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The Russian Third Sector: New Driving Forces—A Rejoinder

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We appreciate the contributions made by the two commentarists on our paper (Alekseeva, 2010; Sundstrom, 2011) to the understanding of the trends in the Russian third sector. We believe that this brief discussion has simultaneously revealed the common ground of the different views on the Russian third sector—and clarified the important disagreements and open questions in its study. In addition, we hail the *multilinear approach* to the broad domain of the Russian third sector which is presented in the commentaries.

Our paper ‘The Changing Models of the Russian Third Sector: Import Substitution Phase’ (Jakobson & Sanovich, 2010) presented a theoretical framework for the appraisal of the third sector’s evolution in Russia. Looking at the demand for and supply of key resources and institutions of the third sector in the late USSR and Russia, we identified three consecutive models of the Russian third sector: latent growth in the late USSR, import-dependent in the 1990s, and the rooted model, in place since the beginning of 2000s. All of them were analysed in four dimensions: developmental driving forces, sector structure, dominant organizational culture, and relations with the state.

Following the chronological organization of our original paper and both of the commentaries, we start with the issues related to the latent growth model and import-dependent model. Then we will look at the current rooted model in greater detail and address the most interesting question, raised in both commentaries, about the relationship between third sector development, the role of the middle class, and democracy. Finally, we will give a brief note on the latest trends in the Russian third sector and broader civil activity and outline several open questions for further investigation.

The Latent Growth and Import-Dependent Models: Driving Forces of the Sector

Arguing that the third sector in USSR and Russia has always consisted of needs-based, interest-based and politics/policy-focused organizations, Alekseeva claims that ‘unlike

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in other countries, in Russian history, certain types of third sector organizations (TSOs) in certain historical periods received more attention and public light, and others did not' (Alekseeva, 2010, pp. 309–310). She concludes that the models of the third sector exaggerate the factors that attracted the most public light, at the expense of the real structure of the sector. We agree that the classification she suggests could describe the operational structure of the sector (and could do it for many places and ages).

However, our models are concerned primarily with the *chief driving forces of third sector development*. The search for driving forces could not, of course, replace careful structural analysis; it is aimed at adding to our knowledge. Since it has a different goal, though, it demands an alternative methodology: instead of being concerned with coverage and representativeness, it seeks dominant vectors of development and institutional dynamics. Quite often these are set by minority actors. That is precisely why our analysis is distinct from the structural approach of Alekseeva and others.

As we claim, driving forces were fundamentally different in the periods under study. Only in the latest rooted model are they located mostly within Russian society. During the 1990s, they originated from actors trying to aid the development of the third sector in Russia from outside (and have achieved significant positive results along this path). In the late USSR, the authoritarian state was unable to maintain total control as it had before, which allowed some limited civic activity inside official social and mobilization organizations and provoked the dissident struggle for freedom.

In the in-depth analysis of the current situation, though, the application of Alekseeva's proposed classification certainly could be fruitful for a more balanced assessment. This is the consequence of the fact that, in the rooted model, the third sector is more or less free from external influences and strong enough to determine its own main characteristics and activities.

The Import-Dependent Model: The Role of Foreign Donors

Both Alekseeva and Sundstrom claim that in the import-dependent model we exaggerated 'the impact of foreign donors on the overall third sector in Russia, when foreign donors only interacted with a select portion of the sector' (Sundstrom, 2011, p. 229). Specifically, as Alekseeva notes, 'most of that foreign funding concentrated on a small group of TSOs which were descendants of former Soviet era dissident organizations or were created specifically to work with foreign institutions and promote their agendas' (Alekseeva, 2010, p. 308). Even more important 'the absolute majority of Russian TSOs never received any foreign funding and came across foreign foundations only during occasional training sessions or conferences' (Alekseeva, 2010, p. 308). Both of these statements are absolutely correct (if we are focussing on, for example, statistics of involvement, rather than driving forces). They only can be supplemented with the fact that a substantial share of TSOs was not in touch with foreign donors even through such superficial means as training sessions and conferences. Therefore, we agree with Alekseeva and Sundstrom that in previous literature the *direct influence* of donor organizations was quite often exaggerated.

The difference in our approach is in the implications of these basic facts and comes from our search for driving forces. First of all, we believe that we should not underestimate these 'superficial' means of interaction with donors. Of course, they could not fundamentally transform the values of the TSO or provide its leaders with all the necessary skills. Sometimes this *was* the case, but by no means was it the rule. It was, however, possible to

create a model, an example of what a TSO looks like, and an *ideal pattern* for its growth. Self-consciousness and positioning, language, and models of interactions with the state, donors, recipients, and broader society—all of this was elaborated under the heavy influence of the foreign donors, even by organizations that had never contracted with them directly.

This is especially evident from the experience of those organizations and communities whose values, aims, and habitual modes of operation were the most distant from the ones promoted by the donors. Now in Russia you can easily find TSOs (with all the important elements of a classical TSO: mission statement, board, volunteers, annual report, etc.) created by the former secret service or police officers (they mostly provide protection in exchange for money and other resources, but also often do real charity work by helping veterans or even other needy people) or nationalist activists of different nations and ethnic groups (they claim to provide protection to the one ‘discriminated’ nation—be it Russians or Chechens—from the other ‘aggressor’—be they Chechens or Russians) (see Umland, 2002). All of them openly attribute themselves to civil society (usually with some specific identifier, e.g. ‘patriotic’ or ‘Russian’). In the 1990s, even some criminal groups formed kinds of TSOs to legalize their economic, political, and civic activity (see Shelly, 2006, p. 98; Volkov, 2002, p. 122). Outside these marginal areas, and especially in human rights, nature protection, or educational TSOs, the lasting effect of donor’s contributions (material and more important, cultural, normative, etc.) remains crucial until today.

Alekseeva provides interesting sociological data from the survey of Russian TSOs, conducted in 1994–1996 by Charities Aid Foundation Russia. These data are quite revealing regarding the role of other actors in third sector development during the 1990s: ‘the most common types of [government] support were provision of free office space or space for events or service provision to their members’ (Alekseeva, 2010, p. 309). In other words, the only thing the state could provide TSOs was space; however, the TSOs had broad discretion about how to use the space and were open to the direct and indirect influence of donors in this regard. Later TSOs themselves provided the regional and municipal governments with suggestions for new effective ways to use state resources. For example, they taught the local governments how to distribute money and aid among schools, hospitals, etc. through competitive procedures and temporary grants. No doubt, TSOs learned these tools from foreign donors. Generally speaking, it is impossible to separate the adaptation of foreign models in the third sector and the general process of westernization that took place in Russia during the decade after the Soviet Union collapse.

In addition, the influence of foreign aid is noticeable in the way corporations do charity, especially in the location of their operational units and in their focus on serving the needs of the employees and their families. In the USSR, large industrial enterprises were responsible for many social services and welfare aid provided to the employees; this activity was never separated from the main business operations. In the 1990s, during the economic crisis, this activity was very limited, but later, during the period of stable economic growth, it began to expand again, partly on voluntary basis, partly under government pressure. Nevertheless, now all corporate charitable activities—directed to both employees and needy non-employees—are normally conducted through legally (and often organizationally) independent corporate charity foundations. Many of them extensively employ the traditional TSO’s modes of operations.

Finally, a minor though interesting question about the impact of foreign aid is raised by Sundstrom. She claims that in case of educational and scientific organizations, the decision

to support people instead of institutions was successful at least in the sense that it helped to create several new independent universities. We believe, though, that the examples provided (European University in St Petersburg and Higher School of Economics) as well as others (New Economic School, Independent Institute for Social Policy or The Institute for Urban Economics and other members of The Association of Independent Centers for Economic Analysis) are clear examples of the success of the long-term support of institutions. By contrast, the support of the individual scholars in other ('old') universities and research centres seems generally to have had a very limited influence and was later diluted by organizational inertia after the donors' departure.

The Rooted Model: The Middle Class and the Third Sector

The relationship between the middle class and the third sector is now attracting the attention of observers for at least two reasons. The first is empirical: a significant part of Russian society now could be attributed (at least, by some characteristics) to the middle class (Dmitriev & Belanovsky, 2011). The second is theoretical: the middle class was always considered as the basis for the strong third sector. However, due to a number of reasons, the primary one being low levels of trust towards existing TSOs on the part of the population, the new emerging philanthropic activity of the middle class will most likely not transform the existing TSOs. Instead, as Alekseeva points out (and we completely agree with her analysis), 'a range of informal or formal nonprofit public benefit activities of the middle class and the wealthy [will primarily] happen totally outside the formally registered traditional third sector' (Alekseeva, 2010, p. 310). Now the scope of such activity is growing fast and is less bounded by low interpersonal trust, primarily because of internet-based social networks that are available currently on a daily basis to one-third of the Russian adult population (FOM, 2011, Table 1). For example, during the drought and forest fires in summer of 2010, a large campaign for voluntary fire fighting and aid to victims emerged. Starting from informal activity and faced with the low productivity potential of such modes of operation, this 'parallel' civil society will become more and more formal, but will be superior to its predecessors in terms of the portion of organizations that actually exhibit real accountability, responsibility to stakeholders, and mission achievement.

The Rooted Model: The Middle Class, the Third Sector, and Democracy

Sundstrom starts the discussion of the relationships between the middle class, the third sector, and democracy with the famous citation of Barrington Moore: 'no bourgeois, no democracy'. Here is not the place to discuss this important idea in general; we only have to note that the empirical validity of Moore's and similar hypotheses as well as the exact causal mechanisms are constantly the subject of heated debate (see the summary of recent advances in Wucherpfennig & Deutsch (2009)). For scholars of the third sector, it is important that the exact relationship between middle class scope and strength, on the one hand, and the development of the third sector, on the other hand, is still not clear enough. Specifically, in the 'social origins of civil society', Salamon and Anheier (1998) suggested the classification of 'third sector regimes', which were related to the size of government welfare spending and the restrictions on third sector development. The problem with applying such a type of analysis to Russia is the unfinished

formation of the welfare regime in the country (Jakobson, 2006). However, the group of hypotheses suggested by the authors to test the social origins theory (which relates the relative political strength of the middle class, the elite, the lower classes, and the government) is definitely worth investigation in further empirical research. As for now, we can say only that to create a social basis for the third sector is not the same as to create the social basis for democracy. Moreover, the exact type of third sector which will emerge from the middle class that now exists in Russia is also unclear. In one scenario, for example, the less effective Russian democracy and, consequently, the Russian government is going to be, the higher will be the demand for and supply of private middle-class philanthropic activity.

Our finding that, in the rooted model, most of the altruistic activity targets ‘changes that can be made within the limits offered by the present-day state and society’ is completely in accordance with the other accounts, especially regarding the attitudes and practices of the middle class. The findings by Urnov and co-authors, cited by Sundstrom, show that one of the two main behavioural strategies of the middle class in the Russian regions is ‘integration [which] refers to adaptation to the existing economic, social and political conditions, accepting the “rules of the game” set by the dominant elite groups’ (the other one, according to this investigation is emigration; we have not checked whether it is the only alternative) (Soboleva, Sobolev, & Urnov, 2010, p. 11). Dubin and co-authors, who looked at the capital cities as well as the regional middle class, came to the same conclusion; most of the members of the middle class do not:

believe that they had the tools to influence the politics and decisions that are vital for their future. Therefore, the majority of respondents accepted corrupt tools for resolving existing conflicts and problems (bribes, informal connections, pulling strings, etc.), while considering them wrong, unpleasant, but necessary rules of the game in contemporary Russian society (Voices from Russia II, 2008, p. 2).

Therefore, *at this point*, we can assume the following. First, the Russian middle class has become large and strong enough to act. Second, its actions often have altruistic goals, which leads to the substantial philanthropic and other civic activity within the third sector (both by using existing TSOs and creating new ones). Finally, this third sector activity is developing within the rooted model, i.e. it is mostly not going beyond the existing circumstances. Given all these circumstances, how can we answer the question Sundstrom poses in her title, ‘What Does this Really Mean for Russian Politics and Society?’ This question was outside the scope of our initial paper. However, we could suggest a hypothesis, which definitely requires further investigation.

We believe that even a relatively politically indifferent third sector could make a difference in the process of further Russian democratization. Without an aim and capacity to change the rules of the game or even aid in this process, it will not start the new phase of democratization. However, being economically powerful, socially responsive and in demand, it could make this new phase a more stable and consequently successful one. This feature is important for any type of major political change. Self-sustained civil society, which could partly replace some state-provided services, could make reforms less painful (and hence less politically risky) and the radical political crises less acute. The suffering of people after the collapse of the USSR and during the years of economic reforms is to a large extent responsible for a demand for restricting democracy and strengthening the state (Remington, 2000) and for the state’s direct intervention in

social, political, and economic life (Denisova, Eller, & Zhuravskaya, 2010). Such attitudes are especially widespread among the most vulnerable and less-adapted groups (Guriev & Zhuravskaya, 2009). The suffering of such population groups could be relieved by the service provision through TSOs in case of the decline of such provision on the part of government. In other words, the third sector will not start the positive political changes, but, if they happen, could make them more irreversible and prevent the new phase of restoration of overbearing government.

At the same time, we should note that recent studies express cautious optimism about the potential implications of the civic activity of the middle class:

Such social activity is not political. However, it is promising [...] as an emergent and developing instrument of socialization, collective action, and handling of social capital. Experience gained through such activity can be used in other areas (Grigoriev *et al.*, 2010, p. 139).

In the long-term perspective, the ‘school of democracy’ provided by the third sector could transform the political attitudes of Russian people and through this, indirectly, create a basis for major political changes. At present, though, the third sector shares with the entire Russian society the low presence of forces that are ready and able to change the political landscape of the country.

Conclusion: New Tendencies and Open Questions

The latest events in Russian political and economic life show the slow politicization of the civic political protest actions. During previous years, protest was mostly the prerogative of old human rights organizations. By contrast, the civic activity of people who defend their social rights has been more or less politically indifferent (Gontmacher *et al.*, 2008). In the last 2 years, however, some of the protests gained political shades. The symbol of this process is the case of the Khimki Forest near Moscow where the activists, who began by defending the forest from the road to be routed through it, over several months moved towards the political opposition domain. The same has happened in other regions (Kaliningrad) and other cases (car-owners movement against high taxes on used imported cars and the privilege of high-level bureaucrats to violate the road regulations and use flashers).

What is unclear still is whether this tendency touches the formal third sector—Russian TSOs—and to what extent. Also unclear is the credibility of government initiatives to provide more economic resources to loyal TSOs, establish some limited dialogue with disloyal ones (including uncompromising human rights activists), and liberate all of them from the heaviest financial and tax burdens as well as the implications of the unfavourable laws on TSOs adopted in the mid-2000s. At the same time, we do not expect that the rooted model will change its nature and that some actor inside or outside Russia will again become the external mover of the Russian third sector.

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