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Meaning and Essence of Civil Society: Theoretical and Conceptual Approaches

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ABSTRACT

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Reconstruction of Ukraine on a democratic basis requires a policy grounded in scientific research. It needs fundamental scientific research on themes of civil society, which accounts for geopolitical and strategic realities and risks. The main goal of research is to propose the theoretical concept of "civil society" and the main scientific approaches in civil society. The goal of the research was achieved in the process of scientific research in the form of realizing tasks. The main scientific methods were used in the article to conduct research. The author used general scientific research methods: the method of scientific cognition, scientific abstraction, analysis, and generalization, etc. The author used an interdisciplinary approach to define the concept of civil society. "Civil society" is system (sphere) consisting of associations, organizations, people (individuals) who interact based on unity of beliefs, value orientations, chosen moral and political goals, which, by the power of legal mechanisms (norms of national and international law), guarantees each individual the free choice of their economic existence, affirms the priority of human rights, excludes the monopoly of one ideology, one worldview, guarantees freedom of conscience, and stands in defense of individual, collective, and social needs. The author offers the following main scientific approaches to understanding the essence and content of civil society: socio-philosophical, philosophical, legal, historical, political science, and economic. The informational, financial, psychological, environmental, geographical, cultural, national security, and other approaches can also be used to understand the essence of civil society, but these aspects are not included in the scope of this author's research. The author also emphasizes that some aspects of the development of civil society in the face of today's challenges have not been sufficiently covered in the scientific works of Ukrainian and foreign scientists and require further research.

KEYWORDS

society, democracy, civil society, public organization, public administration.



Теоретико-концептуальні підходи до визначення поняття та сутності громадянського суспільства

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СТАТТЯ

АНОТАЦІЯ

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Відродження України на демократичній основі потребує вироблення науково обґрунтованої політики, що у свою чергу обумовлює потребу у виробленні теоретичного підґрунтя та актуалізує проведення наукових досліджень з тематики громадянського суспільства в умовах геополітичних та стратегічних викликів. Автор статті ставить мету дослідження – запропонувати основні теоретико-концептуальні підходи до поняття та сутності громадянського суспільства. Мета була досягнута в процесі наукового дослідження шляхом виконання чітко сформульованих та поставлених завдань. Реалізація поставлених завдань здійснювалась шляхом використання наукових методів, які найкраще підходять для досягнення поставлених підцілей та загальної мети наукового дослідження. Автор використав загальнонаукові методи дослідження: метод наукового пізнання, наукового абстрагування, аналіз та узагальнення та інші. Кросдисциплінарний підхід був використаний автором для визначення поняття громадянське суспільство. «Громадянське суспільство» – це система (сфера), що складається з об'єднань, організацій, людей (особистостей), які взаємодіють на основі єдності спільних переконань, ціннісних орієнтирів, моральних та політичних цілей, яке гарантує силою правових механізмів (норм національного та міжнародного права) кожній особистості вільний вибір її економічного буття, утворює пріоритет прав людини, виключає монополію однієї ідеології, одного світогляду, гарантує свободу совісті, стоїть на захисті індивідуальних, колективних, суспільних потреб. Автором запропоновано такі основні наукові підходи до розуміння сутності та змісту громадянського суспільства: соціально-філософський, філософський, правовий, історичний, політологічний, економічний. Автором визначено, що інформаційний, фінансовий, психологічний, екологічний, географічний, культурологічний, підхід з точки зору національної безпеки та інші підходи також можуть бути використані для розуміння сутності громадянського суспільства, але ці аспекти не входять на разі у сферу дослідження автора. Також автор наголошує, що окремі аспекти функціонування громадянського суспільства в умовах сучасних викликів не набули достатньо повного висвітлення в наукових працях українських, зарубіжних вчених і потребують подальшого переосмислення.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

суспільство, демократія, громадянське суспільство, громадська організація, державну управління.

1. Introduction

The revival of Ukraine on a democratic basis requires the development of a scientifically grounded policy, which in turn necessitates the rethinking of scientific foundations and the development of a theoretical basis, actualizing the conduct of scientific research on civil society in the context of geopolitical and strategic challenges. The public demand for scientific research is proven by the obsolescence of strategic regulations on the development of civil society, and numerous scientific and communicative events at which this topic is discussed.

2. Literature Review

The versatility of scientific developments of scientists proves that the topic of civil society research has deep philosophical roots dating back to ancient antiquity. The foundations of the democratic structure of the state with its inherent features were highlighted by ancient thinkers Aristotle [1], Plato [2], Cicero and others. Theoretical ideas of democracy were considered in the works of J. Schumpeter [3], M. Edwards [4]. The relationship between capitalism, socialism and democracy was studied by L. Diamond and M. Platner [5], S. Sinanoglu et al. [6], and others. The European understanding of the rule of law is described by S. Kelbia et al. [7]. A. Agh examines the transition to democracy in Central European countries [8]. The corporatist regime of organized democracy as a way of citizen participation is explored by E. Krick, emphasizing that this idea is less widespread in Norway, in contrast to such countries as Great Britain or Germany, which, having a federal structure and local autonomy of the states, quite intensively uses mini-civil-state structures in local development [9]. The issue of rethinking the university strategy and solidarity of national and international academic institutions, local city and state authorities, civil society and business is raised by O. Spivakovsky et al. [10].

3. Problem Statement

The evolution of scientific thought, the development of scientific schools, and the emergence of new scientific research necessitate constant and systematic study, renewal of knowledge, expansion of worldview on the subject of civil society, and acquisition of theoretical and practical skills in the development of a scientific product. The purpose of our study is to find out the main modern scientific approaches to defining the concept and content of civil society based on the analysis of scientific sources.

4. Methods and Materials

To achieve the goal of scientific research, we have used mainly general scientific methods, which are specified in the process of research. It is impossible to process and present in one study the entire array of scientific information, to study all primary sources, monographs, dissertations, archival materials, articles in scientific periodicals, regulatory legal acts, and statistical and other scientific sources. We have processed more than 200 scientific sources, the list of references includes 23 scientific sources, of which: 3 primary sources in translation; 7 articles included in the scientometric abstract database of scientific citations Scopus; 2 monographs; 2 dissertations, 2 abstracts; 3 encyclopedic editions; 2 textbooks; 1 scientific article; 1 analytical report. Using the method of scientific abstraction, we focused on the basics, abandoning what is insignificant for this study. The tabular method was used for visual visualization of the results of the study of scientific sources and better perception of the research material. We formed logical assumptions, scientific generalizations about the subject of research, proposed hypothetical assumptions and reasoning that were confirmed in the process of research. Using the structural-system analysis, we considered civil society as a system, identified structural elements and connections between them, and traced the purposefulness of the functioning of civil society as a system.

5. Results and Discussion

The study of scientific sources proves the presence of various concepts and scientific approaches to the analysis of the phenomenon of "civil society", and the versatility of this concept. It is advisable to

look for the “roots” of the phenomenon of “civil society” in the works of ancient philosophers. Plato and Aristotle, although they did not consider “civil society” in its modern sense, nevertheless laid the foundation for the reflections of scientists and philosophers on the essence, political structure of the state, and the factors that provoke conflicts; Their works have become an inexhaustible source of wisdom and inspiration, not devoid of justified criticism.

Aristotle in his treatise “Politics” focuses on the three “correct forms” of the state system – monarchy, aristocracy and polity, and on three forms that deviate from the correct ones – tyranny as a counterweight to the monarchy, oligarchy – aristocracy, democracy – polity [1] The main principles for the functioning of the aristocracy, according to Aristotle, are virtue, oligarchies – wealth, democracies – freedom. Considering the different forms of democracy, the ways and factors that influence it, Aristotle emphasizes the importance of the existence of a middle stratum of society that has property.

Plato, in his work “The State,” defends the principle of the unity of the state, stands on the positions of the need to ensure the public good, and depicts an “ideal state” with virtuous philosophers (rulers, statesmen). According to Plato, “... state... arises then,... when any of us alone cannot provide ourselves with extremely necessary things, but needs many more things” [2]. Plato states: “Each of the other citizens should be entrusted with exactly the occupation to which he is inclined, so that, doing only the work that suits him, each will become for himself a unity, and not a multitude, and in the same way the whole state will become one, and not multiple. If any citizen of such a state (meaning Plato’s “ideal state”) experience something good or evil, then, in my opinion, such a state will certainly say that its own share has suffered it, and the whole state will rejoice or suffer with this citizen.”

What makes people unite? Aristotle pondered this question a lot, giving the following answer: “...understanding of the common good, since each person is individually interested in leading a decent lifestyle. This aspiration is, for the most part, the ultimate goal of human association and each person in particular. True, people form communities for the sake of vital interest, because it is in them that a person can achieve something honorable, and only in association can you feel great...” Aristotle, in his treatise “Politics”, using the example of a team of sailors, explains the place and role of a citizen in society, clarifying in general terms the concept of “virtue” of a good citizen: “As one sailor is connected with the rest of the team, so a citizen is connected with society. Although sailors perform different duties, Aristotle emphasizes, one of them is a rower, the second is at the helm, the third is an assistant to the helmsman, the fourth performs some other service – it is clear that a clearer definition of the concept of “virtue” of each in particular is inherent only to some of them, and the general definition will apply to all of them, since the happy end of the voyage is the goal that all sailors in general and each in particular strive to achieve.”

Many publications are devoted to the study of the ethnic group of the Ukrainian people, the analysis of traditions, rituals, and customs. Numerous scientific sources contain references to the emergence of Trypillia, Cimmerian, Scythian and other cultures that took place in one or another part of Ukraine. V. Khvoyka is a well-known researcher of the Trypillia culture, which was characterized mainly by a sedentary lifestyle, people grew wheat, rye, raised cattle, and believed in gods. Interesting from the point of view of architectural traditions is the construction of the dwelling of the Trypillians (citadel). However, in the scientific literature, the question: “Did civil society exist on the territory of Ukraine during the period of Trypillian culture?” remains open. This period will be clarified during the research process. The question “Is it possible to find the “genome, DNA of civil society?” also remains debatable. The answer to the question of the existence of civil society in its modern sense in the period of Trypillia culture is unambiguous. No, in the modern sense, there was no civil society on the territory of Ukraine during the period of the Trypillian culture.

Most scholars agree that the emergence of the state on the territory of Ukrainian lands is associated with the emergence of the first settlements, which united into clans, led a sedentary lifestyle, and had their own traditions and beliefs. Clans united into tribes, gradually expanding to tribal unions. O. Chuvardynskyi proves that the origins of national civic traditions originate in the history and traditions of the Ukrainian people, gives examples of the use of mechanisms of local democracy in the times of Kyivan Rus, emphasizes the importance of the processes of the Ukrainian reformation (XV century), the historical mission of Ukrainian brotherhoods in humanistic enlightenment, the democratic-civic tradition of the Cossack-Hetman era, the idea of citizenship in Ukrainian public opinion of the XIX century. [11].

O. Kostenko, studying the works of the German philosopher of the nineteenth century Hegel, emphasizes that civil society is a sphere that is connected by the phenomenon of “sensuality” as the

main element of the actions and aspirations of the individual. Analyzing individual and collective (social) needs, the author proves that in civil society “a person is revealed as a free being, and the will itself is the main definition of the nature of the individual, taking into account such his needs as the desire to know and preserve his life [12]. The analysis of Hegel’s works allows O. Kostenko to conclude the basis of civil society. The author notes that the structural basis of civil society is the existence of estates, thanks to which individual citizens rise above the external generality, socialize, and in this way, a simple multitude of individuals as an inorganic form finds its organicity. The states of civil society have a special basis of their material existence (corresponding types of labor, needs, means of satisfying them, goals, interests, habits, natural talents and skills), which actually gives grounds to define these sets (masses) of persons as states in their divergence. At the same time, the distribution in the states also depends on chance and arbitrariness. These needs create a certain system within which individuals receive a certain pleasure and realize themselves in some social connection. At the same time, O. Kostenko emphasizes, people are inclined to preserve themselves more in economic relations than in political ones. According to G. Hegel, civil society is a system of institutions and relations that is located between the family and the state. It is the sphere of satisfying the needs of the individual, which is based on labor and property, and contains the contradiction of wealth and poverty. I. Kant considers civil society as a society based on a priori principles, namely the freedom of a member of society as a person; equality of a person with others as a subject; independence of a member of society as a citizen. J.-J. Rousseau explores the social contract as an instrument that transforms civil society into a state, when citizens give up part of their rights and freedoms in exchange for security. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was an intensification and mobilization of people against imperial domination, oppression, for the suppression of independence, and the restoration of statehood (M. Hrushevsky, V. Vynnychenko). Even in a totalitarian regime, sprouts of civil society can arise. In Western Ukraine, even before 1939, there were national societies “People’s Trade”, “Agricultural Host”, “Prosvita” and others. The women’s movement developed. On the territory of Eastern Ukraine, social movements and organizations were created under the strict control of the ruling Communist Party. After the accession of Western Ukraine to the USSR, private property almost disappeared, and cultural and economic ties characteristic of civil society were destroyed [13, p. 110]. It emphasizes and examines the civic mission of Ukrainian politicians, scientists, artistic intelligentsia of the second half of the twentieth century – M. Mikhnovsky, V. Lypynsky, D. Dontsov, the citizenship of Ukrainians in the period of “Soviet democracy”, the defense of democratic traditions by the sixties and dissidents. According to V. Stepanenko, the main meanings of the concept of “civil society” were accumulated as a certain theoretical reflection of complex social transformations in Europe, primarily associated with the formation of bourgeois social relations and capitalism as an economic structure, the collapse of traditional class affiliations and hierarchies, and the erosion of feudal-tribal structures. [14]. The first historical “islands”, according to V. Stepanenko, are guilds, craft and trade unions, self-government of European cities, university autonomies, which were formed in Europe in the period of late feudalism. V. Sazonov reveals two main approaches to the definition of civil society: heterogeneous, which interprets it as a set of social relations that oppose the state, that is, as everything that is not the state, power, politics, or bureaucracy; and functional, which presents it as a form of existence of market-democratic relations [15]. An interesting point of view is Professor Y. Surmin regarding civil society, which is a society of people who have the fullness of the rights and duties of citizens in relation to the state and the completeness of the rights and obligations of the state in relation to citizens. According to I. Bekeshkina, at all crucial stages of the country’s development, civil society acted as a driver of progressive changes and a guarantor of democracy and the European choice [16].

We can agree with the opinion of Ukrainian scholars that civil society is characterized by development and social solidarity, which means that it is the only community that is able to protect the nationwide, collective (group) and individual interests of its members in an organized manner [15]. It should be added that state property is not the economic basis of civil society; most relations are built based on collective, municipal, property of public associations. The authors agree on the features of civil society, such as: unity of interests, private property, a formed system of non-state institutions capable of protecting both individual and public interests, and, if necessary, resisting state interventionism.

The main modern approaches to clarifying the essence and content of civil society include: socio-philosophical, philosophical, legal, historical, political, and economic (Table 1).

Table 1. Civil Society: Scientific Approaches

Scientific approach	Essence
Social and philosophical	The realm of society, which covers extra-state relations, forms of social activity, and citizens' initiatives, is the sphere of free expression of will and self-organization, a system of institutions and relations designed to provide conditions for the self-realization of individuals and their associations.
Philosophical and legal	A large number of free people, some spiritual substance, which is abstractly separated into many persons (families, individuals), recognized as independent individuals, the reality of which is ensured in state life. This is a formal generality with the relative totality of the volitional relations of individuals to each other. At the same time, individuals act as special for themselves, that is, their existence for themselves denies the possibility of absolute unity.
Legal	A society with developed economic, political, spiritual, and other relations and ties, which interacts with the state and functions on the principles of democracy and law.
Historical	Historically, a stable set of people living in a certain territory has its own traditions, habits, culture, and life. Historical concept and at the same time a project for the modernization of social life.
Political Science	The sphere of spontaneous self-expression of free individuals and voluntary associations and organizations, which is protected by law from direct interference and arbitrary regulation of their activities by state authorities.
Economic	The sphere of social relations, which is based mainly on collective property (property of public, religious, sports, youth, women's organizations, trade unions, clubs, etc.) and municipal property (territorial communities), is characterized by non-profit activities aimed at satisfying both individual and public needs.

Source: Compiled by the author from sources [14; 17; 18; 19; 20].

The structure of civil society can be classified according to various criteria: by subjects and objects of activity, field of activity, type and direction of activity, target direction of the organization, etc. [21, p. 477]. The English scientist of the sixteenth century, a representative of political philosophy Thomas Hobbes, in the composition of civil society, distinguishes: ordered groups, i.e. groups with a certain number of representatives, and disordered groups; absolutely independent groups (for example, state) and subordinate, subordinate groups; political groups (formed based on the powers given to them by the supreme power), partial groups (formed by the subjects themselves); legal and illegal groups. In this way, several levels of civil society are distinguished: a) the level of the political state, which unites citizens under the command of a single state authority (the main civilian); b) the level of citizens, groups and associations of citizens (private civilian); c) the level of individual citizens who are subjects of the sovereign (sovereign) and representatives of private groups [20, p. 160].

V.P. Yakubovsky, studying the role of morality in the formation of civil society institutions, proves that the main ethical challenges in the activities of institutions are excessive individualization as a result of the total virtualization of public space, as well as a morally uncritical attitude to technologies associated with the use of artificial intelligence. The author emphasizes that one of the tasks of the institution of civil society is to contribute to increasing the level of media literacy and civic education [22].

So, summing up, we can offer the following theoretical concept of "civil society" – it is a system (sphere) consisting of associations, organizations, people (individuals) that interact based on the unity of common beliefs, value guidelines, moral and political goals, which guarantees by the force of legal mechanisms (norms of national and international law) to each individual a free choice of his economic existence, affirms the priority of human rights, excludes the monopoly of one ideology, one worldview, guarantees freedom of conscience, defends individual, collective, social needs.

The main intermediate results of scientific research were discussed at scientific and practical conferences, and were reflected in the pages of monographic studies of the author of the article, scientific periodicals, collections of scientific papers and other encyclopedic, informational and analytical works of the author. This proves the scientific interest in this topic, the public demand for research. The practical plane of theoretical developments consists of providing proposals for strategic documents, draft regulations, etc.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of the study, to offer the main theoretical and conceptual approaches to the concept and essence of civil society, was implemented in the process of scientific research by performing clearly formulated and set tasks. The implementation of the tasks was carried out through the use of scientific

methods that are best suited to achieve the set sub-goals and the general goal of scientific research. Which, in turn, made it possible to come to the following conclusions:

1. The development of social relations, the evolution of scientific thought, the development of scientific schools, and the emergence of new scientific research necessitate constant and systematic study, analysis of scientific sources, and updating knowledge on the subject of civil society. It can be stated that: the evolution of scientific thought on the subject of civil society dates back more than one millennium, the sprouts of the study of civil society on the territory of modern continental Europe date back to the period of antiquity (Ancient Greece and Rome). Scientific sources contain references to the emergence of Trypillia, Cimmerian, Scythian and other cultures, but the question of the beginnings of civil society in this period on the territory of Ukraine remains debatable. It can be unequivocally stated that in this period and on the territory outlined above, there was no civil society in its modern sense.

2. For many centuries, mankind has developed and formed a significant array of scientific information, including treatises, dialogues, encyclopedic publications, monographs, textbooks, manuals, scientific articles, analytical publications, regulatory legal acts, and more. Modern computer technologies, the emergence of the Internet, artificial intelligence, electronic databases (specialized libraries, scientometric databases and other web resources on which scientific information is posted) on the one hand help with the search and processing of information, allow you to speed up the process of developing a scientific product, on the other hand, they form additional obstacles, create additional restrictions, and lead to an increase in transaction costs associated with the search for scientific information. The study of scientific sources proves the absence of a single, generally accepted concept of "civil society", the presence of various concepts and scientific approaches to the analysis of the phenomenon of "civil society".

3. The impossibility of covering the entire array of scientific information in one study prompted us to use the method of scientific abstraction, which allowed us to concentrate on the main features, rejecting the characteristics of civil society that are insignificant from the point of view of our study. For a better understanding and presentation of scientific information in a simplified form, with the possibility of its further use in educational and scientific processes (which will contribute to better assimilation and formation of competencies), we used the method of simplification. The method of generalization was useful in the development of scientific judgments, the formulation of a scientific category, and a conceptual approach based on the numerical positions of authors recognized in scientific circles. The use of structural-system analysis in the process of studying civil society as a system made it possible to identify structural elements, connections between them, and to trace the purposefulness of the functioning of civil society.

4. The application of a cross-disciplinary approach made it possible to propose the theoretical concept of "civil society" – it is a system (sphere) consisting of associations, organizations, people (individuals) that interact based on the unity of common beliefs, value guidelines, moral and political goals, which guarantees by the force of legal mechanisms (norms of national and international law) to each individual a free choice of his economic existence, affirms the priority of human rights, and excludes monopoly one ideology, one worldview, guarantees freedom of conscience, defends individual, collective, social needs.

5. It has been found that in the most general form, using a cross-disciplinary approach to understanding the essence and content of civil society, the following approaches can be distinguished: socio-philosophical, philosophical, legal, historical, political, economic and others (for example, informational, financial, psychological, environmental, geographical, cultural, national security and others, but these aspects are not currently included in the scope of our research). It should be added that certain aspects of the functioning of civil society in the face of modern challenges have not been fully covered in the scientific works of Ukrainian and foreign scientists and need further rethinking.

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