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What is This?

Culture as Structure in Emerging Civic Organizations in Russia

Sarah Busse Spencer[1]

Abstract

After nearly 20 years of democracy-building projects in Russia, a robust civil society has yet to develop. While researchers have suggested political conditions, misaligned incentives, or the unintended consequences of Western funding as possible reasons for this situation, the impact of culture on civic organizations has been overlooked. This article draws on ethnographic research of civic organizations in Novosibirsk, Russia to illustrate the impact of national and organizational culture on emerging civic organizations. Most civic organizations in Russia are influenced by cultural legacies of patronage and personalism, Soviet-style collectives, and group boundaries reinforced through taking tea. Reproduction of these cultural norms results in bonding social capital rather than the bridging social capital associated with democratic society. The ongoing structuration of civic organizations through the reproduction of tsarist and socialist legacies illustrates the importance of understanding the cultural contexts of civil society development.

Keywords

ethnography, structuration, postsocialist society, culture, civc organizations

According to scholarship harking back to de Tocqueville, successful democracy depends on a strong civil society with active voluntary associations (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993; Tocqueville, 1969). In the 1990s, these theories spurred Western-funded democracy-building projects in many postsocialist states (Henderson, 2003, p. 5). There is a growing consensus, however, that these efforts have failed to reach their intended aims. What factors have hindered the establishment of robust civil society

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and democracy in Russia? Recent research has suggested corruption (Wedel, 2001), lack of norm agreement (Sundstrom, 2005), incorrect incentives and inadequate formal institutions (Henderson, 2003), or a third sector dominated by former Soviet elites (Hemment, 2007). Scholars have often overlooked the impact that culture—shared norms, values, and behaviors—can have on the formation and operation of organizations, including voluntary associations. This article seeks to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the impact of culture through the structuration of social interaction (Giddens, 1984) in civic organizations in the third sector in Russia (Hemment, 2007). Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in Novosibirsk, Russia, this article argues that legacies of norms and behaviors from the tsarist and socialist eras continue to structure how new civic organizations are founded and operated. Western scholars and funders must recognize that these cultural legacies create civic organizations with different organizing logics and outcomes than Western theories predicted.

Civil society has been described as "a space of citizen directed collective action, located between the family and the state" (Henry & Sundstrom, 2006b, p. 5), consisting in part of formally organized groups for which scholars have used a range of terms. The term "nonprofit organization" refers to groups qualifying for tax-exempt status in the United States, but excludes important groups that do not meet this criteria (Van Til, 2009). In research on Russia, Henderson uses the term *nongovernmental organization* (NGO) to refer both to Western-funded groups and those that operate without such funding (Henderson, 2003, pp. 6-10) but notes distinct differences between these two types and could have used different terms for them. Also in Russia, Henry distinguishes between "grassroots organizations" based in local, often unpaid, collaboration; "professionalized organizations," often with Western funding; and "government affiliates" or groups surviving on donations or subcontracts from local government representatives (Henry, 2006, p. 217). The term "voluntary" association seems to imply groups attracting volunteer efforts, yet many groups in Russia maintain small memberships (Henderson, 2003, p. 11) and severely restrict the involvement of outside volunteers. In Russia, groups in civil society are most commonly referred to as "social" organizations (*obshchestvennie organizatsii*); this article will use the term "civic organization" as the nearest translation of this Russian phrase, referring to all groups active in this sector. To call them "civic organizations" should not suggest that all groups positively contribute to civil society or build "civicness," since many do not (Henderson, 2003, p. 11) but indicates simply their sphere of activity.

Culture and Organizations

Understanding why civic organizations have not yet contributed to a robust democratic society in Russia requires examining how culture influences civic organizations. This begins with a discussion of the broader literature on the effects of culture on organizations. Scholars in organizational studies have long examined the intersection of culture and organizations (Morrill, 2008). Such research typically focuses on either (a) the effect of external culture on an organization's form, content, or operation or (b) the effect of organizational culture on an organization's efficacy. Culture is

generally held to include shared values, norms, and attitudes, including the taken-for-granted "common sense" in a society (Geertz, 1975). Culture has been variously compared to rules (Giddens, 1984), schema (Sewell, 1992), and repertoires of action or a "tool kit" (Swidler, 1986) from which individuals choose actions that either reinforce or modify previously existing norms, values, and behaviors. Through repeating familiar habits, individuals contribute to the reproduction of existing practices (Bourdieu, 1990), contributing to the ongoing process of "structuration" of social interaction (Giddens, 1984).

National culture affects organizations, creating differences in how business is conducted across different countries even within similar industries (Orru, Biggart, & Hamilton, 1997). Organizational scholars concur that "culture, whether Japanese, . . . British . . . French, or American, shapes the character of organizations" (Morgan, 2006, p. 122). Studies in comparative capitalism recognize that economic organizations are embedded within distinctive cultural and structural arrangements and that these distinctive cultures help produce the varieties of capitalism observed today (e.g., Quack, Morgan, & Whitley, 2000).

In contrast, research on civil society often ignores the cultural embeddedness of civic organizations. While some scholars have pointed out the impact of political culture on nonprofit organizations (e.g., Bielefeld, Scotch, & Thielemann, 1995) or on their funding strategies (e.g., Wernet, 1997) or the impact of market orientation (Gainer & Padanyi, 2005), on the whole, civil society research pays insufficient attention to cultural context. This article seeks to redress this general lack by focusing on the effects of culture on civic organizations and how that shapes civil society.

"Organizational culture," or the shared values, beliefs, rituals and habits within an organization, also influences how an organization is structured and operates (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). Scholars have suggested that more attention should be paid to organizational culture (Schein, 1996). Business research focuses in particular on how organizational culture can be manipulated to increase a firm's overall efficiency (Morgan, 2006). Research in this vein has illustrated several differences between the organizational culture of U.S. and Russian companies (Fey & Denison, 2003).

Research on civic organizations has also examined the role of organizational culture. Organizational culture can have marked effects on the ability of groups to collaborate (Barnes & Fisher, 2006), as illustrated in cause-based partnerships between nonprofit and commercial organizations (Parker & Selsky, 2004), or in mergers of nonprofit groups (Giffords & Dina, 2003). In this sector, organizations are increasingly influenced by an organizational culture of "professionalism," management practices that mirror those in the for-profit sector (Drucker, 1990). Scholars have noted the rise in professionalism among nonprofit managers in the United States (Berman, 1999; Mulhare, 1999). U.S. funders increasingly apply these standards funders to NGOs outside the United States as well (Roberts, Jones, & Froehling, 2005).

In any setting, organizations face specific "organizing logics" that both constrain action and act as "repositories of distinctive capabilities that allow firms and other economic actors to pursue some activities . . . more successfully than others" (Biggart & Guillen, 1999, p. 725). Because organizing logics are based in culture and vary

across regions and nations, there are limits to how much uniformity of organizational form can be achieved across borders (Guillen, 2001). Research on organizing logics have examined examples of clientelism (Padgett & McLean, 2006) and the structure of postsocialist social networks (Bandelj & Purg, 2006).

Culture is not static in any setting, since individuals continually exercise their agency to reinforce or change existing social structure (Giddens, 1984). For example, a study of chauffeurs in the early 1900s illustrates that individuals who mastered the new automotive technology rejected the traditional behaviors of subservience expected of stableboys and coachmen (Borg, 1999). In Russia, Western funders expected that with the new freedom of association and new funding from the West, Russians would automatically choose behaviors that supported Western-style democratic society. However, the legacies of tsarist and Soviet-era culture have proved remarkably resilient, confirming the notion that "deep structures" are resistant to change (Sewell, 1992). These cultural legacies have specific consequences for civil society, as described below.

Civil Society in Russia

Scholars have suggested diverse reasons for why civil society in Russia has not developed as observers had initially hoped. These include political conditions, bureaucratic hurdles, the lack of generalized trust, types of social networks, or even the influence of Western funding. While all of these factors may play a role, this article argues that it is essential to also examine the role of culture in shaping the civic organizations that contribute to civil society.

Some scholars suggest political conditions are the real sources of difficulty for building democracy. Restrictions on civil society and political participation in Russia (Knox, Lentini, & Williams, 2006), the rejection of democratic structures (Crotty, 2003), the ineffectiveness of democratic institutions (Petukhov, 2008), and the influence of political elites (Gill, 2002) have been cited as reasons why democracy-building projects have been less than successful. Certainly, regulations governing the activity of civic organizations have tightened considerably under Putin's administration (Yuryeev, 1999). For example, a law signed in December 2005 restricted civil society activities, limiting funding from foreign organizations and increasing the hurdles for the registration of domestic organizations (Press, 2006).

Other scholars focus on social obstacles to democratization including popular attitudes, religion, generalized trust, or social networks. Challenges facing civic organizers in Russia include the traditional nonparticipation of citizens in collective action (Rimskii, 2008) and the less than enthusiastic attitudes of the population toward civil society (Petukhov, 2003). Religious identity has not served as a basis for political mobilization (White & McAllister, 2000) but others have suggested that Russian Orthodoxy is not an obstacle to the development of civil society (Marsh, 2005).

Scholars have emphasized the need for generalized trust in democratic society (e.g., Warren, 1999) and some have argued Russia is low in such trust (Fukuyama, 1995). However, others suggest that it is not trust but the shape of social networks that matters:

Weak ties or bridging ties across heterogeneous groups are more conducive to a democratic society than strong bonding ties (Putnam et al., 1993). Russian society is characterized by strong ties within closed groups (Gibson, 2001), extensive trust within social networks (Alapuro & Lonkila, 2000), and a high distrust of strangers. Emerging civic organizations share these characteristics: for example, environmental organizations in Samara are described as "inward looking and parochial" (Crotty, 2006, p. 1319), and organizations in several cities are noted for their small size (Henderson, 2003, p. 11). Howard argues that although civil society in Russia is not as weak as some suspect, it does not foster the "civil skills" that support democracy (Howard, 2002, p. 286).

Still other scholars cite the unintended consequences of Western funding as a source of challenges for civil society development. Sundstrom (2005) suggests that following Western-specific goals makes an organization less effective in Russia, while Henderson (2003) notes that Western funding, while supporting NGOs, might undermine civic development (p. 14) and that foreign aid can "discourage groups from functioning as a civil society" (p 28). Wedel (2001) likewise notes the disconnect between Western funders and genuine civil society in postsocialist Poland.

This article argues that cultural legacies of the tsarist and Soviet eras, reproduced through daily norms and habits, have significant implications for the shape of civic organizations and thereby for the development of civil society. Socialist legacies include the "values, attitudes and behavior of the population" whether instilled by the state or "developed as the result of living under a communist system" (Millar & Wolchik, 1994, p. 10). Specific norms from the past continue to structure social interaction, creating distinctive organizing logics for civic organizations in this setting, molding civil society in a direction not foreseen by Western funders.

Ethnography in Postsocialist Society

Data in this article come from ethnographic research among civic organizations conducted in the city of Novosibirsk, Russia in 1999-2000 with brief follow up trips in 2002, 2005, and 2006. Ethnographies have proved fruitful in developing our understanding of post-Soviet Russian society (such as Ashwin, 1999; Caldwell, 2004; Humphrey, 2002). In particular, interviews and participant observation have illuminated distinctive features of postsocialist civil society (Hemment, 2007; Henderson, 2003) and connections between local civic organizations and Western funders (Wedel, 2001). Participant observation is crucial for understanding norms and behaviors and their consequences at the micro level.

Although most scholars have concentrated on Moscow or St. Petersburg, I chose Novosibirsk, in western Siberia, which has been studied less frequently (Barchunova, 2003; Barkhatova, 2000; Henderson, 2003; Ledeneva, 1998). With approximately 1.7 million (mostly ethnic Slavic) residents, a moderately sized local business and civic community, and little foreign direct investment, Novosibirsk is more typical of other urban Russian settings than Moscow with its concentration of international business and Western NGO foundations.

Located midway between Moscow and the Pacific Ocean, Novosibirsk serves as the commercial and transit hub of Siberia. Founded in 1893, most of Novosibirsk's housing stock, public buildings, and urban plan represent the typical "socialist city" (French & Hamilton, 1979). Street names, May Day parades, and the statue of Lenin in the city center still evoke a Soviet legacy. In the Soviet era, Novosibirsk relied on two economic sectors: the military industrial complex, employing thousands in factories; and the Siberian branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences and an elite university and research institutes. Since the collapse of the USSR, Novosibirsk has experienced economic changes typical for the nation as a whole (Silverman & Yanowitch, 2000): Some residents find high-paying jobs in new businesses, while those in the state sector face increased unemployment or inadequate salaries. Furthermore, the small business sector in Novosibirsk is estimated to be "not very different from the average Russian one" (Barkhatova, 2000, p. 657).

When I began my research in 1999, scholars knew little about the Russian third sector outside of Moscow (Ruffin, McCarter, & Upjohn, 1996). Novosibirsk was rated as among the top ten regions for factors that encourage civil society development, including civic engagement, higher education, communications infrastructure, and lower crime rates (Twigg, 2003, p. 181). A list from 1999 indicated 420 civic organizations in Novosibirsk (Maslennikova, 1999), but many of those groups were no longer operating in 2000. Most of the groups provided services for various target populations, while one tenth of the groups called themselves simply "social clubs."[1] An acquaintance at a regional civic organization introduced me to fellow staff members and invited me to civic events. I used the center's resources to seek a local group where I could volunteer, but despite this introduction, most civic organizations I contacted were not interested in outside volunteers and rejected my offer of help.

Ivana, the leader of a women's organization, did agree to let me help her group design and conduct a brief survey of attendees at a large civic event. In preparing the survey, I met with Ivana several times, and accompanied her to additional events where I met other leaders, as I gradually gained familiarity and then trust with leaders of civic organizations. I conducted 16 open-ended in-depth interviews of 1 to 2 hr each with key informants in civic organizations in addition to hundreds of hours attending various civic functions. Like Henderson (Henderson, 2003), it was while trying to help start a group that I experienced many of the obstacles to starting up a civic organization in Russia. In my follow-up visits, I interviewed six of the previous interviewees to ask about changes since my earlier visits.

Culture and Organization in Novosibirsk

Drawing on my ethnographic research, the following section outlines aspects of tsarist-era and Soviet-era culture as they affect civic organizations in Novosibirsk. First, despite Western efforts to introduce "professionalism" to the third sector in Russia, most local civic organizations follow established traditions of patron–client ties and utilize personalistic ties with "useful" acquaintances for getting things done, subverting formal channels. Second, many members of civic organizations in this city

think or act in relation to their group as to a "collective," reproducing a form of association derived from Soviet schools and workplaces. Third, I observed numerous civic organizations continue the Russian tradition of taking tea to reinforce internal group cohesiveness. Taking tea and thinking like a collective foster bonding social capital through reproducing small, fixed-member groups, closed to outsiders. This creates a condition opposite from the bridging social capital and generalized trust researchers argue derives from civic organizations to support democratic society (Henry & Sundstrom, 2006a).

Western Funding and Western Advice

Western NGOs and governments have supported democracy-building projects in Russia since the early 1990s (Henderson, 2003). Western donors have funded projects based on their own values often without considering local needs (Sperling, 1999); such Western-funded organizations are typically less successful than those that take their cue from local values and norms (Sundstrom, 2005). But Western donors also insist that grantees follow what they prescribe as "best practice," based on the business model of scheduling, budgeting, and impersonal task-oriented interactions (Drucker, 1990). Given the differences in organizational logic in the two countries, a "professionalized" group that adopts Western business-like styles (Hemment, 2007) can seem just "foreign" in Russia as one that adopts Western goals.

Giving Western advice in Novosibirsk. In 1994, two Americans in the city used Western funding to develop a network that would connect civic organizations in the region. The resource center they created became a conduit for Western funding of "democracy building" projects (Henderson, 2003) as the hub of a network of civic organizations in cities across Siberia. When I first visited this organization in 1999 it had over a dozen full-time staff and numerous part-time consultants. From 1995 to 2004, this resource center provided grants for local organizations and conducted projects and programs which, according to the group's mission statement, aimed at increasing the professionalism and mutual cooperation of local civic organizations. Seminars and discussion groups to teach professional standards to local leaders were an integral part of the group's activities. This resource center advocated Western-style professional behaviors for civic organizations in Novosibirsk.

In events at this resource center, I saw numerous occasions where civil leaders modeled a Western participatory workshop format (including chart paper for discussions), as Hemment observed in a similar setting in Tomsk (2007, pp. 59-60). However, in other civic organizations, I saw little Western-style behavior. In addition, grant-writing and Western accounting practices were seen only in a few groups that repeatedly secured all the foreign funding in the city. Old habits persisted even among the few groups with international exposure. For example, a staff member at the resource center who led a committee of civic leaders to plan the NGO Fair (described below) dictated actions to participants rather than allowing for any open or democratic discussion or genuine volunteering. Similarly, in the neighboring city of Omsk, a former Soviet official–turned civic organizer led a meeting celebrating the achievements of

local civic organizations, using the Soviet style of "democratic centralism" in which the leader proposes ideas to which everyone automatically consents. She even told attendees when and how they should clap at the end.

Tradition of Patronage

Echoing the findings of many scholars of Russia, I observed a persistence of tsarist and Soviet-era traditions of patronage. Patronage politics (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984) was a feature of Russian society under the tsars (Vorozheikina, 1994) and continued to be prominent in the Soviet Union (Ledeneva, 1998). As the Soviet economy slowed to a standstill in its last two decades, currying patron–client ties to secure increasingly scarce good jobs, housing, promotions, and basic consumer goods became even more prevalent (Millar, 1987; Rose, 2001). Because the Soviet Union was dissolved through a relatively peaceful process and not through revolution, many of these same patron–client relationships have continued uninterrupted into post-Soviet society (Rose, 2001). The process of cultivating vertical ties to serve as channels of patronage are perpetuated today, since economic and political changes have only altered the ends to which these patron–client ties are used (Ledeneva, 2006).

Patronage in civic organizations. From 1995 to 2002, the resource center worked with its client groups to put on an "NGO Fair" or exhibition (*yarmarka*). The Fair I observed in 2000 was meant to be inclusive: In theory, any group engaged in "socially beneficial" activities was invited, but in fact most of the 100 presentations were submitted by client organizations of this resource center. Despite the rhetoric of inclusiveness, the Fair was an event of, by, and for civic organizers; I was unable to find anyone at the event who did not run some organization. Participants knew each other and chatted lightly as they waited for the event of most importance to them: the visit by the mayor. When the mayor finally walked through with his entourage, it was clear that civic leaders had entered the fair just to be seen by the mayor, hoping to get a chance to seek his patronage. As the mayor progressed through the stands, his staff accompanied him to make note of his promises. As soon as the mayor had seen a row of stands, people began immediately dismantling their displays, not waiting for closing time to leave.

In an open acknowledgment of this patronage connection, the mayor's office has since 2002 taken over the management of the Fair, providing space at the city's exhibition center for civic organizations to set up their displays. Since the NGO Fair still included roundtables and discussion groups, it still might in theory provide an opportunity for networking among civic organization leaders. However, in follow up visits, my acquaintances have suggested that for participants the most important aspect of the Fair remains not the peer networking but the hope to catch the mayor's personal attention.

Tradition of Personalism

Another ubiquitous aspect of Soviet life was personalistic contacting, the use of *blat* or "pulling strings" to circumvent inefficient bureaucracy and the shortages of consumer

goods and services that were endemic to socialist society (Ledeneva, 1998; Lovell, Ledeneva, & Rogachevskii, 2001). Today, habits of personalism still persist and form part of the organizational logic of civic organizations. Other researchers have noted that many civic organizations are based on "preexisting friendships or elite connections" (Crotty, 2006, p. 1319) or "preexisting institutions, networks of individuals and norms" (Henry, 2006, p. 223).

Personalism in civic organizations. Despite attempts by the resource center to encourage civic organizations to work together, most tend to work in isolation. According to staff members of this center, in 1995 other civic organizations were usually composed of a leader and a few friends, with little drive to expand in size or collaborate with other groups. There was no impulse to . . . expand the number of members . . . or work together with other organizations" (SCISC, 2004). This seemed to me still a very apt description of civic organizations in 2000. Even in 2005, civic leaders seemed still not interested in combining efforts with other groups, nor in letting strangers join or volunteer for their group.

One example of refusing to cooperate in 2000 was the instance when two women leaders each used money from different Western grants to advertise and set up a "confidential telephone" (*telefon doverii*), or anonymous hotline, to report domestic violence. Despite the challenges of educating citizens about domestic violence (still not widely discussed in Russia), the two leaders, both powerful personalities, refused to work together, though I knew a psychologist who answered phones for both hotlines. When I returned in 2002, one leader had managed to keep her hotline running using money from her own business, while the other leader, having not secured ongoing funding, had moved on to other projects. Though emotional affinities affect business and nonprofit groups everywhere, personal relations loom large over organizations in Russia, where maintaining a working relationship in the face of personal dislike is rare.

These examples are but a few of those I observed, which suggest that civic leaders in Novosibirsk continue traditions of patron–client ties and personalistic relations, reproducing socialist-era behaviors that contradict the Western advice of "professionalism." Individuals may simply be following convention (Biggart & Beamish, 2003), but every repetition of how things have been done serves to reinforce existing structures and shapes civic organizations in directions not anticipated by Western funders or scholars.

Traditions of Taking Tea and the Collective

Patronage and personalism illustrate the significance of external culture in shaping organizing logics that influence civic organizations. Two other examples illustrate the persistence of socialist legacies in organizational culture: the reproduction of a Soviet-style "collective" and "taking tea."

Collectives: A Soviet legacy. In the early Soviet period, students and workers were organized into workgroups or "collectives" (*kollektivi*) in schools and workplaces (Kharkhordin, 1999). Small, fixed-member groups were held accountable for their

members' behavior, a style of mutual surveillance also common in socialist China (Shaw, 1996). Rewards or punishments for actions of individuals were awarded or meted out to groups, insuring that groups monitored their own members. The severity of punishments lessened over time, and what emerged was a sense of camaraderie and joint effort toward a common goal. By the end of the Soviet period, the characteristics of a *kollektiv* were generally understood to mean (a) a fixed group of people, (b) united by a common goal or interests, (c) sharing common activity to reach this goal, and (d) maintaining a sense of group cohesion (Kharkhordin, 1999).

In post-Soviet society, *kollektivi* are still formally organized in schools and at some workplaces, while feelings of group identity (*kollektivnost'*) and camaraderie spill over to many settings where such groups are not formally organized. Ashwin (1999), in her study of coal miners, describes their *kollektiv* as a "focus of sociability where workers spent half their lives together" (p. 146). The women in one group found a "vital source of emotional support" (pp. 147-148) among coworkers and often treated the group as a "second family" (p. 149). In another group, men also had a "strong sense of identification with the collective" and found it gave a "sense of meaning in life." (p. 150). Although small groups with strong internal bonds are found everywhere (Harrington & Fine, 2006), the legacy of Soviet manipulation of workgroups still contributes to a distinctive type of group in post-Soviet society. Individuals raised in such collectives become accustomed to mutual surveillance and to accepting shared rewards and punishment. They also adopt practices that prioritize group interests over individual convenience, a cultural legacy that continues to structure civic organizations in Russia today.

The collective in civic organizations. According to one scholar, in Novosibirsk "most of the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) . . . are micronetworks of people who used to be friends, relatives or coworkers before they started their organizations" (Barchunova, 2003, p. 135). Most civic organizations in Novosibirsk are small in membership, typically five or less, but almost all under 20, even the more Western-oriented groups. Most groups and their representatives that I met were resistant to outside volunteers and were as "inward looking and parochial" as environmental organizations are described in Samara (Crotty, 2006, p. 1321).

In 2000, the Russian leader of a local congregation of a U.S.-based Christian church invited me to their services, proudly saying that I should come see his *kollektiv*. His unprompted remark first helped me see the connection between small cohesive civic organizations and socialist-era workgroups. On a return visit in 2002, I asked another civic leader whether people think of their civic organizations as a *kollektiv*; she readily assented that many did. Although the term *kollektiv* itself is rarely heard, in civic organizations across Novosibirsk I observed behaviors and practices that reinforce the cohesion of small groups, reminiscent of the Soviet era. Many individuals I met seemed to value a type of *kollektiv* in their civic organizations.

The persistence of these small groups "may provide a basic building block for future civil society development" (Henry, 2006, p. 224) by encouraging members to greater effort toward a common goal. However, small groups pursue small projects and need a coalition for larger scale efforts. The strong cohesiveness in these groups

hinders their ability to join forces with others. In one example, several women civic leaders wanted to mobilize a citywide project or "action" drawing on the expertise of several small women's groups. These leaders held two meetings of women leaders of civic organizations to try to plan a shared project. At the second meeting, in a cavernous, high-ceilinged room in a municipal building, about 30 middle-aged, well-educated but not well-to-do women sat around a table and introduced themselves and their organizations. From my familiarity with local groups, I knew that many of these were small organizations, composed often of only two or three friends, in contrast to this large room filled with strangers.

As the attendees were all given an opportunity to describe a cause for common action, each woman was most vocal for her own cause, thus loyal to her own group. One woman told a highly emotional personal story meant to compel others to accept the cause of fighting drug abuse. In the middle of this impassioned plea, an obviously well-heeled and articulate woman representing a group dedicated to animal rights interjected her opinion that everyone already had an organization and that no one wanted to drop her own organization for the sake of a larger group. Her argument effectively derailed the discussion of a coalition effort, and no shared project ever emerged from these meetings. While there can be numerous reasons for the failure of coalition efforts, this example demonstrates both the clash of strong personalities and the devotion to small groups that hindered coalition building in this instance. The persistence of these contemporary *kollektivi* means that civic projects tend to remain small scale, with little citywide cooperation; this is one way that a socialist legacy affects civil society development.

Western advocates of civil society often assume that organizations serving specific populations welcome contributions from outside. However, in Novosibirsk, I found that civic organizations focused on specific populations are often mutual aid societies, closed to outsiders, even to potential volunteers or donors. One example is the clubs for large families (*klub mnogodetnikh cem'ye*), organized to help families with three or more children. Such families often face both economic challenges and social disapproval; declining birthrates prompted first the Soviet and now the Russian government to provide subsidies to promote large families, and some Russians accuse parents of large families of simply chasing the subsidies. Another common stereotype is that children in large families are raised poorly and become criminals.

In this climate of poverty and suspicion, civic organizations serving these large families operate in each neighborhood of Novosibirsk, but they do not represent opportunities for outsiders to donate food, clothing, or money. Instead, these are clubs by large families for large families, and their monthly socials are not typically open to visitors. My sense was that these groups served a function similar to mutual aid societies, often also organized under conditions of social exclusion (Greenbaum, 1991). Though mutual aid societies exist around the world, in Russia they take on the additional features of a *kollektiv*: small, fixed-member groups sharing common activities and common goals.

While some closed groups exist in most democratic societies, I noticed repeatedly in Novosibirsk that most civic organizations did not want outside volunteers. The low generalized trust and emphasis on cohesive small groups like the *kollektiv* derive from a legacy of socialism, but by reproducing these patterns, civic organizations in Russia reproduce the closed, cellular type of society maintained in the Soviet Union rather than the open society posited in Western theories of democracy. Thus cultural legacies help structure emerging civic organizations, which in turn shape the development of civil society.

Taking tea. The practice of "taking tea" (*chaepitie*) has deep roots in Russian tradition, as witnessed by the ubiquity of the stereotypical Russian samovar (Ivanov, 2001). "Taking tea" refers not to the beverage but rather to a ritual food event with specific norms that has a long history in Russian culture. Ritual food events have an underlying structure distinguishing them from merely eating (Douglas, 1975, 1982). Taking tea is bound up with notions of hospitality central to Russian culture (Pesmen, 2000, pp. 150-169) and it serves as a marker of friendly and intimate association. Taking tea has been referred to as "the most common kind of table socializing" in Russia (Patico, 2002, p. 361) and tea itself has been described as a "ubiquitous beverage of familial and ritual gatherings" (Ries, 1997, p. 55).

The structure of food events reveals patterns of social relations in the larger society (Douglas, 1982, p. 84), and examining food events can reveal the priorities and values of those who practice them. The practice of "taking tea" involves sitting around a single table, sharing tea or coffee, and biscuits, cookies, or cake, while special events might also include alcohol and small open-faced sandwiches, all consumed in a "cozy" (*uyutno*) and relaxed atmosphere. Taking tea encourages group solidarity while also reinforcing group boundaries: those who take tea together are "insiders," those who do not are "outsiders." The tea event thus helps reinforce bonding social capital while minimizing bridging social capital. Taking tea structures not only social interaction but also group size: When individuals enjoy sharing *chaepitie*, they do not want a group to be larger than can fit around one table. This explains in part why most civic organizations in Novosibirsk have fewer than 20 members.

Taking tea in civic organizations. Taking tea forms part of the routine interaction of volunteers or staff in many civic organizations in Novosibirsk and elsewhere in Russia. In one example, at the end of a day of speeches by various third sector leaders, complete with press cameras, the women from the host group cleaned up and then sat down together to *chaepitie* to relax together. In another instance, the visit by central office representatives of a youth volunteer organization to their filial suburban branch was celebrated with a fancy tea. More than one organization celebrated its anniversary or "birthday" with an elaborate *chaepitie*. Finally, my visits to numerous civic leaders in their homes or rented offices often also ended in taking tea, signaling that these leaders saw me as a friendly acquaintance and not as an outsider.

Many adults in Novosibirsk have expressed desires for greater social contact outside the home or workplace, prompting some civic leaders to form "social clubs" to fill this void. Two such clubs I visited organized their meetings around the familiar ritual

of taking tea. Natalia runs a "Ladies' Club," a group of retired women who contribute food or money to a monthly *chaepitie*. It took many months for me to secure an invitation to the Ladies' Club monthly social, and several members were very uncomfortable with a foreigner in their midst. The occasion was a major holiday, and the usual cakes, cookies, and tea for *chaepitie* were supplemented with wine for toasts and small sandwiches. Taking tea serves as a regular collective ritual for the group, increasing their cohesion and identity.

Another leader, Ludmilla, runs a "Name Day Tea," where women with the same first name gather on a certain day and share an evening together. Though the invitees were not initially personally acquainted, they all know Ludmilla and accept others on her recommendation. The day I was invited, accommodations were sparse, the table improvised, and the fare adequate though not fancy, but all the participants were delighted to share a *chaepitie*. Women who might ordinarily have not trusted strangers came because of Ludmilla and were able to feel comfortable among new acquaintances through the familiar ritual of taking tea.

In short, some organizations view taking tea as incidental to their core activities but included it as part of their routine, while other groups center their activities on tea events. For many Russians, taking tea is a taken-for-granted part of their social interactions, whether at work or in civic organizations. By continuing old traditions of taking tea, Russians build bonding social capital and limit the size of their groups. Thus as with the *kollektiv*, individuals reproduce norms and practices from previous generations, contributing to the further structuration of Russian society around small, cohesive groups that do not include outsiders. That these groups constitute the core of civil society means that Russian civil society will continue to look very different from the open, porous, civil society Western observers expected.

Conclusion

Scholars of civic organizations in Russia have often overlooked the impact of cultural legacies of the tsarist and Soviet eras. In contrast, this article argues that the influence of culture on civic organizations cannot be ignored. Norms and practices carried over from the past help to structure social interaction and organizations of the present; observing the culture in which organizations are embedded will help us understand how and why groups follow a distinctive logic in their formation and operation. This ethnographic research has identified three legacies from the tsarist and Soviet eras as they influence civic organizations in Russia: the use of patronage and personalistic contacting; the persistence of the *kollektiv*; and the practice of taking tea. These norms encourage small, closed, fixed-member groups reinforcing bonding social capital, explaining why observers have called them inward looking and parochial (Crotty, 2006, p. 1319).

Structuration theory recognizes that culture is malleable: individuals have agency to choose alternate behaviors, especially in the context of new resources (Sewell, 1992). Yet Russians reproduce many of these legacy behaviors despite changing

political and economic circumstances. The persistence of patronage politics and personalistic contacting might represent the purely pragmatic behavior of small civic organizations seeking to wrest resources from a still-powerful state. However, there seems to be little material benefit for a group in Russia to think of itself as a *kollektiv* or to continue taking tea, but nonetheless many groups do one or both. The reproduction of the *kollektiv* and taking tea represent the influence of culture on civic organizations, the more potent because unlike patronage politics, they are little discussed (in Russia or elsewhere), forming part of an invisible, unspoken common sense reality (Geertz, 1975). Such structures provide opportunities for reproducing the status quo or for change, for example, using the tea event to bring together small groups of strangers, but either way these norms form part of the organizing logic facing civic organizations in Russia.

Organizing logics based in local cultures enable certain types of organizational forms and not others. Because socialist and tsarist cultural legacies continue to structure social interaction and organizing logics in Russia, there is a limit to the possible convergence between civic organizations in Russia and the West, just as there is a limit to the convergence of business forms (Fey & Denison, 2003). Socialist legacies reproduce a distinct organizing logic that most commonly results in small, cohesive, parochial groups uninterested in coalitions. Civic organizations in Russia may meet local needs but do not build the kind of civil society that Western observers assumed to be a requirement for democracy. Observers should not expect a Western-style democratic society in Russia so long as these legacies are being reproduced in Russian society today.

Note

1. In this list, 101 groups list giving a "complex of services" and 79 groups list their primary functions as "charitable activity and the development of volunteerism," which covers a wide range of possible events; 60 groups provide services in the "social sphere," often to fill in gaps of services the government used to provide; 34 groups deal solely with education, while nearly three quarters of all groups have some educational functions; 26 groups in the directory are sports clubs and 26 groups offer legal services or advice; 25 are professional associations and another 10 offer some kind of professional services. "Preserving health" is the main aim of 23 groups, and 7 groups have primarily an international cultural focus; 3 focus on agriculture, 4 on finding work, and 5 on media relations or associations (Maslennikova 1999). I found the lack of environmental groups surprising, but then Novosibirsk has not experienced the more devastating ecological destruction elsewhere in the Soviet Union nor is it home to any compelling natural wonders that environmental groups often use as a rallying cry (such as Lake Baikal). On my return visits I requested an updated list from the group which had published the first one, but they maintained only an internal database of their client organizations. They had by 2005 given up as futile the attempt to keep a current list in print of the rapidly changing sphere of civic organizations in Novosibirsk.

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