

## **CATEGORIES, NETWORKS, AND CIVIL SOCIETY: TEACHERS' SOCIAL TIES IN ST. PETERSBURG**

The notion of "civil society" refers to the social conditions that must be fulfilled for people to be able to act independently of or in opposition to the state authority in a sustained way, that is, above all, to effectively use political rights, such as the right to speak publicly, to assemble and to demonstrate. A crucial element among the preconditions for the use of political rights is the organization - if organization is understood as a combination of: 1) categories of people who share some characteristic (being intellectuals, industrial workers, Orthodox believers, etc.) and 2) networks of people linked to each other by an interpersonal bond. The idea of the organization states that the more organized a group (or a set of individuals comprising *both* a category *and* a network) is, the more extensive are its common identity (based on a shared category or shared categories) and its internal networks. And organized groups in particular are necessary to enable people to act jointly and in a regulated way to influence the government (Tilly 1978, 62-64).

In this paper I wish to shed some light on the preconditions of joint action by looking at networks of individuals belonging to the same occupational group, secondary school teachers, in St. Petersburg. In looking at their networks, we can examine which categories or classifications serve - or do not serve - as the basis for common identity. We then can ask whether the nature of the common identity (as it is reflected in the categories that structure the networks) appears conducive to joint action and in what sense.

The question of categories characteristic of network composition may be put in another way as well. We can ask how the hierarchical social space is constructed in the teachers' occupational milieu. The stress on hierarchy is important, if we believe that inequalities and consequently differences in interest are crucial to joint action in the pursuit of common ends (see Tilly 1978, 55, 64). This means that the networks of teachers are viewed primarily from a *stratification* perspective, and therefore prime consideration will be given to the occupations of the network members. To what extent are the networks structured along occupational lines? The occupational composition of the networks, together with other information, may give us an idea of the character of the common identity and the solidarities that further social interaction and which may or may not be useful for joint action in opposition to state authority.

The networks under study are based on information collected among 40 secondary school teachers in St. Petersburg. Most of the teachers were married and had at least one child living at home; the examples below belong to this group. The data were gathered through standardized diaries the teachers kept for a period of 15 days; in these diaries they registered all contacts they considered significant. Then they completed the information by enumerating those significant persons they had not met or contacted during the research period. A short biographical interview was conducted as well.<sup>1</sup>

Similar data were collected in Helsinki.<sup>2</sup> Observations from Helsinki are contrasted below with those from St. Petersburg in order to illuminate the peculiarities of the Russian results.

### **Teachers from the worker milieu**

The first example is a 31-year-old teacher of Chemistry, Nina V.,<sup>3</sup> who was born in and still lives in St. Petersburg. Nina V.'s father is a filer and her mother an office worker. Her ties with her kin are very close, and her network forms a milieu or a circle. The configuration of the mutual connections between her contacts (not reproduced here) indicates that her kin, her husband's kin, and her old friends are intermingled and that many ties link this cluster to the professional milieu. People whom Nina V. has come to know recently constitute a separate group, which nevertheless has a number of connections with her kin and friends.

The fact that Nina V. has preserved a large number of connections with her kin and that the kin

continue to be located within a dense larger cluster implies that she maintains her links with working class people. In addition to her father, a filer, there are another filer and a carpenter who are good acquaintances or friends, as well as an electrical worker. The latter is married to a modiste who is Nina V.'s childhood friend - another indication of the preservation of ties with the childhood milieu. Moreover, in the group of close friend figures there is also a salesperson she has known since her student years. Nina V. has maintained ties to her initial milieu, but the professional milieu is important to her as well.

On which mechanisms is the strong presence of kin and (old) friends from working-class and lower white-collar occupations based? First of all, Nina V. lives in her parents' apartment, a *khrushchevka* of three rooms, with her husband, their child and her parents. The situation is necessitated by the severe housing shortage characteristic of St. Petersburg, and more generally by urban life in the Soviet Union and Russia. A considerable number of other St. Petersburg teachers in the data share this situation with Nina V. (The reason the family has chosen Nina's parents' apartment and not that of her husband's parents is that his father and mother already share their apartment with his sister and his aunt.)

The situation shows a structural constraint which does not exist for the teachers studied in Helsinki and which has shaped and continues to shape Nina V.'s social itinerary. It implies, among other things, that the market-regulated neighborhood segregation which provides an important source of class structuration in Helsinki and in other Western cities (cf. Giddens 1973, 108-110), does not function in Nina V.'s case. The situation also implies that the generational dependence constitutes a tangible mechanism of social power.

The links of Nina V.'s colleagues with her closest circle are also reinforced by the constraints of housing - which consequently has major ramifications in her life. She has found a workplace in the vicinity of her home, precisely as many of the other teachers studied in St. Petersburg have done (see Lonkila 1996b). Because of the housing shortage, her apartment and its location are more or less a given, and she has thus adapted her other decisions to this fact. Therefore she, like many of her colleagues, has sought a workplace as a function of where she lives (notably to avoid making long and complicated connections in getting to the school), not the other way around. This means that Nina V. teaches in the school that she attended as a child. Moreover, she was recruited by the school director who knows her from the past.

A process such as this is inconceivable in Helsinki, where, in contrast, the teachers have chosen their apartment on the basis of the location of their school or, more commonly, due to considerations that have little to do with the exact location of their workplace.

Again, many aspects of Nina V.'s situation are not individual coincidences, valid only in her case. They are indicative of the constraints and incentives functioning in the social space around the teachers in St. Petersburg. Many of them live in the spatially-reduced circle of the home and the school, which at the same time may even share, as in Nina V.'s case (somewhat exceptionally, it is true), a partly common history. This is an indication of the "personalized" character of the social ties which are in a way rare or non-existent among the Helsinki teachers. Such patterns of Nina V.'s everyday life as housing and work depend on *personal* acquaintance or on kin. They exert power in matters which presumably are public in character. This is not true in Helsinki, where non-personal, market-regulated mechanisms account for the choice of apartment and normally the choice of the workplace as well, and where there are no mechanisms conducive to the proximity of the workplace to the apartment.

What all this means is that social life is patterned not only or even primarily according to a stratification logic but to a logic of interpersonal relations which makes it conceivable and functional for people from different social milieus to mix. The logic provides a sensible perspective for the comparatively large social variation of workplace contacts in St. Petersburg. For the St. Petersburg teachers, the school apparently serves as a milieu for the exchange of material, goods, for example, in a way that makes contacts to people other than colleagues probable only in the workplace (Lonkila 1996; Bäckman 1995, 61-62, 66, 69). This element, too, ultimately stems from the non-functioning of the market mechanism; or it is another aspect of the constraints that scarcity places on the nature of the social space in St. Petersburg (cf. Srubar 1991).

Finally, one more detail in Nina V.'s contacts suggests that the occupational hierarchy does not work in the same way as it does in Helsinki. As noted above, a very good friend of Nina V.'s from the

Herzen Institute, where she studied, is currently a salesperson (*tovaroved*). This detail illuminates the inadequacies of the educational system as a social allocation mechanism in the Soviet Union and Russia (as well as, perhaps, of the turbulence of today). Higher professional training did not necessarily lead people into the corresponding professional career.<sup>4</sup> Certainly this example alone only illustrates the point and does not show it. But another aspect of Nina V.'s contacts, the peculiar multiplicity of the *engineers*, has greater value as evidence.

There are seven of them: the husband and his sister, Nina V.'s own sister, two female cousins and two persons known from childhood who have become engineers. These people constitute links between the initial milieu and the present teacher milieu. The home milieu has a consistent occupational orientation, with which the father's occupation, filer, fits in well. Significantly, the presence of engineers is not accidental; it is indicative of the social space in which the teachers in St. Petersburg live. Engineers constituted the most numerous "specialist" occupation in the Soviet Union, a "mass profession" (Kryshtanovskaia 1989, 109) covering nearly 40 per cent of all university students both in the 1950s and 1980s (Kryshtanovskaia 1989, 110). Their number was accentuated in Leningrad, an important military-industrial center during the Soviet period. In the networks of the 40 St. Petersburg teachers far more engineers than representatives of any other occupation (except the teachers themselves) have been listed.

These facts are significant in the present context because the engineers constituted a highly heterogeneous occupational group for which the boundary vis-à-vis skilled workers was extremely vague (Kryshtanovskaia 1989, 109-129). They provide a model example of the thorough social upheaval and the destruction of the former status hierarchies brought about by Soviet power. In fact, it is doubtful whether one can speak of engineers (or of any other comparable occupation) as a profession in the Western sense. The professions remained poorly crystallized at best, even though during the last Soviet decades some consolidation took place (Kryshtanovskaia 1989, 95-96; Jones 1992).

We therefore have here a new indication of the fact that the teachers are attached to a space in which the hierarchies are not structured by a socio-economic classification to the same extent as in Helsinki, where engineers are a well-established, high-status profession.

### **Geographically mobile teachers**

Another aspect of the journey the teachers have traversed in the social space is geographical mobility (see, in more detail, Lonkila 1996b). What we find again is a highly personalized set of constraints shaping the itinerary and consequently the network composition. Obviously parents cannot provide an apartment to an in-migrant - something that was possible in Nina V.'s case - but if there are relatives living in St. Petersburg, the kin remain a crucial resource. And most importantly, the very difficult process of having permission to live (*propiska*) in St. Petersburg (more exactly, in Leningrad), more or less marks the social journey and consequently the network of practically all in-migrants. An example is Tamara I., a 36-years-old teacher of Russian Language and Literature. Her relatives in St. Petersburg were of great help when she moved to the city and they are still close to her. In addition, soon after her arrival in St. Petersburg Tamara I. was forced to work, for several years, in the kindergarten of a factory in order to get an apartment legally. This period provided her with a number of professionally variable ties, including many people in worker occupations. Tamara I.'s itinerary is an individual one, but it is also one variant of a more general phenomenon - the necessity to seek ingenious personal solutions in order to move into a big city in the Soviet Union and Russia. The social space is structured in a way which suggests only a secondary role to the "market capacities" relate to the occupation (see Giddens 1973, 103). In Helsinki, so it appears, these capacities have largely determined the geographical mobility of the teachers.

The occupational composition of Tamara I.'s relations is similar to that of Nina V. in a second respect. Her contacts include many people from the engineer-worker complex, both engineers and various skilled workers. Thus the relations do not comprise, in this case either, a socio-economically homogeneous network in the sense the relations of the in-migrants in Helsinki normally do, and certainly not a middle-class network.

### **Teachers with a pronounced professional continuity**

The examples of flows from a socially and/or geographically distant origin to the teacher position

therefore reveal certain peculiarities of the social space in St. Petersburg (including the meaning of the social "distance" itself). However, these are not the only relevant cases for reflecting the preconditions of the civil society. In order to get an idea of the common identity and solidarities in the teaching profession, the network construction linked to socio-professional continuity is presumably as interesting as that linked to discontinuity. To complete this exercise, I consider a case in which the social distance between the initial and the present milieu is as short as possible, that is, a teacher born into a teacher family.

Igor B. is a 35-year-old teacher of Physics born in Leningrad. His father is a (university) professor, and his mother and older brother are teachers, as is his spouse. The intergenerational professional continuity is accompanied by a nearly corporatist network. Among the 51 adult persons Igor B. has listed, 20 are teachers of various kinds, including family members, several colleagues and friends-colleagues. Many people have related intellectual occupations. The network graph displays a milieu with many interconnecting ties between subclusters: the core family links friends and kin together on the one hand, and colleagues on the other.

Still, even in this case of a strong professional continuity, working-class people or lower-level nonmanual laborers can be found in the network: a couple working in the militia and a cook, are characterized as close persons. The former are the wife's relatives and the cook works in the school. Here, once again, the number of the engineer contacts is high, including relatives (for example, the father-in-law and mother-in-law), colleagues and friends.

There are other cases in St. Petersburg resembling Igor B's. These show a strong socio-professional continuity with a predominantly intellectual network, in which colleagues play at least a moderately significant role. All in all, in looking at St. Petersburg teachers one is able to discern a space which is structured by socio-professional criteria (which was the rule in Helsinki). In other words, even after decades of Soviet rule or as a result of an incipient professional stabilization in the post-Stalinist era, at least fragments of continuity can be found there.

### **Varying bases of identities and solidarities**

If, following Anthony Giddens (1973, 101-102), we accept the notion that in capitalism the market is the most important structure of power for privileging some groupings of individuals in relation to others, then in advanced capitalist societies the individuals' class position is based on their market capacities. For those in the middle-class, the market capacity - that is, what the individual is able to bring to the market - is fundamentally dependent on education or the possession of educational or technical qualifications. Their relative bargaining strength is founded on their education. It largely determines the modes in which people having these qualifications are transformed into a social class, or how the structuration of class relationships takes place.

In this view people in professional occupations like teaching bring "specialized symbolic skills" to the market; the marketability of these skills is normally "protected or enhanced by the systematic enforcement of controlled 'closure' of occupational entry, a particular characteristic of professional occupations" (Giddens 1973, 186). The "closure" implies a professional interest organization which is one of the main expressions of their ability to act jointly and in a regulated manner to influence the government and other interest groups. This organization is based on a shared category and an internal network; it is a typical instance of the functioning of the civil society.

The results from Helsinki, though not reported here, are compatible with the market-based conception of classes in capitalism. Teachers offer skills to the market, and significant decisions in their lives are structured according to their market capacities - stages like finding a job and therefore moving to Helsinki, finding an apartment as a function of this move, etc. Even though the market mechanism is far from being the only factor at work,<sup>5</sup> it predominates both when they offer their skills to the market and when they make decisions which are consequent to their success in offering them. As a result, we see middle-class networks, with a certain internal variation between them.

This is not the case in St. Petersburg. As the examples above show, the interpersonal relations that break the horizontal group formation constitute a very charged dimension in the social space: a distinct class-based categorization is far less significant in marking the teachers' networks. Therefore, one may hypothesize that the common identity conducive to an occupational interest organization is much weaker there than in Helsinki.

This observation is fully in line with the fact that the professions were poorly established in the Soviet Union (on teachers, see Jones 1991). As Yuri Levada maintains, the vertical organization characteristic of the

Soviet system fundamentally divided the society into two parts: those with access to the privileges of the party-state, and the rest of the population. A special type of hierarchy emerged which was marked by a "hierarchical egalitarianism". The hierarchy which derives from the state was accepted but that based on economic achievement, property, and the like was not. Therefore, Levada asserts, the mechanisms of social mobility were shaped by the state (Levada 1993, 26, 39-40).

Consequently, the "collective" became a horizontal structure of utmost importance. It was composed of the personnel of an enterprise or any other workplace, an organization of people equally dependent on state power (Levada 1993, 89). A few years ago, another sociologist, Leonid Gordon, put his hopes for the emergence of civil society in Russia specifically on the labor collectives (Gordon 1991a; 1991b; see Alapuro 1993, 207-210). He believed they constituted the only viable organizational framework which could structure a challenge by the majority of people in an otherwise little-organized society. In stressing the importance of the workplace, Gordon thought that economic, political, and cultural aspects could be fused in a way that would make Russian organizations "multifunctional" and therefore different from the specialized Western interest organizations.

If considered from the perspective of the admittedly very limited results of this study, Gordon's assessment is highly debatable. The formation of a "multifunctional" network in the workplace apparently offers only limited possibilities for a categorization that could serve as the basis for a common (professional) identity and ultimately an interest articulation.

In fact, the observations of this study suggest a type of network formation in which the occupational label is secondary to the contents of the relation. They suggest a system of personalized relations which are instrumental in surviving and getting along in everyday life. What counts in this system is above all a structure that guarantees solutions to the crucial problems the individual faces during his/her life course, a series of relations which together constitute a configuration necessary for coping. Therefore the professional space of the teachers is not necessarily characterized by a professional identity. The individual members of the network may be replaceable, or interchangeable, and colleagues may even appear to be less like colleagues than people having a strategic role in the survival network. This would mean, paradoxically, that the structure of the relations itself, rather than the particular individuals in the structure, is most important. People can be replaced, but the structure, and in any case its personalized character, will remain.

Obviously, in social relations of this kind no social hierarchy in the conventional sense of the word can be found. Yet, despite all the apprehension over this deficiency, the examples of professional continuity show that a professional identity is *not* totally lacking among the St. Petersburg teachers. Presumably the conditions are changing; in that case, the elements of professional identity, etc., may also be introduced.

<sup>1</sup> The study was carried out both in St. Petersburg and Helsinki - in the latter case the number of teachers involved in the study was 38 - and the data were collected or their collection organized by Markku Lonkila and Anna-Maija Castren in the Finnish research project "Social Networks and Particularities of the Finnish Culture", financed by the Academy of Finland. It is a part of a larger international project initiated and led by Maurizio Gribaudo. On the project and the procedures involving the collection of the data see Gribaudo (ed.) 1996.

<sup>2</sup> See note 1 above. On results in Helsinki see Lonkila 1996a; Alapuro 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Obviously all names are pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup> Says David Lane (1992, 300): "For the 1975-80 period, one study showed that only 57.2 percent of graduates of teachers' colleges took teaching jobs and only half of graduates in industry used their specialist qualification directly in their work..."

<sup>5</sup> See Alapuro 1996, in which teachers' networks in two capitalist societies, Finland and France, are compared.

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