

REPORT

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Research topic: Interactions between NGOs and authorities in contemporary Russia

First of all, I would like to thank Sverker Åström Foundation and personally Disa Håstad for this great opportunity to visit Sweden and to carry out this research project. I was in Sweden from September 19th 2016 to December 19th 2016. I was hosted by the Department of Sociology at Södertörn University and collaborated with Prof. Apostolis Papakostas and Zhanna Kravchenko.

The research project was concerned with organizational changes of the Russian third sector (NGOs) and the political regime, regional and local authorities. In this project (which I am conducting together with my colleague Andrei Semenov), we study the organisational adaptation of Russian NGOs to the so-called “Foreign Agents Law”, implemented in July 2012. Using the approach of sociological institutionalism, we reconstruct the logics of adaptation and argue that the ecological sphere played a great role in shielding/exposing specific organisations to the provisions of the new legislation. The law itself was a continuation of the Kremlin’s strategy of licensing civil society and affected the third sector as a whole, at the same time targeting human rights and environmental groups especially hard. As a result, Russian NGOs had to adapt, in the worst-case scenario liquidating the existing organisations. Empirically our research is based on interviews with representatives of NGOs in the Russian regions, public opinion polls, documents and media reports.

My purpose during the internship was to prepare an article based on our research materials and results, present and discuss our outcomes to colleagues at Södertörn University, receive some qualified feedback and improve the research idea and article.

I visited some interesting presentations, workshops and conferences at Södertörn, as for example:

- The US Presidential Election
- Populism in Europe and beyond: against Eurocentrism
- Analysis of current public policy in the spheres of Russian culture and education in terms of the neoliberal turn transformed into a neo-traditionalist form
- Force replacement of young Georgians from Abkhazia
- The Finns Party in government and dynamics of populism
- Is there a conflict between philosophy and politics?
- Traditional voters or postmodern citizens? Citizenship typology in Lithuania (CBEES Annual Conference)
- The defence volunteer movement in modern Ukraine: identity and relations with the state (CBEES Annual Conference)
- Public space and mass protest in Minsk (CBEES Annual Conference)
- The power of language – on (self)presentation of think tanks in Poland (CBEES Annual Conference)
- Going against institutionalization: New forms of urban activism in Poland (CBEES Annual Conference)

On December 5th 2016, my presentation “Organizational Changes in the Russian Third Sector After the “Foreign Agent Law” took place. The discussant Eva Karlberg drew attention to the issue of professionalization of civil initiatives and NGOs and updating a variety of organizational resources with a view to formalizing inside NGO relations. In the discussion after the report, interesting comments were made about the presence of ambivalent trends in modern Russian civil society: professionalization, formalization and bureaucracy, on the one hand, on the other – the elimination of formal NGOs spread the practice of founding informal initiatives as well as the non-institutional funding of non-profit activity. After my report, I improved our article and submitted it to the journal *Economic Sociology*, a Russian journal included in the database Scopus. Only recently, we already received a positive feedback.

Furthermore, good working conditions and a productive atmosphere at Södertörn University helped me to finish writing another article about the typology of experts after the Russian regional elections in 2015 (“Who and how evaluates the elections in Russia: the sources of biases and evidence from the expert survey of the Russian regional elections on September 13, 2015”). Now, we improve and edit this paper with my co-author Margarita Zavadskaya and we are going to submit it early next year.

I am so glad that my internship helped me to establish fruitful academic relationship with Swedish political scientists and sociologists from Södertörn University. We discussed some potential future projects and collaborations, for instance the participation of Swedish colleagues at a conference taking place next summer at Perm State University.

Also, my internship for me personally will ever be associated with the successful defence of my PhD (*kandidatskaya*): in October, I went to Kazan Federal University and defended my thesis.

Last but not the least, I enjoined not only Stockholm academic life but also the everyday business of this beautiful and traditional city. I visited a lot of museums and exhibitions and was pleasantly surprised by the fact that the films in the theatres are shown in English language. I tried to improve my English everywhere: in conversations on the streets, in the shops, with colleagues at the university, with our host lady Kristiina Leino, in English-language cafes at Stockholm University, in encounters with couchsurfers and so on. I fell in love with kanelbulle and the great and mature Swedish tradition of fika.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I am proud that I can consider myself part of the Sverker Åström Foundation community (we had a wonderful alumni meeting in Moscow). It is a great opportunity for Russian young people to discover Sweden, to meet new people, to explore Swedish culture, and to continue Sverker's quest for peace and happiness in the world.