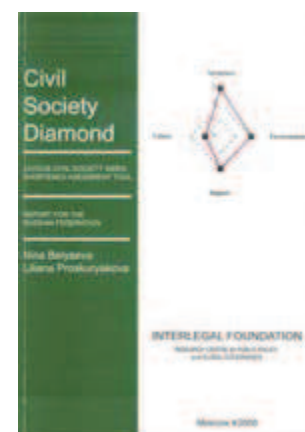


Nina Belyaeva and L. Proskuryakova. 2008. *Civil Society Diamond. CIVICUS Civil Society Index – Shortened Assessment Tool. Report for the Russian Federation*. Moscow: Interlegal Foundation. (Printrun: 120).

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Civil society is a popular notion in contemporary political science. It is widely used in works on transition and democratization because of some assumptions. First, the end of process of democratization is a special configuration of civil-government relations when there is a degree of normative reciprocity, government agencies and CSOs (civil society organizations) share basic ideals and more or less function effectively. Secondly, there is an assumption that CSOs became a tool for different social groups to express their preferences and to satisfy their needs. The survey of Nina Belyaeva and Liliana Proskuryakova, dedicated to the analysis of Russian civil society, is based on a methodology developed by CIVICUS and shortened especially for this study due to the fact that (in current circumstances) it was impossible to gather all relevant data for building a «classic» CIVICUS Index. Even a shortened tool shows us much considerable information.

This book provides evidence on two very important concepts for understanding current Russian facts. First, in some fields CSOs succeed in building relations with governmental institutions and amongst each other (for instance when advocating for special issues like rights for disabled people, veterans of wars, and some others), but it is almost impossible to establish a systematic influence due to the closed decision-making processes in administrative and representative institutions (at the federal and regional level). “Russian civil society operates in an environment that is somewhat restrictive to its activities... Frequent forms of government-CSO interactions include civil society councils by governors or mayors, special departments of executive authority and legislative bodies. The effectiveness and the level of autonomy of these consultative bodies vary greatly from case to case and should be looked at on individual bases” (p. 57).

The second very important fact that this book has shown is the ineffectiveness of civil society organizations in dealing with general public. The public does not know much about different non-governmental institutions and does not want to. "A substantial proportion of the Russian population show limited involvement in civil society activity... Grassroots activities, including community action, volunteer work, and CSO membership remains rather low... Despite 15 years of development and foreign assistance, Russian civil society, especially located outside major urban centres and regional capitals, clearly lacks financial and technical resources" (p. 31). I think that it is not the main problem. Yes, financial and technical resources are quite necessary for normal functioning. But there is another dimension. Some non-governmental leaders after years of external aid find it difficult to get resources themselves.

On the one hand, the idea of lack of resources may be a rationalization of their inability to set up a normal connection with the public. On the other hand, people are not willing to become activists or to support civil activities. Distrust in society is also widespread. This attitude is partly based on low levels of development of social capital: low participation of citizens in all kinds of social and political activities, low trust in social institutions, and low interpersonal trust⁴⁰. This phenomenon is not exclusive for Russia: many post-soviet countries suffer from such citizens' sentiments. And we used to interpret these facts mostly as being political, but when we look at the civil dimension of them we find that the facts are less unambiguous. "... civil society efforts to promote values in the society have a limited impact on the population and ... vary from region to region" (p. 71). "The general level of public spiritedness is low, as an interpersonal trust... CSOs find it difficult to mobilize people in support of their course and to attract greater membership" (p. 57).

The picture is not very optimistic. But due to some methodological ideas of this survey and to the fact that civil society was interpreted as organizational, we may assume some thoughts. The sample of analyzed organizations did not include many new and un-institutionalized groups of civil activists that work at the local level, which usually has no formal organizations. As a newborn institution, they may represent

40 Kozyreva P.M. 2009 Mezhlichnostnoe doverie v kontekste formirovaniya socialnogo kapitala (Interpersonal trust in the context of social capital formation) // SOCIS (Sociological Studies). 2009. No. 1. P. 43-54.

another self-understanding and may affect people in a different way. In some future scenario, they could become a new civil society. In the book, we see only one group of this kind of activist – participants in the ecological movement. I suppose that if we want to have a deeper understanding of civil society's formation, we are to pay more attention to these kinds of activities.

The rich bibliography and information on research centers to be found at the end of the book can be useful for further elaboration of this topic. This book is a recommended reading to all who are studying Russian civil society. Maybe some ideas and facts do not get enough development in this book but it does give a panorama that could show the road for future research.