



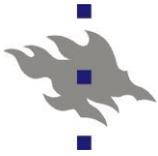
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Supporting the Vulnerable: the Role of Russian Socially Oriented NGOs

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Aleksanteri Institute

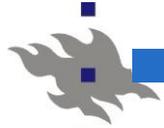




Content of today's lecture

- About civil society theories
- About civil society development in Post-Soviet Russia
- About state policies on civil society in contemporary Russia
- Empirical examples “from below”

”Civil Society”



- Large number of studies and conceptualizations; no consensus definition
 - However, almost all authors concur that it is “a sphere of public activities by citizens (that is outside of their homes and kinship organizations) that lies outside of state institutions”
 - I.e. A realm where citizens associate voluntarily, outside their families or businesses or state institutions, to advance their interests, ideas and ideologies
 - Focus on organized forms of action (CSOs, NGOs)
- Focus: civil society’s relationship with the state
 - The extent to which the state could be involved?
 - Sharp distinction between the state and civil society: “a dichotomy where those two stand in a zero-sum relationship” (Howard 2003, 38)
 - Different state-society models

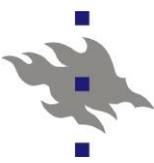
“Scholarly frameworks” on civil society



- ■ Predominance of “democratization framework” in the analyses of state-society relations in the Russian context
 - Focus in democratization processes and consequently political role of civil society
 - Preference on certain activities (advocacy function, societal change)
 - Focus on state policies

- “Welfare framework”
 - Non-profit voluntary third sector
 - Dysfunctionality of the state: to take over where the state or market will not operate – usually in the field of (welfare) service provision
 - Service provider role (apolitical?)

- Two separate roles (policy-advocacy vs. service-provision role)?



Investigations of Russian Civil society

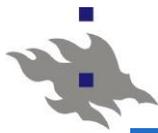
- Predominance of democratization framework
 - Liberal” approaches dominant
 - “Paradigm of conflict”: **civil society against the state**
 - -> Statist conclusions
 - No independent civil society, but co-opted by the state
 - Left little room for analyses of more collaborative patterns and the “political potential” of socially oriented activities
- Civil society in the 2000s Russia – weak
 - Socially, practically, apolitically oriented
 - Co-opted by the state



■ A short history of Russian civil society: the Soviet era

- There was no civil society in the Soviet Union?
 - No: control mechanisms pervasive

 - There was something, though
 - 1) Party-controlled “voluntary” organizations, such women’s councils, youth and disabled organizations, trade unions
 - Their role to ordinary people?
 - Was the state control pervasive?
 - 2) Dissidents
 - Underground, abroad
 - Anti-communist movement, human rights
 - Detached from the ordinary people
- All in all, statist design



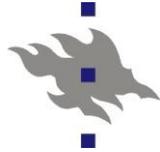
A short history: Post-Soviet civil society

- ■ Gorbachev's perestroika & collapse of the Soviet Union
 - Euphoria and optimism
 - Mushrooming of organizations (in number, fields of activities)
 - Mobilization (against the state; anti-communist)
 - Foreign partners and donors – development and dependency (funds)
 - Western models

- 1995-2000: Institutionalization (after chaos)
 - First legislation concerning civil society organizations
 - Professionalization (cf. foreign assistance: training and funds)
 - Cooperation mechanisms with the authorities, particularly at the local and regional level

- 2000->: Putin's 'directed' or 'sovereign democracy'
 - Strong but restricted emphasis on civil society

Civil society (and the state) in Putin's Russia



- CSOs engaged with social welfare
 - Approximately 670,000 civil society organizations (2009)
 - Small number?
 - (Small-scale) service provision
 - Cf. Less than 1 % in GDP
 - Low participation
 - “Standard explanations”
 - Growing number of people
- Selective corporatism: parallel support and control
 - E.g. state subsidies – according to the national priorities
 - New restrictive laws
 - “Thaw” of the Medvedev era
- Legislation on socially oriented organizations
 - More support and outsourcing
 - Ever-increasing social orientation?



This book is about state-society interrelations in contemporary Russia. A core question is: How do Russian citizens relate to the Russian state and more broadly to other public-sector institutions? This question is investigated through citizens' involvement in civil society by asking: What kinds of organizational civic activities occur? How are these organized forms of civic activity interwoven with the state and public structures? Finally, why do particular forms of engagement occur? The book focuses on the local level which is a logical level for citizens to interact with the state. The "messy" conceptions of civil society and state are profoundly analyzed through a bottom-up ethnographic approach. The analysis of citizens' organization and engagement with the state is grounded on an extensive ethnographic investigation within the Sortavala district. Sortavala's location on one hand in Russian Karelia, outside big Russian cities, and on the other hand on the border of Finland and the European Union allows a fascinating view from below to a local setting that can be characterized as peripheral and transnational at the same time.

"Kulmala's study makes many important contributions to scholarship on state-society relationships and civil society. The bottom-up ethnographic approach allows her to scrutinize what really goes on among the multiple local actors in different civil society organizations engaging with the state. This approach, coupled with a thorough exploration and understanding of the state (and other macro-) structures, allows the author to demonstrate the role of civil society organizations as agents of social change, despite the many structural and political constraints, and the importance of practical and local work carried out by women and/or Soviet-type organizations."

Laura Assmuth, Professor of Social Policy at the University of Eastern Finland

"Kulmala's work is a real contribution to scholarship in political science, sociology, and Russian studies. Empirically, Kulmala's decision to focus on a small town is an important aspect of the study. Approximately half of the Russian population lives in small towns and the daily experience of these individuals has been neglected by scholarship that focuses on major urban centers. The author also usefully disaggregates the state by examining the municipal level of government and the effects of the 2006 reform. Finally, rather than looking narrowly at advocacy groups, the author includes welfare-oriented associations, filling a gap in the literature."

Associate Professor of Government Laura A. Henry, Bowdoin College



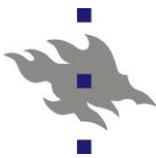
STATE AND SOCIETY IN SMALL-TOWN RUSSIA A FEMINIST-ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY INTO THE BOUNDARIES OF SOCIETY IN THE FINNISH-RUSSIAN BORDERLAND

Meri Kulmala



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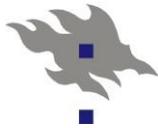
MERI KULMALA



The studied organizations

- **Social welfare organization:** a mission-driven organization whose active participants – paid staff and volunteers – do not belong to a group on behalf of whom the organization works and to whom its activities are addressed; solidaristic, not representative in its nature
- **Membership organization:** organized around a classic representative structure with a clear constituency; run by its members with a delegation of power; serves the interests of these members; collective organization of people based on principles of mutual aid and self-help

Organization	Membership organization	Social organization
Association of the disabled	X	
Association of the visually impaired	X	
Diabetik	X	
Hope	X	X
Lifeline		X
Mental Health		X
World of Children		X
Pensioners' organization	X	
Youth organization	X	



An overview of the local civil society (II)

■ Voluntarism

- Instead of paid staff

■ Female predominance

- In social organizations, in particular
- Essentialist explanations: unquestioned female responsibility

■ Continuation from the Soviet era

- “I have always been active”

■ Finnish influence

- Certain priorities; certain model

■ Moral support from the local government

- No institutional mechanisms for collaboration, but tight contacts
- Small town setting

■ Social orientation

- All types (not only social-sector CSOs)
- Apolitical – (what counts political?)

Quotations



■ Apolitical work

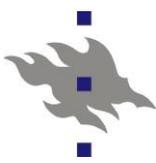
- Nadezha: **No, we are not a political organization; that is unequivocal.** We provide help in every occasion. When it is election time, women, our members, usually participate in the work of election committees. When it is time for the population census – again everyone says, please give us your activists – it’s good for them also, they [women-members] get some money for their work – and we can be sure that everything goes as it should go. **I think that we are here more for solving social problems.** On a voluntary basis, because we have so many active women who are ready to help, without any money.

■ Feminine work

- Meri: What about... what do you think, why almost all the activists in civil society organizations are women? That’s what I think. It’s difficult to find a male activist.
- Marina: **A women – she’s a mother.** They [women] are more emotional. I don’t know, perhaps because she has the motherly instinct (*materinskoe nachalo*), that’s why she knows. **If men volunteered – oh my God! (...)** I’m active because of **sense of compassion, sense of responsibility, sense of obligation**, I don’t know... Maybe I’m more emotional [compared with my husband].
- Nina: **Because from [her] heart, because it’s [social activism] a question of good things – women have it more deep, and they perceive more.** Thus, for women, it’s easier to understand and to be open – how to say – to feel a stranger’s pain or problems. And in general, women belong to the most active layer of the population. **And a woman, she is a mother, a wife** – for her, it’s easier to see everything, to understand and with a delicate approach. ... Because in the work of social organizations, one cannot leap before one looks, but one needs very carefully to consider everything very softly, with a delicate approach to one or another problem. And then, weight these aspects, priorities, what’s most important, and what’s of secondary importance. Though, of course, we have also men among the activists of our social organization [i.e., child protection organization]. But nevertheless, **woman is by nature, by her structure of character, and by her in-built strengths more able to help other people.** And the very basic goal of the social organizations is to help children, families. That’s why, perhaps, it [social activism] is **a truly female task, function.** And that’s why mostly women are our members, among active members of the organization. You have observed right. That’s how it is.

■ Small town context

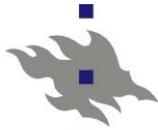
- Nataliia (laughing): Well, you see, the town is small, that’s why it’s easy. **With one you studied, with another one kissed, with third person something else...**



Role of socially oriented NGOs

- More recent (usually Post-Soviet) **social welfare organizations**
 - Services and support as primary function
 - Advocacy as a side product
 - Publishing new (sensitive) issues
 - Modifying local welfare scene

- Old Soviet-type **membership organizations**
 - Interest representation and rights defense as primary function
 - Social rights
 - Assistance with access to social support and welfare services; small-scale services of their own
 - Emotional, peer-support



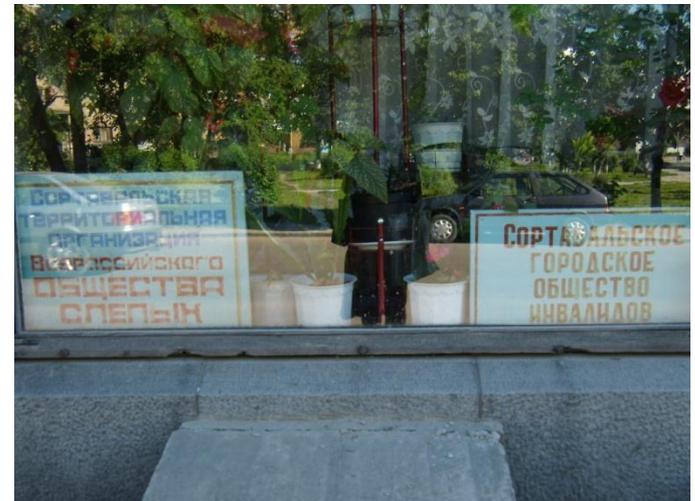
Public-Civic Combination

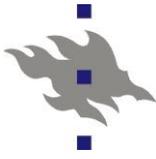
- Municipal Center responsible for social services (minimum requirements)
- Most staff members involved in several social organizations, active within the Center, and networked with Finns -> new services initiated through projects, e.g.
 - Crisis center for women suffering from domestic violence;
 - Workshops for the mentally disabled
 - Partly public; partly voluntary
- Blurred boundaries and overlapping roles: where the state ends and society begins?
- Logic: Public-Civic-Combination for better well-being of local community
- Extra services + new clientele = local service structure modified
- Articulation of new identities & sensitive issues
- Negotiating public private boundaries
- Service provision; advocacy as a side product



Old Soviet-type organizations

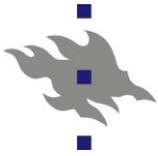
- E.g. veterans' and disabled organizations
 - Mass membership organizations
 - Ignored in the Western scholarship on post-socialist civil societies
- Advocacy: securing old in-kind benefits as the main function (cf. Soviet welfare regime)
 - Members' interest representation
 - "Of all the pensioners"
 - Against federal policies; vis-à-vis local service institutions
 - Politicization of the "offended identities"
- Helping with access to state services
 - Small-scale services of their own





Concluding about role of civil society...

- Social orientation and practical help
- But not: advocacy OR services
- More "political" function
 - Publishing new issues
 - New identities created
 - Already existing "offended" identities defended
 - Local "structures" modified (services but also framings)
 - Less (non-existent) "conventional" policy impact
- Also political is social
 - Resonance in the given context
 - Expectations about the state as major provider of services
 - Cf. Neo-liberal critique
- Finally, sharp distinctions of social vs. political and state vs. civil society not illustrative



Further readings

- Kulmala, Meri. 2011. Rethinking State and Society Boundaries in a Small-Town Context of Russian Karelia. In *Gazing at Welfare, Gender and Agency in Post-socialist Countries*, ed. by Maija Jäppinen, Meri Kulmala & Aino Saarinen. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 170-198.
- Thomson, Kate. 2006. “Disability Organizations in the Regions.” In *Russian Civil Society: A Critical Assessment*, edited by Alfred B. Evans, Laura A. Henry, and Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom, 229–245. New York: M.E. Sharpe.