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Formation of civil society types and organizational capital of the Baltic nations in the framework of the Russian empire

1. Civil society in Baltic History

The term "Baltic nations", which today refers mainly to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, portrays the Baltic area as a quite homogeneous region. But the differences between the three Baltic countries are far greater than meets the eye. One can speak about an actual Baltic region within the context of a shared historical experience only in regard to the last century. In their need to describe clear distinctive features in the history of the Baltic nations historians use terms like "Baltic Lands" to refer to more or less to the area of present-day Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and "Pribaltica", which includes only the gubernii of Estonia, Livonia and Courland, i.e. present-day Estonia and Latvia (Misiunas 1985). The Soviet occupation forcefully standardizing all "republics" was effective in making the Baltic states institutionally identical to each other, also establishing a compulsory nomenclature of "associations" there (Communist Party, Komsomol, "Trade Unions", etc.).

However, in a covert way these national communities continued to carry on their own traditions. The "Singing Revolution" made these states an open conflict arena of different heritages of the past - "socialist," "bourgeois", "premodern", etc. It has also provoked some very interesting questions about the role of the legal, social, political, etc., segments of society shaping these historical nations.

The restoration of the political independence of the Baltic states in August 1991 has stressed the legal and political aspects of historical continuity with the pre-occupation era. But the restitution of property rights, the restoration of national citizenship, etc., cannot mean a full-scale restoration of the historical past, a revival of the destroyed national societies of the Baltic nations as social systems. The constitutional state and implementation of liberal principles first of all made possible the dialogue between different patterns in the history of the Baltic nations. Which of these patterns represents the "authentic history" of each Baltic nation will become visible in the course of time. Our problem is to theorize this "dialogue", which indicates that the civic history of each Baltic nation decisively shapes the outcome of this competition and appears to be the main carrier of historical continuity.

The focusing of our interest on civil society is motivated by its significant role. Striving for independence, which started in 1987, not only caused a blossoming of civil society but the successful introduction of the people's civil initiative was very much a problem of effective transition. Compared to all post-Soviet states, the Baltic nations have been effective in building an integrated state and liberal society. This addresses the question of the resources of the anticommunist revolution, about the accumulated "historical organizational capital."

However, scholars have detected remarkable differences in the political culture of the Baltic nations "in responses to the political contingencies the 1900-1905 period, World War I, World War II and the Soviet regime after 1945. Of the three response patterns, the Lithuanians exhibit the greatest degree of political cohesiveness, capacity for internal compromise and disposition to rely on nationally-generated political resources; the Latvian pattern shows the lowest degree of cohesiveness, internal compromise and national self-reliance; Estonia occupies a middle ground between the other two" (Penikis 1973, 65).

At the same time the political history of the last half-dozen years, membership of associations, shaping of a multi-party system, formation of the public sphere, etc., also indicate that

the "organizational capital" which was mobilized to propel the transition is structured in a unique way in different Baltic countries.

Seen in this light, the affinity of the Baltic nations to rely on the past, recalling their historical experience - chiefly the period of their initial independence - as one of the main resources for success in the post-communist transition to democracy, actually refers to rather different civil traditions. So the past has the capacity to shape considerably different civic futures for the Baltic nations. The objective of this paper is to supply a general historical perspective for understanding differences in the framework of the formation and commitment of organizations that already became visible at the very start of transition.

2. Shaping civil societies in the framework of the tsarist Russian Empire

Linguistically and culturally the Latvians and Lithuanians are almost a single people of their own; the Estonians are Finno-Ugrian. The last four-five centuries have made Estonian and Latvian history closer due to parallels in development. It is important to remember that the domination of the Baltic German civilization and the Lutheran Church in Estonia and Latvia provided the background for a different cultural environment than existed in Catholic Church-dominated Lithuania. Historical memories of a glorious past - the powerful Lithuanian state - have continuously played an important role in construction of new political realities.

The high literacy rate, establishment of associations, active mass participation in cultural life, reading of newspapers, etc., made Estonians and Latvians closer by mentality and popular mobilization patterns to Germany or the Nordic states than to East Central Europe. In Estonia (and Latvia) in 1885 there were about 20 newspaper subscribers per 1000 inhabitants; in Finland the number was about 25 (Hoeyr & Lauk & Vihalemm 1994, 92). The development of Lithuanian newspapers was to lag a good twenty years behind the development of the Latvian and Estonian press (Senn 1985, 311). Despite repression, Lithuanians ranked third in literacy among the nations of the Russian Empire. Lithuania's cultural patterns in these years, however, not only resembled those of Poland but due to severe limitations in network-building Lithuanians did not have access to civil services. A profile of the differences in nation-building becomes particularly visible when interpreted in terms of civil society and the public sphere.

The development of ethnic communities in the Baltic lands can be described as interrelations of three sets of factors: 1) the ideological construction and basis of the message that is conveyed to the audience; 2) the social, civic and cultural characteristics of the population to whom this message is addressed; and 3) the legal, socio-economic and political environment within which the people operated.

All these sets of social factors had a strong formative effect on shaping the historical community. Generally speaking, the first and third factors seem to be decisive in giving birth to the nation. However, the role of the second factor appears to be underestimated. It demonstrates a "qualitative dimension" of the society, the main mechanism in the transformation of social energy. In this respect Penikis' ranking of the Baltic states by "political culture" takes on greater importance if related to modernity. The cohesiveness of the community can be built in an "open" or "closed" society, which integrates individuals in very different ways.

Examining the recent history of the Baltic nations supports the impression that historical "organizational capital" and civic culture are the resources which matter most in shaping a society. The ideas of Alain Touraine, which state that the essence of social conflicts is focused on the struggle for the control of "historicity," the models that govern the way in which collectivity normatively organizes its relations with the environment and through which society reproduces itself, are useful in providing an understanding of the mechanism of accumulation in civic culture (Touraine 1988).

The mobilization of national communities in the Baltic nations occurred in terms of an ethnic awakening (which gained support at the end of the last century), which to a considerable

extent combined all the humane capital and organizational resources which were available. Different elements of the civil self-organization of the diffuse societies (intellectual community, religious participation, congregational organization, association activity, etc.) became dominant in the nation-building of each historically unique Baltic community.

Different cultures of popular mobilization in Lithuania, on the one hand, and in Estonia and Latvia, on the other, become visible in the role associations played in creating a model which was the basis of the struggle for hegemony. It has been suggested that "differences may be explainable in terms of hitherto neglected formative influences of different political developments in the Baltic territories prior to the 19th century" (Penikis 1973, 65). The varying structure of civil mobilization in the Baltic states was dictated not only by the deep traditions of the ethnic community itself, but by the characteristics of a larger institutional environment or institutional culture which the national community faced in its struggle for emancipation.

The conflict of the national society with the repressive "official society" was waged on both the value and organizational levels. The main sphere of conflict for Lithuanians with the Imperial Russian state was the severe administrative restrictions in their exercise of national culture and religion. Estonians and Latvians were mainly confronted by the powerful civil self-governmental and organizational structure of the Baltic German upper class. Implementation of local Baltic legislation (*Baltische Sonderrechte*) and Russian self-governmental rules created a framework for the articulation of group and individual interests of the native people in Estonia and Latvia.

Self governmental bodies analogous to the Russian *zemstvo*, though with long-standing operative traditions, had been functioning in Pribaltica before their incorporation and were later retained. After the enactment of the Rural Township Law in 1866 the Baltic German nobility lost large amounts of its administrative power and many key questions of local life were decided by parish councils and courts of law. Estonians and Latvians gained extremely important experience in self-government.

Reopened in 1802, the University of Tartu continued its activity through the turn of the century in the framework of German standards and the mentality of the Enlightenment. (The University of Vilnius was closed after an 1832 Polish uprising.) Despite their different social positions, members of the student organizations were treated as equals and people were trained to develop democratic habits (Jansen, 1993a, 300). Having a dominant position in small countries, the university very much shaped the mentality of new elite of Estonia and Latvia.

Anything analogous to the Baltic German *Landtage* was missing outside Livonia, Estland and Courland. The commune, a pivotal facet of new the Russian structure, was absent as a functioning institution in the ethnographic territory of Lithuania. The *zemstvo* assemblies were not considered suitable by the imperial authorities for the Lithuanian areas, where they, if patterned on the models of Russian region, would have introduced points for the crystallization for opposition by an intentionally disloyal Polonized gentry (Misiunas 1985).

The limited "organizational capital" and human capital of the national communities of the Estonians and Latvians were seen as the main problem in overcoming German domination. In addition to the national awakening as a means of collective self-identification the German-based *bildungsideologie* also oriented these nations to cultural self-realization. Personal promotion in the field of farming and cultural emancipation was viewed as the main way of striving for freedom. The essence of the struggle over historicity in the northern regions of the Baltic area focused around self-government, culture and the "world of associations."

In 1900 a czarist official, Petr Rutsky, published a survey of Estonian, Latvian and German associations in the Livonian province (including Estonian and Latvian territories) based on official data. According to this survey, a total of 1241 different associations existed in the year 1899. This is quite a sizeable number, and the existence of so many different organizations and associations for all social strata, the highest and the lowest, all ethnic groups, all professions and occupations, etc.,

was according to Rutsky the characteristic feature of the Baltic provinces as compared to other parts of Russia (Jansen 1993, 123). The sphere of religious associations (church) and congregational activity was perceived in Estonia and to some extent in Latvia (in its Lutheran areas) as marginal or "territory lost to the enemy". The term *Herrenkirche* was commonly used. Along with being perceived as a hegemonic structure of the upper classes, the Lutheran Church had only a small potential for mobilizing identity. In this historical context it is illuminating that in the first years of the Estonian and Latvian Republics the church was separated from the state and religion declared a private matter of its citizens.

The emergence of relatively small sect-like religious groups and the conversion of Estonians and Latvians to the Orthodox Church in the latter half of the nineteenth century was in general motivated by economic interests. The dominant mobilization patterns in northern areas - "Pribaltica" - as early as the end of the century were secular and oriented on an individual basis. In contrast, in Lithuania the repertoire of reproductive models of the dominant church was perceived as the backbone of the nation and the main hegemonic structure. Before 1900 visible signs of a nationally-focused association movement were missing in Lithuania (Loit 1985, 73). Secret instruction in Lithuanian and the "smuggling" of books from Lithuania Minor printed in the Latin alphabet (the "books carriers" movement) relied heavily on the church.

Along with the building of ethnic identity the emerging markets also began in the latter half of last century to legitimize private interest and create "fields" of public action. In the Baltic area in general the capitalist system came late. Compared to Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania remained a predominantly agrarian and paternalistic country for a longer time. Serfdom was abolished a half of century later than in the historical Baltic provinces - Estonia and Latvia. Thus the "free worker" institution was particularly late in making its appearance.

The fragile and agriculturally-centered structure of production and capital (accumulation) in all the Baltic regions promoted capitalist organizational institutions ("small accumulation of capital"). Tenants' associations and the cooperative movement (self-help associations, food associations, loan associations, etc.) were established in Estonia and Latvia, where they embraced many spheres of life and a considerable part of the population before the First Russian Revolution. In Lithuania the process started at the turn of the century. Not until the countries became independent in 1918, however, did the movement acquire significant proportions (Sabaliunas 1972, 93).

The emerging markets supplied the newly-independent nations with experience concerning regular deliberate economic and political activity and organization life in the context of public procedures. Procedural action, open voicing of group interest, implementing discourse on legal rights, etc., means a shift in principle regarding the mode of civil organization. Civil society dominated by a community based on *Gemeinschaft* started to modernize into a "complex civil society" with overlapping association structures.

Undoubtedly there were many common elements in place in addition to the differences in the developing ethnic civil communities. In all the Baltic states in this period, the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and a charismatic efflorescence of public ethics was evident: the demands for and expressions of individual dignity as the "basis" of political life. Ethics was perceived as an autonomous political criterion for public action. The metaphor of "awakening" chiefly has serious connotations of religious commitment (Kull & Lotman 1995, 2479). In this sense the political "awakening" was in the long run derived from the "procedural publicness" of liberal societies.

The attributed collective values took on the role of cognitive and formative categories in all Baltic countries. The effective mobilization of cognitive categories made possible the emergence of a "politics of identity." But only in Lithuania did values inherent to historical romanticism and religious messianism play a dominant "organizing" role in building the community. It is quite revealing that even today Lithuanian scholars declare that "most of us agree that civil society is

founded on national consciousness" (Taljunaite et al. 1993, 124). The newsletter of the Lithuanian independence movement "Sajudis" took as its name "Awakening" (*Atgimimas*).

The tendencies towards structural change in civil organization in the Baltic at the turn of the century are best interpreted in terms of a change in the structural conditions of two essential modes of connection between the social structure of society and organizational commitment and the basic models of organizing the consciousness of the nation. These essential modes of connections were 1) the direct effects of changes involving residual, technological, environmental, etc., conditions making organizational activity possible; and 2) changes in those conditions supporting the preservation of a highly ideological-romantic social consciousness (a consciousness in which individual performance, property and other bourgeois values are not yet autonomously observed).

It appears that the role of individual articulation of life-strategies as well as that of public procedures in the formation of social initiative and associations was considerably weaker in Lithuania than in Latvia and Estonia. At the same time the Lithuanian civil society confronting the imperial regime included some features of the charismatic type of political culture and mobilization in Russian society.

It has been suggested that "by the very nature of Russian rule, the Lithuanians had to be revolutionary" (Senn 1985, 315). Moreover, it is also important to note the dominant model of "historicity", the limited capacity of Lithuanians to build their own society "inside" the Russian state, which motivated them towards "direct visible actions" and making them much more radical in their political focus. Lithuania was among the first nations in the Empire, along with the Poles and Finns, at the peak of First Russian Revolution in December 1905, to demand political autonomy for its national community.

Conclusions

Two basic models for building civil society can be observed to have been employed in the Baltic states. The interest-based and association-focused version of civil society development was introduced and gained power in Estonia and Latvia. In this model the dichotomy of civil organizations and the state, self-government and central rule, culture and political power, was essential and the civil sphere was strongly perceived as serving the emancipation (social, political, cultural) of suppressed individuals. The association movement-based form of civil organization in Estonia and Latvia offered a more democratic definition of political leadership and membership as well. This perception contrasted the ethnic citizen with the alienated individual of "status society." In a larger perspective the pragmatic and individualist model legitimated the ethnic and class struggle of suppressed nations.

In the case of the other historical version, the formation of civil society is focused on a "superstructure" and works primarily for intellectual integration and collective emancipation. In one of its classical sources - the Catholic Church - it is perceived as a sphere in which ideological apparatuses operate and whose task is to exercise hegemony over the interests of groups who do not have their own apparatuses: economic and intellectual organizations. Civil society represents morality, through which a suppressed nation (class) achieves a consensus and is consolidated (Bobbio, 1989, 31). This type of civil organization is popular in Mediterranean Catholic countries. Civil mobilization as described by Lithuanian scholars (Krikshtopaitis 1995) resembles the Southern European version of civil society.

So the model that governed the way in which ethnic collectivity organized its relations with the dominant and usually repressive social and political environment was different and shaped each of the Baltic nations in a unique way. It could take either dialogic or conflicting forms.

Striving to build independent nation states in the Baltic was not a result of an international "imperialist conspiracy," the "business of small nationalist gang" or a "miracle". It was the result of a hundred-year-long civil development. The failure of Lenin to root state socialism there was not caused by weak Bolshevik indoctrination (as the popular Soviet version explained the failure of

Baltic Communists). The essence of the successful defensive war waged by the small Baltic nations against the Bolshevik revolutionaries can at best be interpreted as a conflict of civilizations. It appears that Samuel Huntington's well-known concept of the "clash of civilizations" also has some real meaning in this context (Huntington, 1993).

In respect to describing the role of civil society, it is very revealing to note Lenin's strong criticism of the "petty bourgeois" mentality and habits. In these attacks, formulated in terms of class conflict, the Bolsheviks expressed the massive stabilizing ("anti-communist") potential of individualized interests and personalized society. The Baltic nations - above all Estonia and Latvia - were petty-bourgeois nations *par excellence*. Their national communities were based on small-ownership and cooperation. The members of these societies focused on activities defined in terms of the "here and now," not on the idea that building a messianic collectivist society may be possible sometime in the future.

In the context of political history it is obvious that the proportions of the predominantly ethnic (*Gemeinschaft-based*) and modern bourgeois structures of civil mobilization which were launched in the fight for independence (1918-1920) were also unique in the case of the different Baltic nations. (Furthermore, the Lithuanians were heavily supported by the Germans in building their army.) The largely romantic ethnic and religious identity-based Lithuanian mobilization was the dominant element in the chain of their historical fight against the Russian state.

This last comment does not mean that a patriotic mobilization did not work in the case of the Estonians and Latvians. However, there "nationalism" was articulated much more as civil resistance and the integration of community networks. After the first attempts of the Bolshevik occupiers to introduce the "proletarian democracy" of the Soviets, the overwhelming majority of people realized that not only was national independence under attack, but the whole set of historical values and their whole way of life as well, the whole civilization which was the main achievement of a hundred year-long civil struggle.

The "essence" of the paradigmatic political confrontation that faced Estonia and Latvia after the Leninist putsch in October 1917 and was interpreted only in terms of "class conflict" was totally misunderstood by the majority of Russian-trained local Communist leaders. It was a conflict between types of civilizations - the Russian-Bolshevik (based on the historical traditions of Russian society) and the Central European (based on the self-reliance of the burgher).

Compared to less-structured Russia, the Bolshevik rhetoric was not such an effective mobilization vehicle in the Baltic lands with more sophisticated societies. Civil society had already taken shape as the core of society and had offered a different experience in political leadership and membership to a large part of the population. At the same time these nationally-entrenched societies were relatively homogeneous socially compared, for example, to Finland, where organizational capital had been formed in a framework of different hegemonic projects. The intermingling of popular "organizational capital" and the building of ethnic identity gave the impetus for the hegemonic drive of the national petty bourgeoisie.

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