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Philanthropy in Russia and Central Asia



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Definition

In Russia, the term philanthropy, which is traced back to the Greek *philea* (love) and *ánthropos* (man), has been used together with the native Russian word *blagotvoritel'nost'* meaning “creating good deeds” and translated as “charity.” Both words circulated widely before the revolution of 1917. In Soviet times, however, philanthropy and charity were associated with the capitalist way of life and considered a demeaning, manipulative capitalist practice because the state was supposed to be the sole provider of citizens’ welfare (Gambrell, 2004). An academic dictionary of the Russian language of that time defines philanthropy as support and patronage of the needy in the bourgeois society (Yevgenyeva, 1957–1960). Starting from the mid-1990s, an official legitimization of the nonprofit sector and the activities of international and Russian charities reintroduced the term and concept of philanthropy into modern use.

Introduction

Russia is a country with long-standing traditions of institutional and private philanthropy which were cut off over 70 years and started to be rebuilt only during the post-Communist transition. Private altruistic activity in various formats has been on the rise over the past two decades. An all-Russia NPO survey (2012, $N = 1005$) revealed that private and corporate donations made up 15% and 8% of NPOs’ budget, respectively. Membership fees amounted to 20% of NPOs’ budget (Mersianova et al., 2015). In 2017, more than half of adult Russians made charitable donations, including direct help to the needy (Mersianova 2019).

The development of philanthropy in Russia is closely linked with government attitudes toward the NPO sector. According to the Russian Federation Ministry of Justice, Russia has over 218,000 NPOs registered. However, the data of the Russian Federation Public Chamber revealed that the number of actually functional NPOs amounts to some 15–20% of the total number of NPOs (Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, 2019). Nevertheless, the state is a major donor supporting the nonprofit sector. The 2012 all-Russia NPO survey mentioned earlier indicated that 10% of NPOs received federal funding. Regional and municipal budgets provided support to another 10 and 16% of NPOs, respectively. Overall, 27% of NPOs benefited in some way or another from public funding sources (Mersianova

et al., 2015). Currently several federal ministries, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Sports, the Ministry of Culture, and others, also provide NPO financial support. Federal budget resources going to NPOs totaled RUB 12.9 billion in 2017.

Government policy with regard to NPOs and private philanthropy is quite controversial: although considerable government funding continues to flow to the NPO sector, the adoption of the so-called “foreign agents” law causes significant difficulties for the operations of NPOs receiving foreign funding. The law requires them either to refrain from broadly defined political activities or to register as foreign agents. Salamon et al. (2015) suggest that Russian government policy vis-à-vis the third sector is not a holistic phenomenon but rather results from a combination of multiple policies each having its own goals, follows its own logic, and is pursued by a different government agency.

Historical Traditions of Private Giving

Before the eighteenth century, charitable activities were exercised by the Russian Orthodox Church and individuals driven by religious motivations. In imperial Russia, philanthropy became an important function of the state. Mersianova et al. (2015) distinguish four phases in Russian philanthropy development.

The first phase (eighteenth century to 1860) marked the appearance of entities somewhat similar to modern charitable foundations and combining features of both foundations and government agencies. Such public/private hybrid entities emerged through the ruling family’s direct involvement in philanthropic undertakings. The beginning of the nineteenth century saw the appearance of charitable societies, i.e., voluntary associations of private individuals aimed at providing support to the poor. Among the first was the Philanthropic Society created by imperial decree in 1802, which later remained a benefaction society. Tsar Alexander I and his mother, Dowager Empress Mary, served as royal patrons. Another example was the Office for Supervision of Empress Mary’s institutions, which was primarily concerned with promoting education for

women, while also caring for orphans, widows, and the disabled.

The second phase (1860 to the Communist Revolution of 1917) is known for the reforms abolishing serfdom and spurring active engagement of various social groups in public-driven initiatives, such as the relief provided to victims of the famine of 1891–1892 jointly by the government and the public. Charitable associations and societies, donations of private philanthropists, and charitable activities at the municipal level supplemented philanthropic initiatives of the Russian government. Charities flourished in large cities, such as St. Petersburg, Moscow, Riga, and Odessa, where private donations made up the bulk of the funding pool. In the 1890s, annual proceeds of all charities of the Russian empire totaled RUB 59 million. Generous donations to culture and the arts were made by P. Tretyakov, the founder of State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, S. Morozov who financed the construction of the Moscow Art Theater, and S. Mamontov, the owner of the arts center Abramtsevo Estate. By 1902, Russia had 11,040 charities. The involvement of women in philanthropic initiatives, a typical feature of the reform period, resulted in the setting up of women’s self-help charities. With the outbreak of World War I, new types of charities emerged, providing support to refugees (Tumanova, 2010).

The third phase (1917–1991) started with the Communist Revolution cutting off the charity development trajectory. On one hand, the state provided support to education, healthcare, pension, and housing systems. On the other, it eliminated private businesses together with independent charities. The Soviet government ignored Russia’s heritage of the charitable sector and almost totally eliminated numerous charitable institutions. In 1961, the Soviet Foundation for Peace was established which was one of the Soviet Union’s soft power instruments for financing humanitarian aid and various public events worldwide. Later a few other state-controlled foundations appeared whose activities were generally focused abroad rather than within the Soviet Union.

The fourth and current phase started with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Philanthropy

growth in the 1990s was characterized by an import-dependent development model of Russian third sector. International donors acted as the key agents for supply of both resources and institutions. They would not only provide funds but also ensure a transfer of Western third sector culture to Russia and served as a training ground for future Russian-funded philanthropic activities. Foundations became legal entities for the first time with the introduction of the new civil code in 1991 and additional legislation on nonprofit organizations in the mid-1990s. The 2000s were characterized by import substitution: domestic sources replaced the foreign ones in providing NPO funding (Jakobson and Sanovich 2010). The Russian government welcomed the emerging domestic philanthropy that focused on supporting public priorities and aligned with state priorities (Jakobson et al., 2018).

Cultural Factors Affecting Philanthropy

Wiepking and Handy (2015) note that one of the key drivers of philanthropy in a cross-national perspective is a culture of philanthropy rooted in the perception that philanthropy and the nonprofit sector are instrumental in the provision of public goods and services. In Russia, dissatisfaction with the state-provided social services became a facilitating factor for the public recognition of philanthropy's (potentially) positive role. Russian government expenditure has traditionally played a crucial role in the funding of social needs. However, citizens' satisfaction with sectors of the social sphere is rather low (Jakobson et al. 2012). An All-Russia 2015 population survey indicated that 70% of citizens link potential improvements in social welfare, among other things, to the strengthening of the NPO role. Some 87% of NPO leaders share this opinion (Mersianova & Benevolenski, 2016). The Charities Aid Foundation's annual report on individual giving in Russia showed that over half of the respondents perceive charities to have a positive impact on their country and local communities (Charities Aid Foundation, 2020).

Another aspect of a culture of philanthropy is the transparency and public visibility of philanthropic giving (Wiepking and Handy 2015). In the

1990s, Russian business people making sizeable private donations preferred to keep a low profile not to attract attention to the fortunes which the public opinion perceived as illegally acquired (Polishchuk, 2006).

In 2016, the international Giving Tuesday movement inspiring people to donate and talk about their giving to charity was first introduced to Russia. According to the www.givingtuesday.ru website, some 4100 partners – charities, businesses, and government institutions – from 320 cities and towns of the country joined the movement in 2019 and organized over 3000 fundraising events, whereas the number of people sharing stories about their giving rose by one-third.

Public trust is considered one of the crucial factors affecting philanthropy. National surveys indicate a deficit of this factor in Russia. Only 38% of Russians are trustful of certain NPOs (Mersianova & Korneeva, 2017). The trust in charities was undermined owing to fraudulent cases of illegal collection of donations misusing the names of well-known charities. The nonprofit sector responded with a campaign “Together Against Fraudsters,” and nearly 300 charities signed the Declaration of Fairness claiming that uncontrolled collection of cash tarnished the charitable sector as a whole. The situation is showing signs of improvement. An All-Russia NPO poll revealed that 88% of NPOs use diverse elements of information transparency, such as websites, social media, participation in public events, and open access to reporting (Jakobson et al., 2020).

Religious values are shown by international scholarship to be of significant importance in facilitating philanthropic activity. Russian data on the connection between private giving and religious affiliation are scarce. Donations to the church, mosque, or a house of worship are characteristic of various religious denominations. Overall, the Islamic community looks relatively more active than other religious groups. Unlike many other countries, philanthropy in contemporary Russia is fairly weakly connected with religious organizations. No significant differences were found between giving for religious causes and for secular causes (Mersianova et al., 2015).

Philanthropy in Central Asia

Similarly to Russia, NPOs started to emerge in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union as five former Soviet republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) gained independence. The NPO sector development in these Central Asian countries followed a path similar to that of the import substitution model in Russia. Although charity has historic roots across the region in Islamic cultural and religious traditions, there is little evidence that charitable activities play a significant or sustainable role in national development or addressing social challenges. This is explained by a combination of factors: lack of understanding of philanthropy, low public trust, and limited awareness of the contemporary culture of charity. Charity is often understood as in-kind giving, help to one's own family and relatives, and help to one's fellow villagers in times of need. There is a general understanding of philanthropy as immediate relief. Other impediments include a critical lack of credible data on charitable giving in Central Asia (University of Central Asia, 2019).

Individual Giving

Over half of the Russian population makes donations, at least sporadically, in the amounts they can afford. The trend has remained consistent for about a decade showing a tendency toward a modest increase. A 2009 large-scale survey in 68 regions of the country found that 53% of Russians were involved in charitable giving (Mersianova, 2010), whereas according to an All-Russia representative survey in 2017, this figure rose to 57% (Benevolenski et al., 2019). Over half of respondents donated to children that need expensive medical treatment. Caring about the cause and helping people in need, such as elderly people and children, are the most common reasons for giving money. However, private philanthropy exists mainly in noninstitutionalized forms: Russians prefer to give directly to the beneficiary rather than through intermediary charity funds, which is an indication of fairly low trust.

In terms of individual donor motivations, confidence that their money will reach the end beneficiary is a crucial factor to facilitate individual giving by Russians (Hartnell, 2018; Mersianova & Korneeva, 2013). The most popular methods of giving are texting followed by online donations with a bank card and putting money into a donation box in a public place. Up-to-date fundraising technologies are advancing quickly, including online donation platforms run by nonprofits.

Giving activity differs according to socio-demographic characteristics. A poll showed that Russians aged 31–45 and 46–60 years are the most active donors. The typical (median) amount donated in 2019 was RUB 3000 (Charities Aid Foundation, 2020). Those who are more highly educated and participate in NPO activities have a higher frequency of giving and donate comparatively large annual amounts. The likelihood of engaging in charity increases in line with family income and relates, to a degree, to the employment type: 69% of entrepreneurs and businessmen and 62% of managers reported they make donations. Those who participate in NPOs make donations more often and donate larger amounts (Mersianova et al., 2015).

When it comes to Central Asia, reliable data on individual giving are virtually unavailable across the region. This can be explained by the prevalence of small individual donations given in passing to those in need and in-kind giving of food and clothing. Substantial individual donations are known to be made through religious institutions, but the data to estimate the amount of such donations are lacking. Recently social media have played a significant role in mobilizing support for people in need of expensive medical treatment. Mass-scale labor migration of Tajiks to the Russian Federation resulted in a substantial flow of remittances, which according to IOM research constituted some 40% of the republic's GDP (International Organization for Migration, 2014). Despite the Tajikistan government's efforts to encourage labor migrants to contribute financially to the country's development, migrants were unwilling to do so through the central government, although some made financial contributions

to their communities via local-level state bodies (University of Central Asia, 2019).

Foundations

Russia's foundation community is still fairly small and closely tied to the business sector. Currently, some 11,000 nonprofits are registered as a foundation in Russia although relatively few are active. Some for-profit and public sector entities are officially called foundations, which makes it difficult to identify the financial capacity of the charitable sector proper. Given its fairly short history, the numbers, assets, and annual spending of Russian foundations are still modest, and the data on assets and giving are still virtually nonexistent (Chertok, 2014). A lack of transparency (only a little over half of the foundations maintain a web site; 21% publishes annual performance reports and only 13% produces financial reports) as well as the misuse of foundations in the 1990s led to skeptical views regarding foundations (Jakobson et al., 2018). Russian charitable foundations are subject to strict reporting requirements: they have to provide annual performance reporting, a report on the membership of their boards to territorial offices of the Russian Federation Ministry of Justice, and a report on their expenditures and use of assets including those received from foreign entities.

As a still young and evolving field, the repertoire of foundation purposes, approaches, and roles remains somewhat limited. Russian foundations can be divided into six types, which is not a legal classification but one based on their essential characteristics:

- Private foundations.
- Corporate foundations.
- Endowments.
- Community foundations.
- Fundraising foundations.
- Government-initiated foundations.

Private foundations established by a private person or a family are not many and mostly

concentrated in Moscow – the capital city has more than 20 large private foundations with an aggregate annual budget of RUB 4.5 to 5 billion (in the range of US\$ 80 million). Private foundations outside of the capital agglomeration account for only 2.4% of the expenses of private foundations. However, the data on the exact number of private foundations and their total budget are unavailable (b; Freik, 2020a).

Corporate foundations are established by companies to implement charitable programs. To date some 25 such foundations are in operation. However, only a small portion of corporate philanthropy is channeled through such foundations. Community foundations operate in a specific territory and accumulate funds from local businesses and individuals to finance social and charitable projects. Introduced in the 1990s, there were over 70 community foundations in 2017. Although nearly half of them operate in rural territories with scarce financial resources, community foundations have been successful in supporting civic initiatives and tapping local residents' potential.

The concept of endowments was known in Russia back in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but in Soviet times fell into disuse (Jakobson et al., 2018). Endowments were only introduced with the Federal Law of 2006. After a decade since the law was adopted, over 170 endowments were established, and the total amount of endowment capital in Russia was already in excess of RUB 24.9 billion (Volunteerism and Charity in Russia 2019).

Fundraising foundations are established to raise donations on behalf of specific beneficiary groups or for specific purposes. According to reports, 485 of the most prominent Russian fundraising foundations such as RusFond, Gift of Life, and others collectively raised RUB 10.4 billion (about US\$ 175 million) in 2014 (Jakobson et al., 2018: 1853).

As for government-initiated foundations, the Russian government has not been very active in establishing its own foundations, which are few.

In terms of purposes, Russian foundations favor relief and protection. Social welfare is a

high-impact area for Russian foundations. According to the data of the Center for Studies of Civil Society and the Nonprofit Sector at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, 79% of foundations are engaged in offering social services as operating foundations, and most of these are provided free of charge (Jakobson et al., 2018).

Foundations interact most frequently with the government on a regional and municipal level. According to the All-Russia NPO Survey of 2017, 81% of surveyed organizations interact with local self-government, 57% with regional government, and 28% with federal government (Jakobson et al., 2018). In general, Russian foundations adopt the complementary and substitution roles with regard to the state.

As for the Central Asian republics, the extent and nature of the foundation sector are largely determined by limited incentives for charitable giving. Although in some countries laws provide for tax deductions for donors, they are too low to be attractive (up to 4% of tax deduction for companies in Kazakhstan; up to 10% of tax deductions from the taxable profit in Tajikistan). In Kyrgyzstan, although subject to tax benefits, NPOs refrain from obtaining a charitable status as they will be required to spend 98% of their income on charitable purposes. Overall, as noted earlier, traditional norms of philanthropy prevail (kinship, community, and religious formats), which explains why the majority of charitable initiatives are not institutionalized. The foundation field follows the NGO sector's general trend: some estimates place the portion of active NPOs between 15 and 20% of those registered, while the number of effective NPOs is much smaller (University of Central Asia, 2019).

Corporations

In Russia, businesses and particularly those that derived from privatization of formerly state-owned enterprises are still expected to maintain social welfare responsibilities by the state, local governments, and the public. The emerging phenomenon of corporate social responsibility in

Russia is in a way an extension of social role expectations that date back to the Soviet times when companies actively took part in the provision of healthcare, education, and housing. Now most companies provide at least some form of social services where they have corporate presence. Companies are often pressed by the government at the municipal level to maintain social welfare responsibilities or contribute to infrastructure. Corporate philanthropic engagement particularly toward government priorities is officially encouraged.

Over nine out of ten companies are engaged in at least one of the following areas: culture, education, healthcare, youth and sports, and infrastructure (Fifka & Pobizhan, 2014).

Currently there is no state statistics on Russian corporate philanthropy. Information on corporate philanthropy total expenses is based solely on expert estimates. According to some estimates (Fifka & Pobizhan, 2014), average expenditures for what was referred to as "social programs" for the companies that disclosed information were US\$ 58 million. Indirect conclusions on the dynamics of and scope of corporate philanthropy can be provided by the data of the annual competition for the best corporate philanthropy program "Leaders of Corporate Philanthropy." In 2008, participants' total budget for social programs was about RUB 6.5 billion. Almost a decade later, the total CSR budget of competition participants rose to RUB 43 billion although half of this amount was accounted for by only two giant mining companies ALROSA and Nor Nickel (Volunteerism and Charity in Russia 2019). Recent data estimated CSR expenditures of corporate foundations in 2018 at RUB 13.9 billion which almost equals federal budget support of RUB 12 billion for socially oriented NPOs in 2018. Half of all corporate foundations operate in the Moscow capital agglomerate (Freik, 2020b).

Preserving legitimacy seems to be an important motive for Russian corporate philanthropy. A Donors' Forum Survey (, 2019) points out four types of motivations for corporate philanthropy: moral (creating social value), economic (creating value for shareholders), external

(response to expectations by federal and municipal authorities and NGOs), and inherited motivations (adherence to traditional priorities of a parent company or longtime social provision responsibilities). However, these are not mutually exclusive, and the ultimate drivers of corporate philanthropy are usually of a complex nature. Most popular goals of corporate philanthropy are alleviation of social problems (68%) and enhancing business sustainability and community development in the territories of operation (60%) (Donors' Forum, 2019).

The level of discussion and awareness of corporate social responsibility is fairly low with a noticeable skepticism and a view shared by one-fifth of the Donors' Forum Survey respondents that charitable foundations cannot be trusted. In recent years, however, there has been a shift in public opinion toward a more agreeable view of large donations by businessmen and corporations. This shift can be attributed to media messages appearing mainly on the Internet (Jakobson et al., 2018). Companies provide information about their CSR programs to a variety of stakeholders (federal and regional authorities, beneficiaries, NGOs, experts) often in a nonfinancial reporting section of the company's sustainable development report or other types of reporting accessible on the web. Only a minor part of the respondents (13%) issues a stand-alone non-financial report. A corporate web site and social media are the two major information dissemination channels (Donors' Forum, 2019).

Corporate philanthropy tools include donations, operating a foundation, corporate volunteering, and social sponsoring (the sponsoring of non-commercial events or institutions through monetary or in-kind support). Donations are the most frequently used (Fifka & Pobizhan, 2014). Only 30% to 40% of corporations operate their CSR programs through a foundation of their own (Donors' Forum, 2019: 31).

Many large corporations operating in Russia are beginning to rethink strategy and goals of their philanthropic activity that goes beyond direct assistance. Currently more than 150 companies

are known to engage in philanthropic activities on a systematic level (Jakobson et al., 2018). Grantmaking competitions are becoming increasingly popular among corporates (Hartnell, 2018).

Also, although the term "cause-related marketing" (CRM) still does not have an accepted Russian translation, the practice has been successfully piloted by industrial and financial companies. In 2012, a legendary Soviet chocolate brand Alyonka was revived in a cause-related marketing campaign which provided for a transfer of 1 ruble per purchase of a chocolate bar to a major fundraising foundation Gift of Life to support sick children. In the same vein, a confectionary in a Siberian city of Irkutsk jointly with the regional branch of the Russian Red Cross launched a CRM campaign to benefit sick children in a local hospital. A few other CRM projects were initiated by Russian businesses in collaboration with charities (Turkin, 2004). CRM practices are known to Russia's leading banks, such as Gazprombank (a visa bank card to support the saving of the Far Eastern leopard) and VTB (Green World bank card to support forest conservation) (Markeeva, 2020). However, these sporadic examples are much smaller in scope and visibility than traditional philanthropy and almost never have been a subject of research interest in Russia.

Unlike in Russia, corporate philanthropy and CSR do not seem to have caught on in the Central Asian republics. The private business sector is the largest source of philanthropic funding in Kazakhstan. A list of corporate contributors is topped by major oil and gas companies. Both the national government and corporations equate the CSR concept with charitable obligations and sponsorship of one-time events, while international organizations tend to operate grant programs. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, CSR also remains the domain of large companies, often with foreign investment. Few companies have permanent CSR programs. The knowledge of best international practices in CSR is mostly lacking in the region. Accordingly, the impact of corporate CSR programs remains low.

Concluding Assessment

Over a little more than a quarter of a century Russian philanthropy has come a long way from its early days of sporadic and spontaneous giving during the post-Communist transition toward a dynamically developing, fairly diverse sector capable of complementing public welfare. It enjoys government and corporate support and increasing public awareness. However, there is still largely untapped potential of both the sector's development and research on it. The sector demonstrates considerable heterogeneity (Jakobson et al., 2020) manifest, among other things, in the low institutionalization of expanding individual giving, significant regional variations in the development of individual and corporate philanthropy, mismatch between a significant level of corporate funding and limited use of corporate foundations, and disconnect of foundations with civil society. Winning citizen trust, attaining higher professionalization as a sector, transparency, and taking a systemic approach to addressing social issues are major challenges facing Russian philanthropy.

The imbalance in philanthropy research is revealed first of all in a lack of reliable statistics capable of serving as a basis for data-driven studies. The available body of empirical data on the determinants of individual giving contrasts with a lack of knowledge of strengths and weaknesses of different foundation types, conceptualization of foundations as a field, and in-depth studies their innovative patterns and practices.

The philanthropy landscape in Central Asia remains largely obscure owing to an essential lack of credible data on philanthropy's scope and infrastructure. To grow effective and sustainable philanthropy across the region, it is important to instill the modern culture of giving, develop an enabling legal environment, and advance multiple opportunities for citizen participation in philanthropy.

Cross-References

- ▶ Cause-related marketing
- ▶ Charity defined in comparative, cross-cultural perspective
- ▶ Civil Society and Social Capital in Central Asia
- ▶ Civil Society and Social Capital in Russia
- ▶ Corporate Giving
- ▶ Corporate Social Responsibility
- ▶ Community philanthropy
- ▶ Diaspora philanthropy and remittances
- ▶ E-philanthropy
- ▶ Foundations, Corporate
- ▶ Foundations, Community
- ▶ Foundations, Family
- ▶ Philanthropy and Religion, Islam
- ▶ Social Media
- ▶ Transparency
- ▶ Volunteering in Russia and Central Asia.

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