU. (Hašková, 2005a: 38)

### 4.3 The EU Accession Process and the Civic Sector

The negotiations for EU membership, which started in 1998, had a profound impact on the environment in which women's civic groups operate in the CR. EU equality directives were introduced into national legislation, which significantly strengthened the country's anti-discrimination and gender equality legislation. (Havelková, 2005: 8-13) These changes were of great value to the actors in the civic sector, since – as in the case of for example the declaration of human rights – once they were in place, the NGOs that were active in the field, could use and refer to the new legislation for bolstering their claims when lobbying the government for policy changes and when working to raise public awareness. (Havelková, 12-07-2006) Also, the accession process more or less forced the Czech government to address a number of issues that the women's NGOs had been raising since the early 1990s, for example concerning domestic violence, which of course was a feather in the cap for many NGOs (Havelková, 2005: 34). Furthermore, special governmental bodies (more on these in chapter five) were created to focus on the promotion of gender equality. Yet another important development that occurred at this time was the establishment of university degree programs in gender studies (which will be described and discussed in chapter six). (Hašková, 2005b: 1087-1088)

In broad outline, the accession process brought about positive changes for women and women's civic groups. However, many critics have pointed out that there was a lack of political will from the governmental side: “Within the whole

process of accession, none of the involved state institutions has dealt with women's issues, unless they really had to". (Havelková, 2005: 25) This lack of political will has resulted in that many of the changes that were introduced have not been translated into concrete measures. Evidence of such window-dressing can be found both in equality legislation which is not being enforced and in positive action measures and positive discrimination policies that are not being implemented. (True, 2003; Pavlík, 11-27-2006)

One particularly important consequence of the accession process was that the situation of funding of NGOs changed. As the deadline for accession neared, foreign donors, which had been active in the country since the early 1990s, began to leave, moving their attention further east. This meant that the kind of long-term, all-inclusive financial support which these donors had provided and which typically had been used for developing and running civic groups, diminished rapidly. Replacement for these "development funds" came mainly from the EU structural funds. These funds generally involved larger budgets than the previous funds had, which made larger amounts of money available. This had many positive effects and contributed to strengthening the political voice of the Czech women's NGOs. (Ladmanová, 12-07-2006) However, the new system was far from uncomplicated. Unlike the previous forms of foreign funding, the EU grants tended to be rather short-term and directed at precisely defined project activities. These new circumstances contributed to making the NGOs increasingly oriented towards project based activity, something which was perceived by many organizations as a challenge. Furthermore, as increased competitiveness and employment belong to the top priorities in the structural funds, projects applications concerning equal opportunities in the labor market and other gender related labor market issues stood a greater chance of being accepted – and funded. This resulted in that many NGOs felt forced to refocus in order to "fit" into the grant requirements, which contributed to bringing about a mainstreaming in terms of topics and scope of activities of the NGOs. (Chaloupková, 2006: 32; Hašková, 2005b: 1095-1099) Related to the "projectification" of the NGO activity was the consequence that when more time had to be spent on searching for and applying for grants, less time was left for activism (Sloat, 2005: 440). Another problem was that the new grants only were allotted to organizations that were financially stable, a criterion which only a few large and well-established organizations could fulfill, as opposed to the majority of women's civic groups in the CR (Hašková, 12-11-2006).

Hand-in-hand with the requirements for long-term financial resources, were demands that project applicants must be professionalized, meaning registered entities with office space, qualified staff, and the capacity to manage large projects. This resulted in a process of professionalization among Czech SMOs, with changes in their internal organizational structure and facilities, which came to have an important impact on their activities. By professionalizing – and specializing – the women's organizations increased their credibility and started to be considered as valuable consultant experts. The establishment of *Fórum 50 %* in 2004 is a direct example of this development. This new, professional image of organizations specializing in different fields, contributed positively both in terms

of how the organizations are being portrayed in the media and in terms of their overall external communication, be it with the government or with the public. (Hašková, 2005b: 1088; Havelková, 12-07-2006)

## 4.4 Current Organizational Structures and Fields of Action of Czech Women's SMOs

Presently there are some 60 registered gender oriented SMOs in the CR (Pavlík, 15-02-2008). All four criteria for feminist organizations (presented in the introduction of the study); feminist ideology, guiding lines, goals – internal and external – and outcomes, exist. The organizations are diverse in terms of their specific objectivities, size, and operating style, but in all, the movement is largely composed of organizations run by paid professionals who are offering services and advocacy, as opposed to membership-based organizations or grass root community organizations. (Martin, 1990: 190, 193; Pavlík, 15-02-2008)

The 60 organizations can be categorized according to their type of activity:

- 1) traditional NGOs
- 2) organizations associated with political parties or churches
- 3) clubs and professional associations
- 4) academia and research institutions (Hynková *et al.*, 2006: 133).

In this study, focus lies on the category of “traditional NGOs”, although the academia and research institutions will be discussed as well. The organizations in this category focus on a broad range of topics, including the labor market (supporting equal opportunities for women and men in employment policies, working against discrimination), women's political representation, trafficking of women, assistance to women abused in their childhood and to women who have been raped, prevention of domestic violence, the introduction of the gender perspective into education as well as issues related to parenthood and balancing professional and family life. (Hynková *et al.*, 2006: 132; Chaloupková, 2006: 31) To clarify the muddle of traditional NGOs, they can be divided into four subcategories:

- a) Organizations engaged in the social sphere and focusing on assisting specific groups of women (common issues of concern are domestic violence and trafficking and examples of organizations *ROSA*, *proFem* and *LaStrada*), or organizations defining themselves as cultural associations, which basically function as “hobby groups” (typically centre around issues such as health care and motherhood, examples of organizations are *Aperio*, *the Club of Single Mothers* and *Network of Mothers' Centers*).
- b) Organizations engaged primarily in information and awareness raising activities, lobbying and women's rights (e.g. *Gender Studies*, *Fórum 50 %*

and the *Czech Union of Women*, which also includes social work).

- c) Organizations dealing with human rights in general, including the rights of women (e.g. *Amnesty International*, the *Czech Helsinki Committee*, and the *White Circle of Safety*).
- d) Activities related to the feminist movement, but not organized by specific organizations (independent projects, performances, exhibitions etc). (Hynková *et al.*, 2006: 133-134; Hašková, 12-11-2006)

Of these four subcategories, this study focuses on organizations of the type that are found in subcategory b, since these are the only organizations that actively and continuously seek political influence from a gender perspective (organizations in category c also seek political influence, but not solely from a gender perspective).

As has been described in this chapter, the organizational forms and range of activities of the Czech women's movement have developed through the years. Maybe most importantly, the movement has matured, in the sense that it has become increasingly aware of gender and more consciously feminist. (Havelková, 12-07-2006) This is specifically true for the organizations in category b, which makes them especially interesting and suitable for this study.

## 5 Formal Channels of Influence

Having examined the historical development and current structure of the Czech women's movement, I now turn to reviewing the possible formal channels of influence and discussing to what extent they function as platforms for Czech women's SMOs for making their voices heard and influencing public policy.

### 5.1 Institutionalized Mechanisms for Dialogue

Worldwide, the formation of councils and other venues for official participation has proved to be a quite successful strategy for many SMOs, not least within the women's movement, allowing NGOs direct access to government officials and thereby improving the odds for influencing public policy (Öberg, 1997: 68).

As for the Czech context, the breakdown of the authoritarian Communist regime was a necessary first step for these channels of influence to become accessible for NGOs in the country. Talking about women's NGOs in particular, it would take more than a decade before institutional structures allowing the women's movement a formal voice were in place. When they finally were established, it was to a large extent a consequence of external pressure, more exactly the EU membership negotiations, which are widely considered as the single most important driving force concerning gender equality related activities on governmental level in the CR. In fact, it was not until the union put gender equality among the principal themes of the accession process, that the need to concern oneself with gender equality became legitimate from the viewpoint of many top politicians in the country. (Křížková, 2006: 37; Králíková, 01-08-2007; Havelková, 12-07-2006; Pavlík, 11-27-2006)

In this chapter, I will examine the four main governmental arrangements concerning gender issues in the country.

#### 5.1.1 The Unit for Equality between Men and Women

In 1998, as part of the EU accession process, a special *Unit for Equality between Men and Women* (UEMW) was set up within the Department for European Integration and International Relations, at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MLSA), to coordinate the government policies in the field of gender equality and ensure the harmonization of the Czech legal system with European law (OSI, 2005: 62). The unit remains to this day, albeit today it is placed within the Department of Family and Social Policy, which, according to critics, sends a

clear message that the current government understands of gender issues as just a part of family and social policy. (Králíková, 01-08-2007)

One of the main responsibilities of the unit is to draw up the "Priorities and Procedures of the Czech Government in Promoting the Equality of Men and Women" as well as writing the government reports on the fulfillment of these priorities. Furthermore, it is responsible for publishing handbooks and brochures on gender equality and organizing gender sensitivity seminars and training for state employees. (Sloat, 2004: 53-56)

Many gender equality activists and researchers agree that the unit's responsibilities are too extensive in proportion to its staff and economic frames. Another problem is that the staff is not really educated in the subject of equal opportunities and, as a consequence, sometimes fails to be gender sensitive in their work. The unit is run solely by civil servants, like any traditional governmental operation, and there is no systematic contact between the unit and available gender expertise and women's SMOs. (Ladmanová, 12-07-2006; Hašková, 2005b: 1088) It stands clear then, that the unit does *not* function as a platform for dialogue between the public sector and the women's movement.

### 5.1.2 The Committee for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Another government institution whose work concerns equal opportunities – and which was also established in 1998 – is the *Government Council for Human Rights* (GCHR) and in particular its *Committee for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. It comprises representatives of the state, the civic sector (which has eight seats altogether, of which women's organizations have three) and the academia. (Internet 4; Hynková *et al.*, 2006: 140) The main task of the committee is to monitor the compliance with the country's obligations to the *UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) and every four years the council publishes a report on the implementation of the convention, the so called CEDAW report. (Ladmanová, 12-07-2006)

The committee meets at regular intervals, but the benefit of its work for promoting equality for men and women has, however, been relatively modest so far, according to critics in the academic and civic sector<sup>4</sup>. In order for it to become a more effective channel of influence, the committee would have to be more proactive in its approach. As for the overall work of the GCHR on policy issues concerning the equal treatment of men and women, the team behind the shadow

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<sup>4</sup> Since 2004 women's NGOs cooperate with the academic sector in publishing a shadow report to highlight their points of disagreement with the government's evaluation of its activities in the area of gender equality. (Sloat, 2004: 68)

report evaluates it as inadequate, pointing to that the gender perspective is not an integral part of the work of the council and that its members do not seem to view these issues as a priority. (Pavlík, 2006: 30)

All in all then, again the case is that the institutional framework for civic sector influence is in place, but in reality the influence is limited because the institutions in question are rather toothless and fail to act proactively.

### 5.1.3 The Government Council for Equal Opportunities

During the membership negotiations, the EU called for more cooperation between the government and the civic sector on gender issues. As a direct response to this, a *Government Council for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* (GCEOWM) was set up in 2001. The council assembles 23 members, of whom five are representatives for women's NGOs. The remaining seats are filled by the deputy ministers and a civil servant from each ministry, the Commissioner for Human Rights and representatives from the main trade and employers unions and from the academic sector. (Internet 3)

According to its statutes, the council is supposed to assemble at least three times a year, with mandatory participation for all its members (Hynková *et al.*, 2006: 139). However, mappings of the council's meetings have shown that participation in the meetings is often rather low, which weakens the council's credibility (Pavlík, 2006: 25-26). Another shortcoming of the council is its institutional instability. In contrast to for example the governmental council for human rights, the council for equal opportunities is not a permanent body, but must be actively appointed by each new government. (Čurdová, 01-11-2007)

The council's main task is to establish government priorities in the area of gender equality and evaluate their implementation and enforcement. Its status as an *advisory* body means it lacks executive authority or control powers and critics say that in reality its contribution to the actual promotion of the equal opportunities policy is, even in a best-case scenario, miniscule. (Hašková, 12-11-2006; Pavlík, 11-27-2006) In the NGO sector, the attitude towards the council is somewhat ambivalent. The director of *Gender Studies* describes what most civic sector actors seem to believe:

*On the one hand I think it's really good that such a council exists, but on the other hand, it doesn't have any power. It's really good that they bring together people from the ministries to work on these issues together with experts from the academic and NGO sector, but when they don't have a budget of their own and no real decision-making power, some of the meaning of it all is lost. But for sure, it looks really nice when you study the institutional structure of the government.* (Králíková, 01-08-2007)

### 5.1.4 Ministry Level Cooperation and Gender Focal Points

Aside from participation in formal governmental bodies, the possibilities for



NGOs to communicate directly with a ministry should also be evaluated. Such cooperation is recommended in the “Priorities and Procedures of the Czech Government in Promoting the Equality of Men and Women”, but followed only by some of the ministries. (Havelková, 2005: 22) In my interviews, representatives from both the NGO and the political sector testify that the situation regarding this sort of cooperation is rather uncertain and *ad hoc*, depending on the people in charge at each ministry. (Bennerová, 01-16-2007; Králíková, 01-08-2007; Čurdová, 01-11-2007) According to recent research on the subject, the cooperation mostly consists of the ministries using NGO expertise (training courses, brochures and materials, sending documents for commenting), but a more concrete conception of integration of women NGOs into the activities of the ministries is lacking. A lack of guidelines and regulations create a situation in which the form and manner of cooperation is left to each ministry to decide and thus depends on the priorities and dedication of individuals. The strategy of ignoring the field of equal opportunities altogether, chosen by some ministries, tends to go unpunished. (Havelková, 2005: 22, 42) This makes the women’s NGOs entirely dependent on the goodwill of individual ministers to inform them of current government thinking on equality issues. Furthermore, many women’s civic groups report of having felt abused by the governmental bodies, who on several occasions have taken advantage of the expertise provided by the NGOs, without acknowledging their work (Králíková, 01-08-2007; Ladmanová, 12-07-2006; Hašková, 2005b: 1090).

One structural arrangement does exist, which potentially could bridge the gaps between the NGO sector and the ministries. Since 2001, and also as a consequence of the accession process, all ministries are obliged to have a so called *Gender Focal Point* (GFP), which is a civil servant whose main task is to integrate gender issues into the work of each ministry and, in the extent possible, educate the other staff on gender equality. (Internet 7) The GFPs have been educated and trained in gender equality in a program that is co-organized and co-financed by the MLSA and a civic actor, *The Friedrich Ebert Foundation*. The GFPs are the civil servants that accompany the deputy ministers in the GCEOWM and together these two are the key actors in the gender equality activities at each ministry. (Pavlík, 2006: 28)

The women’s NGO community views the GFPs as a welcome channel of influence, as the GFPs often participate in conferences, seminars and workshops organized by the NGOs (Králíková, 01-08-2007). However, the system with GFPs suffers from many weaknesses and insufficiencies. One problem is that there are usually several levels of directors between the GFPs and the deputy ministers, which no doubt renders the vertical communication more difficult and which, to a certain degree, tends to isolate the GFPs. (Pavlík, 2006: 28) Another problem is the GFPs’ lack of decision-making power. Furthermore, the GFP position is only half time, which affects their maneuvering space even more. (Králíková, 01-08-2007) Anna Čurdová sums up the criticism (directed at her own party’s government) by saying:

*The Gender Focal Points actually mainly serve as some sort of demonstration that*

*the government is paying attention to the question, but in reality they have very little power and the chances for them to effectively fulfill the tasks entrusted them are very limited.* (Čurdová, 01-11-2007)

## 5.2 Elections

It is not an overstatement to say that gender equality is still not really a question in its own right in Czech politics. Because of this, any action that is taken within the political parties in the area is practically solely because of the personal interest of someone. (Hašková, 12-11-2006) In part, this is a consequence of the male domination in representative politics and the low interest of the men in top positions in the issue. Since men control the political agenda, it is very difficult to promote gender equality in parliament. One of the few who do, MP Anna Čurdová, testifies to the negative climate in which she works:

*The majority of the men in top political positions still have a very traditional view of the role of women. And their entire attitude is making it even harder. They will tell you that you have no right to speak on behalf of all women. [...] The discussion climate regarding these questions is actually quite hostile, one cannot really discuss these matters normally, and one must be extremely diplomatic. Therefore most women in politics emphasize their party affiliation and really don't want to be connected with the gender issue at all.* (Čurdová, 01-11-2007)

Since 1989, the Czech political scene has witnessed the establishment of a feminist political party twice. The first occurred already in 1990, when the *Political Party of Women and Mothers* (*Politická strana žen a matek*) was founded almost single handedly by Alena Valterová, a house-wife who was on maternity leave during the 1990 pre-election period. She appeared in a television show to talk about the need to found a political party that would exert pressure on the government, trade unions and employers to end discrimination against women. In response, she received more than 850 letters of support from women (mostly) across the country. From these, Valterová managed to gather a network of 250 party activists. Based on the contents of the letters, she formulated a political program for the new party. (Heitlinger, 1993: 104) Although the party received a certain amount of attention from the media, it never succeeded in building up a real base of popular support and disbanded after three years of activity. (Hauser, 1995: 86)

In 2004 a second women's party was launched under the name *Equal Opportunities* (*Rovnost šancí*). The party's aim was to cross the 5 percent margin and thus gain seats in parliament in the 2006 general elections. According to the party's own statistics, it had 600 members and over 2,000 registered supporters at the time. (Internet 8) The party did not manage to acquire much support from the general public however and only received 0,2 percent of the votes in the election (Internet 4). Support was low in feminist circles as well, mainly because of the

party's orientation towards second wave essentialism – in which the existence of certain inherent or "natural" differences between the sexes (aside from the biological differences), rather than socially construed ones, are assumed – thus stressing the need to feminize politics (and all other venues in society) in order to make it equal. This ambition simply was completely contrary to the beliefs of the majority of feminists in the country (and elsewhere), who to a larger degree advocate gender equality based on the argument that all individuals are equal. (Nyklová *et al.*, 2007)

### 5.3 Concluding discussion

The governmental bodies and functions presented in this chapter constitute institutional frameworks which indeed have the potential to function as formal channels of influence for the Czech women's movement. Their everyday functioning, however, shows mixed results. On the positive side, some SMOs have become members of governmental bodies and have thus gained the opportunity to formally take part in, and thus affect the outcome of, national policy making. As the sections above have shown however, the cooperation between the government and NGOs is far from unproblematic and there are several systematic shortcomings. This causes a serious problem, since it tends to create a situation in which the cooperation between the state and civic sector is reduced to mere window-dressing for external actors, be it the EU, the UN or some other transnational, or other, authority.

As this chapter thus clearly illustrates, a solid structural framework is not enough to guarantee the civic sector political influence. How strong a political voice an NGO may have is closely connected to the receptivity of the government in power. While this was practically non-existent in the CR during the Communist era, the conditions improved drastically after the regime change in 1989, not least as a consequence of the Velvet revolution leading man and the first post-Communist President Václav Havel's personal conviction of the importance of a strong civil society. As soon as in 1992 however, the situation changed again, as a result of the politics the Neoliberal governments of Václav Klaus which only supported the classic form of representing public opinions, that is through elections. The government's reluctance to create the right climate for civic participation made the position of nonprofit organizations very uncertain for many years. The central left Social Democratic government, created after the general election in 1998, behaved with much more friendliness towards the nonprofit sector, for example in terms of governmental programs, speeding up the legislation and positive examples of productive collaboration between the civil service and nonprofit associations. Today, after almost a decade of Social Democratic rule, the civic sector is consolidated and has a rather solid support from the Czech public. (Potůček, 2000: 113) Thanks to this, dramatic changes for the worse in government receptivity and attitude towards the civil society are thus not to be expected. As has been explained already however, government

receptivity to civil society in general – important as it is – is not sufficient. Politicians must also be receptive to the specific claims of the NGO in question and willing to change policy accordingly. As for the case of Czech women's NGOs, this is far from the case, since there is a widespread lack of will among Czech top politicians to deal with gender equality. (Králíková, 01-08-2007; Pavlík, 11-27-2006; Ladmanová, 12-07-2006; Hynková *et al.*, 2006: 132) This is true both for male and female politicians. Practically no women are prepared to go into politics to represent women and to work for gender equality, since such ambitions tend to be counterproductive. (Čurdová, 01-11-2007) While understanding female politicians' complex situation – a politician's primary task and aim is always to get elected – women's NGOs often criticize them for not promoting gender sensitive policies and, if nothing else, for not even appearing concerned about women's issues. (Sloat, 2005: 446) When not even women in powerful positions show any interest in gender issues, it is indeed not easy for organizations to find allies within the system who – according to the double militancy tactic – can work to influence and change the system from within. Increasing the low levels of female participation in formal politics is the first necessary step in order to solve this problem. Second – and just as important – comes the question of getting politicians to engage in gender issues and voters to care about them. The voters are the key actors in this, since without their support no gender oriented politicians can come to power. As this chapter has shown, none of the two attempts in the CR to turn civic activity into political influence through the party system has managed to achieve its goal, simply because of lacking support from voters. In spite of this, both efforts have been valuable. First, because they have raised media attention and public awareness towards gender issues and second, because the women who have been involved in the processes have had an opportunity to gain valuable organizational and political experience. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the voters' lack of interest in gender issues and the political environment in the CR today, one can easily conclude that the channel of elections is not a very effective – actually almost not even realistic – way to put gender on the political agenda. Whether this may change in the future is an open question, but for now it is probable that some time must pass by before anyone musters the motivation to give this possible channel of influence another go.

## 6 Informal Channels of Influence

This chapter contains an analysis of to what extent the informal channels of influence are utilized by the Czech women's movement.

### 6.1 Direct Action

Following the figure outlined in the chapter on theory, the activities that belong to the category of direct action can be divided between lobbying and protest.

#### 6.1.1 Lobbying

Activities which are nowadays conventionally described as lobbying have been around in the CR since at least the end of Communist rule. However, the general understanding of what lobbying actually is tends to be broad and very imprecise and the public's perception of lobbying is generally rather negative. The word is often used as a synonym for corruption, bribery and other unfair political practices. This is not only the case among the public in general, but also in the media, by politicians or even among analysts. (Růžička, 2006: 4-5)

In such a context, engaging in lobbying activities is not the easiest thing for Czech NGOs. For gender oriented NGOs, the conditions are even more difficult, since, as has been mentioned already, interest in gender issues typically is low among both legislators and civil servants. (Čurdová, 01-11-2007) The former director of *Gender Studies* describes the situation:

*We are trying to be pro-active and approach politicians and public officials, but it's really difficult. In most cases they are not interested in gender issues. On the local and regional level it is generally easier, not least since there are more women in the political representation at those levels. Women are more aware of the issues and are more open to our suggestions and feedback.* (Králiková, 01-08-2007)

Gender sensitivity is thus higher at local and regional level than in national politics. As for ideological differences, the following quote illustrates that the situation is rather similar across the whole political spectrum, the difference between the left wing and the right wing majority parties seeming to be negligible.

*A serious problem in the CSDP is the strong male leadership, which doesn't accept the theme of equal opportunities, but argue that equality is secured by the constitution*

*and that men and women are equal. So it's very difficult for us NGOs to penetrate the party and get our message across. The same is true, and the situation is even worse, with the right-wing parties, which we have a very difficult time reaching. It's rather obvious that the politicians, even the women, simply don't care about gender equality as a political issue.* (Bennerová, 01-16-2007)

In spite of this, Czech women's organizations use lobbying for conveying their opinions, although to a more moderate extent than what may be the case elsewhere. In addition to trying to arranging meetings with policymakers to discuss current policy issues from a gender perspective, women's NGOs also arrange conferences and seminars for politicians and bureaucrats and keep open house on particular occasions, to which policy makers and other influential actors are invited. Although the events tend to have rather few visitors – and often it is the same crowd that reappears – they are valuable since they contribute to raising the awareness on gender issues, if only in a small scale. (Bennerová, 01-16-2007; Králíková, 01-08-2007)

### 6.1.2 Protest

If the use of lobbying is restricted by external factors such as government and politicians' receptivity, then the opposite is true for the tactic of protest. While this strategy has been widely used in other social movements, the women's movement relies very little upon protest as a tactic for achieving its ends (Beckwith, 2000: 446). As both the literature on the subject and the interviews conducted for this thesis confirm, the Czech women's movement is no different than its sister movements around the globe (Montgomery, 2003; Katzenstein *et al.*, 1987; Bennerová, 01-16-2007; Králíková, 01-08-2007). Since this is no anomaly, but follows a clear pattern, and since space is scarce, I have chosen not to examine the reasons for this, since it is likely that they are general and valid for all women's NGOs and not dependant on the specific Czech context which is the object of my study.

## 6.2 Influencing of Public Opinion

The insufficient knowledge about gender issues and the downright deficient gender sensitivity among Czechs, is generally considered by activists in the Czech women's movement to be one of the main obstacles for changing the gender inequalities in Czech society. (Chaloupková, 2006: 33) The goal of influencing of public opinion strategies is thus to make society more gender sensitive and in the end make the public raise demands and call for politicians to take action.

In the following sections, I have chosen to group the strategies and working methods for influencing the public opinion in three subcategories: consciousness raising, media coverage and the role of the academic sector. While activities with

the aim to educate and raise awareness are carried out by the organizations themselves, in the other cases the organizations work through the channels of the media and the academia respectively.

### 6.2.1 Consciousness Raising

The most basic strategy for influencing the public opinion – the starting point for most SMOs and in a way the base in any social movement – is characterized by a distinct “do it yourself approach”. The methods used for consciousness raising vary from rather simple measures such as arranging open-air meetings and distributing leaflets, to more resource demanding activities such as producing literature, arranging conferences and seminars, and preparing commercial advertisement campaigns. (McCarthy *et al.*, 1996: 295)

In the years following the velvet revolution, women’s organizations were often viewed with suspicion in the CR (as well as in other parts in the former Communist bloc), as a consequence of the experiences of the Communist women’s organizations in the past. Over the years the attitude to women’s NGOs has improved among Czechs however, as people have learned of the contributions that these organizations have made, not least in the areas of domestic violence and trafficking, which today are widely accepted as important. (Hašková, 12-11-2006) Although these issues still comprise a significant part of the Czech women’s movement, the movement has developed much in the last decade or so. As was described in chapter four, the new main themes on the agenda are women’s position on the labor market and women’s political representation. This shift affects the strategy of consciousness raising; since it means that the issues in question are more wide in scope and apply to practically all women. Undue treatment of women in the labor market or in political life is in many ways less obvious than domestic abuse and trafficking, which creates a specific challenge when it comes to getting women to acknowledge the discriminatory structures. This is especially the case in post-Communist societies, where many women for long have been convinced that they are emancipated and therefore are not used to reflect about the patriarchal structures in society. (Havelková, 12-07-2006)

Both NGOs covered in this study, *Gender Studies* and *Fórum 50 %*, have the ambition to raise the Czech public’s level of awareness of gender issues and work actively with consciousness raising. *Fórum 50 %* works to influence the public opinion among other things by arranging round table discussions, in which they invite the public to discuss issues concerning gender equality. Such arrangements are time consuming and not very wide range, but provide the NGO with a unique opportunity to present information and statistics and develop lines of argument that the media usually has no room for, be it only for a limited amount of people at a time. Another example of such in depth arrangements is the special courses and education sessions that the organization provides for women in politics or women who want to go into politics. (Bennerová, 01-16-2007) *Gender Studies* works with rather similar methods to educate the public. One example is their work with focus groups, consisting of employers in the private sector, which aims

to examine how employers perceive gender issues as part of their employer responsibilities, as well as educating them on the subject and making them more gender sensitive. (Králíková, 01-08-2007) Other examples of concrete measures with the aim to educate the public that have been carried out by SMOs in the country are the development of a manual of criteria for assessing equal work for equal value, education of and development of material for career guides in order to make them more gender sensitive as well as teaching material for elementary school teachers. (Ladmanová, 12-07-2006).

As qualitative as these sorts of projects may be, it is clear that such selective measures are not sufficient for the women's movement to be effective in its work and they therefore need to be supplemented with more large scale tactics. One method is commercial advertisement, such as the poster campaign in the Prague subway and streetcar network prepared by *Fórum 50 %* in the pre-election period in 2006, picturing a pair of pants and the text "Do you really have a choice?". Such methods are typically very expensive and difficult to afford even for large organizations (in the example just mentioned the campaign was a part of an EU project and co-financed by the European Social Fund). (Bennerová, 01-16-2007)

Another way of coping with high cost projects is to cooperate with other NGOs. The tendency among organizations to unite with each other and with various external partners has increased over the years, but there is still much room for more cooperation. By coming together, organizations not only create favorable conditions for cutting costs, but also increase the chance to have a bigger impact and create a longer lasting impression. A successful example took place in the summer of 2006, when several women's NGOs in Prague staged what may be described as a PR coup, by co-arranging activities in the streets and claiming to celebrate the (non-existent) "International Equality Day". By distributing leaflets and balloons and "celebrating" in the streets, they managed to receive quite a lot of attention both from people who were passing by and in the media. (Králíková, 01-08-2007; Bennerová, 01-16-2007)

## 6.2.2 Using the Megaphone Effect of the Media

*In order to change people's perception of gender issues and improve the gender equality in this country, we actually prefer to convey our message through the media, since the media is very efficient for influencing the public meaning.* (Bennerová, 01-16-2007)

The media is a powerful weapon for raising awareness and changing cultural attitudes and societal norms. As was explained in the theory section, media can be used in two different ways – by paid advertisement or by influencing the journalistic content. In the CR women's NGOs have not tended to use the method of advertisement very actively, to a large extent because it is costly, but also because written articles are valued higher (Pavlík, 11-27-2006). Journalistic coverage of gender issues is however far from uncomplicated. Just as the media can be a useful tool for fighting stereotypes and increasing gender sensitivity, it may work the other way around, as when stereotypical or gender blind articles



contribute to keeping the *status quo* or even worsening the situation. The coverage of gender issues in the Czech media poses a clear example of this duality. In the first post-revolutionary years, the theme of gender equality was practically entirely absent from the media. To a large extent, this was because society was absorbed by major themes such as democratization, transformation to market economy, Czech – Slovak relations and the overall “return to Europe”. Another important reason was that virtually no one was pursuing the issue of gender equality publicly. The only voices raised on gender issues came from the Christian side, on matters concerning abortion and motherhood. Some reactions did occur in the media concerning the political representation of women (due to the dramatic fall in female MPs in the first free elections) but basically all of them denied the existence of sexual discrimination. The question of female political representation was generally considered irrelevant and the articles on the subject did not contribute appreciably to creating a debate on gender equality. (Havelková, 1999: 150) After a couple of years some articles began to appear on the actual subject of gender equality, but because of feminism’s bad reputation in the country, these articles, which tended to revolve around the ideological aspects of gender equality and feminism, probably damaged the cause more than they supported it, since they failed to be gender sensitive and tended to reproduce a stereotypical jargon. (Havelková, 12-07-2006) Again, the EU accession process proved to be of great significance, since it forced the press to begin to write about gender equality issues from another perspective and cover serious matters such as trafficking and domestic violence. As a result of the media’s coverage of these issues – as opposed to the more or less hopeless attempts to simplify the complexities of feminist theory which led to nothing good – the discourse on gender became much more pragmatic and easier for the general public to relate to. This served as an eye opener and paved the way for a broadening of the gender agenda, from more extreme issues such as wife-battering and prostitution to more “normal” issues such as inequalities in the labor market and women’s poor political representation. (Čurdová, 01-11-2007; Hašková, 12-11-2006)

In all, the development has been positive, but in spite of much improvement the media in general is still far from a progressive force in the fight for gender equality. Stereotypical writing continues to exist, above all in the tabloids, but also in the dailies and weeklies. The main reason for this is of course that journalists tend to have a rather poor understanding of the problematic at stake. (Pavlík, 11-27-2006) In order to improve this situation, some NGOs (among others both *Fórum 50 %* and *Gender Studies*) engage in organizing special training sessions for journalists, in order to educate them on gender sensitivity and teach them how to write about the subject properly. Aside from contributing to improving journalists’ knowledge of the issues, these contacts with the press corps are very valuable for the organizations, since they contribute to the establishment of a stronger relationship between women’s NGOs and the media, which makes it easier for the organizations to get their message across to the public. (Bennerová, 01-16-2007) Partly as a result of the NGO led training sessions, a few informed voices among journalists thus do exist in the CR today. Not only do these write in a gender sensitive manner and look actively for the gender perspective in various

given issues, some even initiate gender perspective articles on their own, as opposed to waiting for the NGOs to come to them with information or requests. (Králíková, 01-08-2007) These journalists are still in minority though and in general, the interest in the topic is limited and often restricted to specific events such as the International Women's Day or elections. (Pavlík, 11-27-2006) Although the range of subjects that journalists highlight from a gender sensitive perspective has grown over the years, there are still some matters which they fail to treat properly. One example is cases of sexual harassment, which continue to tend to be downplayed and at times even ridiculed. (Chaloupková, 2006: 33)

As has already been mentioned, women's NGOs have an important task in providing journalists with gender related information and statistics as well as a gender perspective on occurring events. *Gender Studies* in particular has become established as an information and consultation centre for journalists, who tend to contact the organization for comments on various news themes. The reason for this is simply that the organization has been around for many years (since 1991) and has actively worked to reach out to journalists and establish themselves as a kind of contact point for gender issues. (Hašková *et al.*, 2003: 54; Králíková, 01-08-2007) *Gender Studies* are however not the only organization with this approach. *Fórum 50 %* for example was a frequently cited source in gender oriented articles in the 2006 pre-election period. By being able to provide journalists with what they ask for, organizations can rather easily improve their relationship with the media and this is therefore an ambition among many NGOs. (Ladmanová, 12-07-2006)

### 6.2.3 The Role of the Academia

A third way of working to influence the public opinion is through the academic sector. Here the strategies available can be divided into two principal themes: education and research.

Today there are gender studies programs at the two major universities in the CR, in the cities of Prague and Brno, but it took many years of hard work to get to this point. For the greater part of the 1990s, education in gender studies only existed thanks to lecture and seminar activities realized by *Gender Studies* and other organizations. From 1993 and onwards, *Gender Studies* offered a traveling course in gender studies, consisting of lectures and presentations by leading Czech and Slovak experts and scholars in the field of gender studies and feminist theories. Throughout the years the course traveled through several universities in the country, offering basic information and knowledge in the field to interested students and faculties. For almost five years this activity of *Gender Studies* substituted for and played the role of an academic institution. (Internet 2) Parallel to this, feminist activists and scholars were mobilizing and working for the introduction of gender studies at the universities. This goal was reached in 1998, when gender studies were introduced in Prague. (Hašková, 2005b: 1088)

By offering gender studies as a subject at universities, the academia contributes to spreading knowledge and awareness of gender equality issues. The

fact that young Czechs (mostly women) want to study feminist theory and gender studies, is often interpreted by researchers that the former negative attitude towards feminism is changing in the country. By offering the possibility for Czechs to study these subjects, the gender studies departments are thus making an important long term contribution in the work for changing societal gender norms. (Šiklová, 1999) From this perspective, teaching may be considered a sort of feminist activism. Indeed, all three interview respondents from the academic sector declared in their interviews that they have a conscious activist approach to their work. (Havelková, 12-07-2006; Hašková, 12-11-2006; Pavlík, 11-27-2006).

As for gender oriented research, this has been conducted in the country since 1990, when a Gender and Sociology Department was established at the Academy of Sciences in Prague. From here, many prominent gender scientists were able to conduct research and publish their results, despite the lack of gender studies at the departments at the universities. (Internet 1)

Presenting scholar's research results to politicians and to the public is a significant strategy used by NGOs in their ambition to affect the opinion of policy makers and the opinion on gender issues. It is also quite common that academics and women's NGOs cooperate and conduct research together. (Hašková, 12-11-2006) An explicit example of such cooperation is the joint publication of the annual shadow report of the government's own evaluation of its gender related activities and policies (which are published in a document entitled "Report on the Fulfillment off Government Priorities and Procedures in Enforcement of the Equality of Men and Women"). The shadow reports aim to highlight points of disagreement with the government's evaluation. The reports that have been published this far have for example criticized the government for mixing its own activities with NGO initiatives and repeating and "showing off" activities that were completed in previous years. (Pavlík, 11-27-2006)

From my interviews with both academics and representatives from the civic sector, it stands clear that the gender studies departments at the universities as well as at the Academy of Sciences are a highly valued asset and partner for women's organizations in the country. To illustrate this I refer to the fact that among the first things the director of *Fórum 50 %* did when the organization was founded, was to start building a good relationship with the academic sector. In her view the scholars in general tend to be very cooperative and interested in the work in the civic sector and many regularly work for the NGOs. (Bennerová, 01-16-2007) However, the relationship between the academic and the NGO sector is not solely about cooperation, since the academia also has the task to scrutinize and, if called for, criticize the NGOs, which sometimes can put scholars and activists in an uneasy position vis-à-vis each other. The same is of course true for public officials, who also fall into the category of study objects of the scholars. Overall however, the cooperation between the civic and academic sector works very well. (Pavlík, 11-27-2006)

## 6.3 Concluding discussion

Again, the descriptions and reasoning in the sections above allow for some preliminary conclusions to be discussed in the light of the theoretic framework of the study as well as the issue of government receptivity and the importance attached to the issue by the public. While protest thus is practically never used as a method in the women's movements around the world, lobbying belongs to one of the most common strategies. The Czech women's movement follows this pattern, although lobbying is a less frequent and less powerful tool than in other Western countries, mainly as a consequence of the low interest in the issue among politicians. As became evident in the analysis of elections, the low interest among politicians is closely connected to the fact that gender equality has not been prioritized among voters. This has created a situation in which politicians have not even had to bother to disguise their lack of interest in the topic – almost to the contrary, it has been considered a great political risk (in some instances even “political suicide”) to openly advocate gender issues, for men and women alike (Čurdová, 01-11-2007).

The Czech public's low understanding of, and consistently low interest in, gender issues thus has far reaching consequences for the level of gender equality in the country, since it means that not enough pressure is put on politicians and policy makers to improve the situation. For this reason, the fourth strategy examined in this study – influencing of public opinion – appears to be of specific importance. The analysis above shows that all the three different methods within the realm of this strategy, different as they are, are important, to a large extent precisely because they are different, and complementary.

Paying much attention to public opinion may very well turn out to be a winning strategy in the fight for gender equality. With younger generations of women beginning to take more room in society, policy makers will sooner or later be forced to listen to them in their roles as voters. And as knowledge about gender discrimination and support for gender equality increases in the CR, it is likely that politicians will start paying more attention to gender issues – whether for reasons of vote maximization or (preferably) because of political conviction. This will lead both to better government receptivity concerning gender issues, and to better opportunities for SMOs to use the tactic of double militancy.

## 7 Summarizing Remarks and Conclusions

In the light of the empirical mapping of feminism and gender oriented action in Czech society and in the Czech civic sector in chapters three and four, as well as the analysis of SMO strategies and working methods made in chapters five and six, I will now turn to a final discussion of my research questions and present some summarizing remarks and conclusions.

In the section below, each research questions will be repeated one at a time. Each question has been answered in detail in the previous chapters and what follows here is not in the first place a summary of all the arguments and conclusions which have been put forward earlier, but rather a last concluding discussion of those aspects that, taken together, are the most significant in this study.

### 7.1 Results of the Study

- How has gender equality and feminist thought developed in the Czech lands throughout history? How does this affect the women's movement today?

The societies in the Czech lands were rather early in promoting egalitarian thinking and equal rights and opportunities in various aspects. Especially in the interwar years, when the newly founded Czechoslovak state flourished both economically and socially, a strong sense of egalitarianism developed among its citizens. World War II put an end to the prosperity, which did not get a fair chance to recover until after the velvet revolution, which brought the Communist era to an end. Both the German occupation and, most importantly, the Communist regime caused major setbacks regarding gender equality, which the country still has not recovered from and which has affected the post-Communist development of the civic sector. One of the most striking consequences was the explicit repudiation of feminism among many women and accordingly among many women's NGOs, which was a result of the twisted Communist emancipation argumentation and misuse of ideology.

Another historic occurrence which has had a substantial impact on Czech women's (and men's) view on gender equality has been the need for Czechs to repeatedly fight external oppression (the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the German occupation, the Communist regime). This has served to unite men and women

against a common enemy, which has overshadowed the patriarchal structures as a threat. As a consequence, the general Czech public is not very gender sensitive and the majority of women has not understood – or has not wanted to accept – that they are victims of structural discrimination. This has of course made the working conditions for gender oriented organizations difficult, since they have had to work on persuading both policy makers and the public.

There are however signs that the recent development in the country, not least the EU membership in 2004, has contributed to turn the trend. More and more Czechs – mostly young and mostly women – become aware of the structural, gender related, inequalities in society. This is reflected in growing numbers of applicants to gender studies classes at universities and growing support for gender equality measures and the work of gender oriented NGOs, which is shown in opinion polls but also felt by activists themselves.

- In which context did the modern Czech women's movement evolve and how have different conditions affected the structure and role of the movement? How is the movement organized today?

The Czech women's movement stretches far back in history, but – as all other civic initiatives – suffered from the authoritarian rule of the Communist regime when all “civic” activity was state controlled (except of course for the underground opposition movement). The Communist misuse and manipulation of ideology in general, and of feminism and the terms *emancipation* and *equality* in particular, left a sense of suspicion among many Czechs towards feminism, which has had profound consequences for the conditions in which gender oriented NGOs started to operate in the 1990s. Although civil society attracted many women, feminist activism was rare. Because both interest and knowledge within the CR was limited, many feminist activists turned abroad for guidance and support. This international networking and the focus on the organizations as such, rather than on the society in which they operated, may have delayed external NGO activities aimed at influencing gender issues in society in the short run. Seen in a longer perspective however, I would argue that this period of learning was essential for gaining a sufficient knowledge base and the organizational skills necessary to develop an influential voice in the public debate on gender issues. While there is still much room for strengthening of this voice, the gender oriented organizations in the country have come a far way and have developed steadily in the last two decades.

Connected to the issue of international networking is the question of funding of the NGOs. Lack of national funding was indeed an important incentive for organizations to turn abroad in the 1990s. A potential problem with international donors is however the risk that it is the donor organization's interests that are pursued and not those of the receiving organization. When EU funds became available around the turn of the millennium, this risk diminished, since the decision making regarding which activities and projects should be endorsed in these funds are based on a common analysis of the needs in the union and it is

thus more likely that funding is used in areas where they are needed and can do good.

Another condition which has been, and continues to be, significant for the influence of the women's movement, is the increasing tendency to work together. Cooperation between several organizations has many positive effects, such as splitting costs, exchanging ideas, knowledge and experience, and getting more striking power in contacts with the media and with policymakers, to mention a few.

It is also well worth repeating that outspoken feminist ambitions have increased and become clearer among women's organizations in recent years, compared to the 1990s. This may very well be a sign of a growing awareness of gender problematic and an increasing willingness among Czechs to change their society.

- How do Czech women's NGOs work to influence policy making? Which channels of political influence are available, how are these channels used and with what effect? Are some channels more effective than others and, if so, why?

The study has shown that the Czech women's movement uses – or, at some point has used – practically all available measures in their aim to make public policy more gender sensitive and to promote gender equality in the country. The only exception is the strategy of protest, of which I have not been able to find any examples of usage. Since protest generally is not used in women's movements however, this is really not so much an exception as a conforming to the norm. A strategy which has been used only to a certain degree is that of elections. Again the Czech examples conform to the general international pattern, which is that the use of this strategy is limited and seldom successful. The remaining strategies – institutionalized mechanisms for dialogue, lobbying and influencing of public opinion – are all frequently and systematically used. Their effectiveness, however, varies.

While institutionalized mechanisms for dialogue are formally in place, there are many shortcomings in their practical functioning, mainly connected to their lack of decision making power and lack of influence over the state budget. However, it is better that they exist than that they don't, since they after all offer women's NGOs a platform for dialogue and thus at least a theoretical possibility to work to find solutions to current inequalities. Nonetheless, for these institutions to become more effective changes in attitudes towards gender inequality are necessary and the issue must become a priority among politicians and policy makers.

As for lobbying, this is a strategy which has become more and more available for NGOs in recent years, as suspicion towards the method – be it from the side of the general public or from politicians – has become less of an obstacle. Instead, it is the widespread lack of interest and poor understanding of gender issues among Czech politicians that creates the most difficulties while using the strategy of lobbying today. Successful lobbying depends on the receptivity of policy makers

to the message of the lobbyist. In the case of the Czech women's movement, the receptivity has over the years varied. Generally left wing governments have been more receptive than right wing governments. Apart from this pattern, the EU membership accession period stands out, rather extraordinarily, as a time during which much attention was paid to the issue. In the accession process the receptivity towards the domestic women's groups increased, as a consequence of pressure from the European Commission. However, activists in the women's movement complain that since the EU turned its interest elsewhere the receptivity has diminished again. From this, one can conclude that continued work to inform and educate both politicians and civil servants is necessary from the side of gender oriented NGOs. It also seems probable that it would be helpful if respected authorities in the field of gender equality – be it international organizations, transnational bodies of authority or separate states with successful gender policies – put more pressure on Czech governments to improve the situation of gender equality in the country. Another aspect of the low interest among policy makers in gender issues, and the fact that the theme does not attract many voters, decreases the possibilities for women's NGOs to find allies within the system and thus apply the strategy of double militancy.

Another working method which is used by Czech women's organizations in close cooperation with the academia, and which has been quite successful, is the monitoring of the official governmental institutions put up to deal with gender equality. This strategy has turned out to be quite the magnet for media attention and thus somewhat of a thorn in the side of the government. If Czech voters would be more concerned about gender issues than they are, then this method might be even more powerful. This leads us to the final strategy examined in the study, influencing of public opinion. This strategy is closely related to the strategy of lobbying and politicians' receptivity and is, in my view, in several aspects the key to future success in the work and aspirations of Czech gender oriented NGOs and activists. If voters cared more about gender issues, the receptivity of politicians towards the women's movement would most likely increase. While it may seem like a huge task to persuade the large part of the Czech population which still remains skeptical towards, or simply ignorant of, gender issues, this is essentially the only way to go in order to achieve a lasting and truly gender equal society. As has already been concluded, the different methods and approaches within specific strategy of influencing of public opinion (i.e. consciousness raising, the media and the academia) are all valuable and necessary in the process of getting the Czech public to take more responsibility for obtaining a more gender equal society.

In all, the results of this study confirm what the theory on strategic choice suggests, namely that the choice of strategy does not depend on the inherent qualities of a particular strategy, but on the conditions of the situation in which the strategy is being used. It is thus not possible to generalize and determine if a certain strategy in itself is superior to the other strategies. Put in a particular context however, in this case the Czech one, certain patterns – described above – are indeed discernible. For Czech women's NGOs to optimize the results of their activities in the future, they would do well if they work to make sure to have the



capacity to manage a wide range of tactics and be ready to switch between them when necessary. In order to achieve this situation in an effective manner, I suggest increased cooperation between different NGOs – each specialized in a certain area – as a way forward.

- Can any conclusions be drawn regarding the role of women's NGOs in the quest for gender equality in the Czech Republic?

Naturally, it is difficult (impossible, some would argue) to draw any conclusions regarding the role of the Czech civic women's organizations in the overall struggle to attain a gender equal society, in a study which has not been comparative in scope and studied other actors in the same manner as the actors in the women's movement. And it is true that a comparative study would have been more scientifically solid, if this had been the main aim of the research. However, the in depth analysis made in this study of the Czech women's movement and its activities to influence Czech society and bring about gender equality, has evidently allowed for some conclusions to be drawn, as has become evident in previous discussions. I do not claim that these conclusions hold for generalization, but they are nevertheless valuable, not least in the Czech, national, context, but also as material which may be valuable to other research.

I will therefore allow myself to end this study with a concluding assessment of the Czech women's movement. First and foremost, the study has clearly shown that the Czech women's movement functions as a very important driving force for gender equality in the CR. Although other types of actors have not been pronounced objects of study, the thesis has been thorough enough to allow for the deduction that civic gender oriented organizations, to some extent together with the academic sector, have been – and continue to be – the most significant actors in the pursuit of the goal of gender equality in Czech society. Second, I believe that Czech women's movement has the potential to develop and grow stronger in the future. As has been described, the Czech women's movement is not so much a unified movement, with pronounced common aims and mutual platforms, but rather a scattered assembly of unconnected groups of actors, with separate ambitions and activities. If more cooperation and unity could be achieved, this would undoubtedly, in my opinion, strengthen the NGOs vis-à-vis other actors on the political scene and give them a stronger voice in the process of policy making as well as in the society at large.

## 7.2 A Note of Future Research

As is usually the case, the study realized has generated many attendant questions which invite to further research. One possible alternative, in which one could use this thesis as a source of inspiration as well as analytical groundwork, could be a comparative analysis on this subject among the countries of the former Communist bloc. Which differences and similarities can be found in the different

countries? In a second phase, a comparison could then be made in a European perspective, for example by studying the situation and development in the former “East” and “West”. It could also be interesting to investigate if the enlargement of the union has affected these issues in old and new EU member states and, if so, how and why.

Another possible angle for further research is that which concerns social movement activities in general and the possibilities of civic actors to influence state policy as well as societal norms. Using the results of this study, again it would be possible to expand the focus and adopt a comparative approach, which would allow for further generalization. One can also imagine using the theme of this study to investigate the connection between an active and vibrant civil society and processes of democratization and transition from a gendered perspective.

One further aspect, which has been intentionally omitted from this thesis, is that of the private sector and its relationship with the civic sector and how this might develop in the future. Private corporations and firms are often involved in sponsor agreements and goodwill arrangements which are supposed to improve their public image. Today these activities often concern support for for example sporting occasions or handicapped and disabled. Could this pattern be developed to include gender issues as well?

As stands clear, there are many related topics well worthy of attention and research, above I have mentioned only a few. In this broader perspective, my wish for this thesis is that it will contribute to increase the knowledge on the topics covered and thereby make a contribution to future research as well.

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# Appendix 1: Questionnaire<sup>5</sup>

How would you describe the situation concerning gender equality in the CR today? How has the situation developed since 1989?

How gender sensitive is the Czech society and the Czech public? What is the attitude of the general Czech towards gender issues? How has the situation developed since 1989?

Who in the CR is promoting and working with gender equality issues and how? How has the situation developed since 1989?

- The government?
- The political parties/politicians?
- NGO's and the civil sector?
- The academia?
- Think tanks?
- Mass media?
- Other actors?

How would you describe and assess the Czech women's movement? How has it developed since 1989?

How do the organizations and groups within the Czech women's movement work to improve the levels of gender equality and gender sensitivity in the country?

How would you describe and assess the relationship between the organizations and groups of the Czech women's movement and:

- the government and governmental institutions?

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<sup>5</sup> This set of questions functioned as starting point in all interviews. Not all questions were posed in all interviews however. Depending on the background and the area of expertise of the respondent the questions would focus more or less on different topics covered in the questionnaire (the general gender situation, the women's movement, the work of government/the academia, the role of mass media etc). Furthermore, the respondents' answers would often lead to (unplanned) attendant questions.



- politicians and political parties?
- the academia?
- the media?
- foreign NGOs and supporters?

Would you say that the Czech women's movement has a unified voice and strong cooperation between separate organizations? How has this developed since 1989?

How would you describe and assess the conditions in which the organizations and groups of the Czech women's movement work? What is the situation concerning funding? How has this developed since 1989?

How would you describe and assess the work with gender issues of Czech governments? What about the government approach towards the civic sector? How has this developed since 1989?

How would you describe and assess the work with gender issues of Czech political parties? Do different parties vary in their approach towards the civic sector? How has this developed since 1989?

Are there any specific events or developments which have been specifically influential or important for the activities in the women's movement?

What would you say about the media and its general approach to gender issue and the actors within the women's movement?

What would you say about the approach towards gender issues and towards the actors in the women's movement from the general public?

How would you describe and assess the role and impact of the women's movement of gender equality and gender sensitivity levels in the CR?