Civic culture, citizenship and the quality of democracy

An argumentation of the article support the thesis that culture matters. Culture of a given democratic society shapes a political culture that is closely linked to the quality of democracy. The comparison of liberal democracies, old and young, and above all – rooted in different cultures, is a good opportunity for testing the hypothesis that culture is one of significant determinants of democracy quality (that would not be terribly refreshing statement), but also infuse local democratic institutions and social relations specific content that is compatible with local cultural background. In consequence, interpretation and description of liberal democracy within conceptual framework invented in another culture may produce misunderstandings.

It doesn’t mean, however, a complete theoretical relativism. Comparisons show that there are some universal tendencies that cross cultural boundaries and are independent of the type of authoritarian regime that was abolished in the initial stage of transition. For example the level of social trust goes up along with the persistence of democratic institutions and liberal relations in public sphere. Also structural variables seem to shape civic culture in fairly universal way: the higher are social inequalities the more passive is civil society and more likely particular interests are to hold sway over “civic virtues” (trust, cooperation, tolerance).

Key words:
civil society, citizenship, political culture, cross-cultural comparisons, democracy, social trust