

Problems of Non-Profit Organizations' Activities in Housing and Utilities Infrastructure Sphere in Tver Region

Blokhina M.V.

Department of Sociology and Social Technologies
State Technical University
Tver, Russian Federation
bmvstu@mail.ru

Grigoryev L.G.

Department of Sociology and Social Technologies
State Technical University
Tver, Russian Federation
grig1969@rambler.ru

Abstract—This article is devoted to the analysis of non-profit organizations activity in the housing and utilities infrastructure sphere in Tver region. The research method is a traditional analysis of documents, in-depth interviewing of expert-leaders and activists of non-profit organizations in the field of housing and utilities infrastructure (HUI), representatives of state and municipal authorities of the region, specialists of resource - supplying organizations (2018). The features of such non-profit organizations are identified; their types, functions and areas of work are analyzed. Various aspects of their functioning are investigated: the reasons for the citizens participation in their activities, the forms and methods of work, the nature of relationships with government and business, problems and prospects for further development. The NPO activity in the sphere of housing and utilities infrastructure is necessary for solving acute housing and utilities infrastructure problems, but a significant part of the population is poorly informed and uninterested in their work. Creating non-profit organizations, citizens seek to personally participate in the block of flats management, control spending, and ensure the quality and availability of housing and utilities infrastructure. For the further NPO development in the sphere of housing and utilities infrastructure services, a legal framework development, constructive interaction with authorities and business structures, legal resident education, and innovate experience exchange are necessary to be developed.

Keywords—civil society, non-profit organizations, regional society, housing and utilities infrastructure

I. INTRODUCTION

Soviet Russia is the the rule of law formation and the civil society formation. In this complex and controversial process, global social development trends and specific features caused by Russian history zigzags, national mentality, and prevailing political culture have been intricately intertwined. The core of civil society is numerous and diverse non-profit organizations (NPO), the institutionalization of which is also characteristic of the last decades. NPO function in various spheres of society and solve various tasks. Under the federal structure of Russia, civil society structures are crystallized not only at the state level, but also acquire a pronounced regional and even municipal dimension. It can be noted that the civil society image in modern Russia is a canvas woven from many

regional images, that namely the subjects of the Russian Federation form self-organization spaces of a regional society, manifestations of civic activity and social responsibility of urban and rural settlements residents.

A particular place among the variety of non-profit organizations operating in Russian regions is occupied by NPO, functioning in the housing and utilities infrastructure sphere (HUI). Their importance is caused by the severity of housing and utilities infrastructure, the deplorable state of a significant part of the housing and utilities infrastructure, and the sustained discontent of residents with the state of affairs in this area. At the same time, state partnership, business, civil society structures and its activists are considered as a condition for solving existing problems in modern Russia, as a factor contributing to economic growth, social well-being and political stability. The above mentioned determines the relevance and practical significance of research on the peculiarities of functioning, problems and prospects for the development of non-profit organizations in HUI sphere in specific regions of the Russian Federation.

II. SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE REVIEW

The extensive scientific literature is devoted to the problems of civil society development and its individual institutions. For many decades, the phenomenon of civil society has been the subject of scientific research by specialists representing various areas of social and humanitarian knowledge (lawyers, historians, sociologists). During this time, there have been several key approaches to understanding civil society [1, p. 74–75]. The ideas of such eminent intellectuals as M. Foucault and J. Habermas [2] have a great influence on modern ideas about civil society. Typical for the discourse on civil society is the classic definition of F. Schmitter, who interprets civil society as a “system of self-organized intermediary groups” independent of government and business, being capable of collective action in defense of their interests [3, p. 240].

Domestic authors began an active analysis of the civil society phenomenon in the post-Soviet period, paying particular attention to the genesis of civil society structures in a transitional society [4–5], features of their

institutionalization in Russian conditions [6], specific features of an emerging civil society in the Russian Federation [7–9]. A significant direction of such studies was the study of various aspects of non-profit organizations formation and functioning in the general context of the civil society establishing. Specialists study the legal framework for NPO activities, innovate experience of their work, interaction mechanisms with the state and business [10–11]. Taking into account the diversity of non-profit organizations in Russia, attempts to typologize them are of particular interest, the criteria of which can be organizational and legal form, ownership form, economic way of uniting founders, activity purpose, accounting system, sources of funding and other characteristics [12, p. 53]. Modern publications on non-profit organizations affect the most diverse aspects of their functioning: from studying the social networks role among individual NPO [13] and the non-profit organizations impact on solving specific social problems [14] to researching the specifics of NPO project activity [15].

In recent years, interest in the regional aspects of the civil society development and NPO activities has increased, works have appeared, which authors have analyzed the state of such structures in certain subjects of the Russian Federation [16–22].

In Tver region, studies of the institutionalization and the functioning processes of civil society have been conducted for many years by specialists from the Department of Sociology and Social Technologies of Tver State Technical University; they studied the features of individual regional civil society structures, NPO general development trends, the specifics of civil participation in the region [23–25]. Researches of the named department employees continue and have a monitoring character.

It should be noted that, despite the significant number of works devoted to non-profit organizations, not so many publications studying NPO in the housing and utilities sector can be found. The authors of such works are trying to identify the specific features of such non-profit organizations, functioning factors, problems and development prospects [26–29].

Thus, in modern studies of non-profit organizations as an institution of civil society across the country and in the space of individual regions, lacunae are still associated with determining the specificity of the status and functions of regional NPO in the housing and utilities infrastructure sector.

III. ARTICLE SUBJECT DESCRIPTION

The subject of this article is non-profit organizations activity in HUI sphere in Tver region. Housing and utilities infrastructure service is a complex of economic sectors that create the necessary conditions for the smooth functioning of the engineering infrastructure of buildings and structures in urban and rural settlements. The HUI sphere includes housing (capital and current repair of buildings), heat supply, water supply, electricity supply, repair of engineering communications, as well as landscaping, waste disposal and cleaning [30, p. 27]. Specific features of HUI sphere are: synthesis of production and non-production functions, the

creation of material products and services; high social significance, determining the importance of state and public control; the diversity of relation subjects legal forms in HUI sphere; interaction of large business and small business; the special role of municipal government; the need to provide a minimum of housing services in the conditions of consumers insolvency.

The HUI main problems include the unsatisfactory condition of block of flats (BFH), the growth of emergency and dilapidated housing, the poor quality of housing and utilities infrastructure service (HUS), overhaul, installation and operation of metering devices, charging for HUS, inefficient BFH management.

Non-profit organizations are called to play an important role in solving the problems of housing and utilities infrastructure service. The most common forms of NPO in the field of HBC are condominium associations (CA) house building and housing cooperatives (HBC and HC), as well as associations uniting both individual and collective members. According to the General Directorate “State Housing Inspectorate” of Tver region, there are about 300 of CA and HBC (HC) in Tver region [31]. The NPO activity scale in the HUI field of Tver region are expanding. The article analyzes the factors and features of non-profit organizations functioning in the housing and utilities infrastructure sector, problems and their solutions, prospects for the NPO work in HUI sphere.

IV. AIM, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The aim of the study presented in this article is to analyze the problems and prospects of the of non-profit organizations activity in HUI sphere in Tver region.

The main objectives of our study are:

- 1) *Characterize the state of housing and utilities infrastructure service in Tver region at present, identify the most acute problems in this area and ways of solutions.*
- 2) *Identify non-profit organizations involved in solving problems of housing and utilities infrastructure services in the region, and assess the relevance of their activities.*
- 3) *Assess the population awareness about non-profit organizations activity in the housing and utilities infrastructure sector and the interest of citizens in their work.*
- 4) *Disclose the main reasons prompting Tver region residents to create NPO in HUI sector and (or) to participate in their work.*
- 5) *Study the functions performed by NPO in HUI sphere, as well as the forms, methods and technologies of work they use.*
- 6) *Characterize the NPO relations in HUI sphere with the authorities and business structures.*
- 7) *Offer recommendations to increase NPO efficiency in HUI sector of Tver region.*

In the study preparing process, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1) *In a crisis situation in HUI sphere, namely the non-profit organizations activity can contribute to solving the problems that have been accumulated, so it is quite common among population.*

2) *Despite the objective need for the NPO development in HUI sphere, Tver region residents are still poorly informed about the activities of such organizations and have little interest in participating in their work.*

3) *The main NPO functions in HUI sphere should be: the residents involvement in block of flats management, improving the quality and accessibility of housing and utilities infrastructure services, protecting the rights of citizens in the housing and utilities infrastructure sphere, legal education of the population.*

4) *NPO in HUI sphere should constructively interact with government authorities and business structures, create their own associations, learn innovate practices, and share work experience in order to successfully fulfill their functions.*

5) *The NPO effective activity in HUI sector are currently hampered by such problems as insufficient development and instability of the legal base, low awareness and passivity of a part of the population, poor coordination of activities with each other and with the governing bodies.*

The need to solve these problems and test hypotheses has determined the research method.

V. RESEARCH METHOD

The study was conducted in Tver region that is the largest region of the Central Federal District of the Russian Federation. The problems of the region, the processes of civil society structures formation, trends in non-profit organizations development, the state of the housing and utilities infrastructure sector are quite typical for Central Russia. The basis of civil society in Tver region is formed by numerous public associations, the Public Chamber of Tver region, public councils (chambers) in the municipalities of Tver region, public councils under the executive bodies of Tver region state power. According to the Administration of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation for Tver Region, of December 1, 2017, 2117 non-profit organizations were registered in Tver Region, including 27 national-cultural autonomies, 154 non-commercial partnerships, 701 public associations, 17 public movements, 62 political parties, 294 religious organizations, 6 bodies of territorial public self-government (TPS), and other structures. Approximately 60% of non-profit organizations total number in the region are socially oriented NPO [32, p. 6].

The study was conducted by the Department of Sociology and Social Technologies specialists of Tver State Technical University. An array of empirical research materials was formed using a number of methodological procedures.

First, a traditional analysis of documents posted on the websites of large non-profit organizations operating in the housing and utilities infrastructure sector was carried out [33].

Secondly, in January to May 2018 period, in-depth interviewing of experts was conducted. The sample size was 20 people. The sample representativeness was provided by the method of its formation, which was carried out using the following criteria: work place, position held. The study presents the following expert groups:

1) *leaders and activists of non-profit organizations in the housing and utilities infrastructure sphere - 9 people;*

2) *representatives of the region state and municipal authority - 6 people;*

3) *experts of resource - supplying organizations - 5 people.*

Recruitment of survey participants was carried out by the snowball method. A special toolkit (an expert interview forms) containing the main questions on the study subject was prepared to collect information, which was only required to orient the respondents to the topic of conversation. The methods of traditional analysis were used for the information analysis obtained during the expert interview.

VI. RESEARCH RESULTS

When being interviewed, experts were asked to give an overall assessment of housing and utilities infrastructure services state in Tver region. Most of the survey participants critically assessed the situation in the housing and utilities infrastructure sphere. Experts supported the negative evaluations by indicating specific problems that had not been resolved yet. The following problems can be distinguished “serious technological problems, pipe wear”, “the need to modernize the entire HUI infrastructure”, “poor quality of the services provided”, and also “the lack of municipal and regional institutions specifically dedicated to covering the population in HUI sphere, training specialists in this area”. Only two out of twenty experts considered the HUI sphere state as satisfactory in the region (“the same as an average in the country”).

In response to a request “to identify the most acute problems”, experts enumerated the following: “a state of heat supply systems requiring urgent major overhaul and modernization”, “the payment opacity for housing and utilities infrastructure services”, “lack of qualified specialists in HUI sphere”, “unsettled legislation”, “contractual relations with resource supply and management organizations”, “a disbalance between the quality of housing and utilities infrastructure services and their price”, as well as “garbage disposal”. It was noted that some settlements are still off the gas grid in Tver region, therefore the HUI sphere “is at the level of the last century”. The experts also highlighted the difficulties associated with HUI enterprises management, the lack of specialists professionalism, the passivity of the HC and HBC heads. Discussing the problems of property management in the housing and utilities infrastructure sphere, the research participants touched upon issues which decisions largely depend on the HC and HBC heads. According to the experts, they often lack the qualities “that effectively allow them to carry out management activities”, few heads who “are willing to take responsibility, and do not rely on outside help”.

Research participants were also offered to answer the question “Which bodies (organizations, institutions, enterprises) should first deal with the solution of HUI problems?” Experts could not point out any universal organization responsible for solving housing and utilities infrastructure problems. According to experts, such functions should be performed by management structures at both the municipal and regional levels, representing both legislative (representative) and executive branches of government. According to the opinion of survey participants, effective solution of questions in HUI sphere is possible only on the basis of authority interaction, the business communities, and public organizations (“authority collaboration of all levels, management companies, owners are necessary”).

In the study course, the experts were asked to name non-profit organizations operating in Tver region, who are involved in solving HUI problems, and to characterize their activities. It turned out that the most active and owing to this the most famous NPO in HUI in Tver are the Tver Regional Human Rights Non-Governmental Organization “Life Quality” and the Tver Regional Association HC and HBC (HC). Also, the respondents mentioned the activities of a non-profit partnership in promoting the realization of the citizens’ rights in HUI sphere, “Committee for the Tverches Protection”, and the Tver city public organization in assisting the owners in the area of housing and utilities infrastructure services “HUI Expert”. The main work areas of such organizations are the implementation of public control in HUI sphere and legal education of the population in this area. Several experts pointed out the functioning importance of the block of flats councils as non-profit associations of owners not being a legal entity. At the same time, survey participants noted the special role of “informal social structures” involved in solving HUI problems.

The experts were also asked to evaluate the current demand for NPO activity in the housing and utilities infrastructure sector in Tver region. The overwhelming majority of respondents said that such work is vital (“real NPO working staff in the housing and utilities infrastructure sphere in Tver and in Tver region are definitely needed”, “population need for their activities remains at a high level”).

The reasons for such structures need were also discussed in the study. The experts highlighted the NPO protection of citizens' interests among them (“public organizations represent the interests of people”). Many experts have emphasized the NPO role in the social capital formation that is trust of residents to each other as the basis of joint productive activities to solve housing and utilities infrastructure problems. At the same time, some respondents pointed out the influence of citizens’ insufficient awareness about NPO activities and their capabilities as defenders of population rights in the housing and utilities infrastructure sphere on the residents’ attitude to public organizations.

Indeed, the study showed that the level of citizens’ awareness about NPO activities in HUI sphere is very low in Tver region (“if something is known, that to a very limited number of people”). Experts see the reasons for this state of affairs in the passivity and indifference of citizens (“despite

the fact that information about NPO activities is published in newspapers and broadcasted on TV channels, people are not interested in this”), as well as in the “wrong” reporting of HUI problems and the NPO role in their decision in mass media (“The media should stop scolding the HC and begin to objectively cover their work, as this is the most effective form of block of flats management”).

The research participants also evaluated the citizens’ interest in NPO activities in HUI sphere, their readiness to support their work and also involvement in it. According to the experts, this is strongly influenced by the population lack of information about such NPO (“taking into account the very poor knowledge of citizens about certain NPO in HUI sphere it is not necessary to talk about their interest in NPO work, support and active participation”). The respondents paid attention to the fact that if the interest of citizens is great during the creation of such NPO forms as HC and HBC, then later in the process of their daily work, when “it seems to be necessary to take part in solving specific issues, pay membership dues”, the activity of residents is sharply reduced. A new burst of activity in NPO work only occurs when “some kind of common question arises that requires an early resolution”. Due to the experts, “the work of public reception centers, where you can get the necessary advice is in demand” in such situations.

The experts answers are of particular interest to the question: “In your opinion, what are the main reasons that encourage Tver region residents to create NPO in HUI sphere and (or) to participate in their work?” According to the respondents, the main reason is the presence of a large number of acute problems in HUI sphere requiring immediate solution. Among other motives of organizing NPO, the experts called the desire of citizens to receive high-quality housing and utilities infrastructure services, the desire to independently manage the spending, which is allowed by “effective practices of HC and HBC”. Some experts also emphasized the materialistic motives of NPO founders in HUI sphere, who “expect to win a grant and earn income creating NPO”.

In order to better determine the NPO location in HUI sphere in the regional civil society space experts were invited to name functions that perform or should perform such non-profit organizations. The general function of all NPO in HUI sphere, according to unanimous opinion of the experts, should be legal education of citizens (“educational activity is the most important function”, “terrifying legal nihilism has been formed for decades”, “unfortunately, disrespect for the law is in the blood of our people”). Other functions are caused by the objectives of non-profit organizations, for instance, the main function of HC, HBC, BFM councils is the block of flats management; self-regulatory organizations (SRO) control compliance with standards in BFM management.

The majority of respondents believe that key NPO functions in HUI sphere are related to the public control implementation, increasing the level of owners legal knowledge in BFM, rallying people interested in solving HUI problems, and “creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding”.

In the course of the study, the representatives of the expert community needed to list the forms, methods, technologies that NPO in HUI sphere apply in its activity, to give examples of successful practices implemented in Tver region. It turned out that non-profit organizations hold round tables, training seminars and webinars, organize “public receptions” and “hot lines”, publish methodological manuals for the public. According to the experts, one of the most effective methods of work is constant personal contacts with the public (“in this case there is always the opportunity to personally ask a question and get an answer to it”). The most successful public structures operating in HUI sphere, in addition to the already mentioned NPO “Life Quality”, “Committee for the Tverches Protection”, “Tver Regional Association of HC and HBC” are the housing cooperatives as “Smolensky-8”, “Khiminstitute-47”, “Khiminstitute-54”, “Lazur”.

The research participants answers are of particular interest to the questions: “What difficulties and problems do NPO in HUI sphere face in their work in Tver region? What mistakes do they often make?” The opinions of the experts were divided. Several experts linked difficulties in NPO activities with poor public awareness about the work of non-profit organizations in the HUI sphere, the residents lack of understanding of NPO tasks, and distrust of them (many residents think that they are trying to deceive them). Other survey participants drew attention to the mistrust of the authorities towards NPO (“they demonstrate only formal interest”), to some NPO ignoring the requirements of Russian legislation (“they create difficulties for themselves, since they do not comply with the laws”). According to the respondents, mistakes are often made at the NPO creation stage (“for example, HC is created with the support of 50% plus 1 vote, which which corresponds to the law, but not enough for sustained HC activity”).

The most important aspect of the “third sector” functioning is interaction with the authorities. Therefore, the experts needed to analyze the nature of the relationship established by NPO in HUI sphere with the authorities. The majority of respondents noted that the government is interested in the activities of non-profit organizations in the housing and utilities infrastructure sector, because “NPO should be a link between the authorities and the population, primarily in matters of educational activities”. It was observed that the government does not limit the possibilities of NPO activities, but on the contrary, “very interested in the increased number of organizations that help to solve HUI problems and in the decreased number of dissatisfied with the state of affairs in this area”. Therefore, the authorities “support the NPO requests for premises, share information, go forward, and help”. At the same time, some experts doubt the sincere interest of authorities in NPO work in HUI sphere (“Probably, they unconsciously consider HC as rivals”). In many respects, the relationship between NPO and the authorities depends on specific officials and their managerial style.

In the study course, the respondents were asked to answer the question “What are the necessary structures to support NPO partnership relations in HUI sphere? Why?” According to the experts, one of the conditions for the success of non-profit organizations in the housing and utilities infrastructure

sector is equal cooperation with all structures related to HUI (“NPO should be open to dialogue with every subject of relations in HUI sphere”). It is necessary to cooperate with the authorities in order to use their administrative and financial resources for the benefit of the population (“namely the government allocates the grants”). It is necessary to build mutually beneficial social partnership with business structures. Cooperating with public organizations in HUI sphere from other cities, regions, and regions is recommended in order to exchange experience and get acquainted with successful NPO practitioners.

The experts were asked to evaluate the prospects for the NPO development in HUI sphere in Tver region. The majority of survey participants are convinced that non-profit organizations in the housing and utilities infrastructure sector have significant prospects for their development. On the one hand, the HUI field is very complex, multifaceted and dynamic (“there are a lot of controversial issues in this sector that need to be studied and resolved”). On the other hand, the significant potential of citizens social activity who daily face housing and utilities infrastructure problems can be revealed in this area (“if the population takes the initiative, new NPO will be created”). At the same time, experts pointed out that the future of NPO in Tver region strongly depends on the authority position (“it is important what practical tasks the government will set for NPO”).

At the end of the interview, the experts were asked to formulate proposals for improving the NPO activity in HUI sphere. The research participants made a number of recommendations which could be divided into proposals addressed directly to non-profit organizations, and wishes oriented for external entities (governments at various levels, the media, business structures). The respondents recommended NPO in HUI sphere and their participants to raise the professionalism level in their work, study the innovate practices of such organizations, adopt their positive experience, not to shy away from solving acute problems, maintain dialogue and actively cooperate with all interested organizations, officials, and citizens. Due to the experts, authorities need to affirmatively interact with NPO, provide the legal basis for the non-profit organizations (“it is necessary to stabilize the legislation in the housing sector, stop the endless variations”), weaken unreasonable administrative burden (“stop controlling”). The media should objectively cover the work of non-profit organizations in solving housing and utilities infrastructure problems, actively participate in the legal education of citizens. Many experts emphasized the need to consolidate NPO in HUI sphere, closer cooperation between them, in particular, the creation of HC associations at the municipal and regional levels.

VII. CONCLUSION

The conducted study confirmed the hypotheses put forward by the authors of the article. The problems inherent in other similar regions of the Russian Federation are characteristic for housing and utilities infrastructure services of Tver region. The deterioration of heating, low quality and high cost of housing and utilities infrastructure services, gaps in the legislation, the lack of highly qualified specialists are

among them. Non-profit organizations can make a significant contribution to their solution. NPO in the housing and utilities infrastructure sphere is an organic part of the “third sector” of a regional society. The most widespread forms of such NPO are HC and HBC, which directly provide for the block of flats management. But a special mission belongs to higher-level of NPO that is engaged in human rights activity in the housing and utilities infrastructure sphere, interact with various categories of citizens and organizations (block of flats owners, utility infrastructure consumers, HC and HBC heads, management companies), carry out public control in the housing sector. Despite the high demand for non-profit organizations in HUI sphere, the awareness and interest of citizens about their work is low by virtue of the general social passivity of a significant part of the population, due to the lack of necessary legal knowledge, and people’s distrust of any projects in the housing sphere.

The motivations of citizens involved in the creation and operation of non-profit organizations in HUI sphere: the desire to assert their rights, directly participate in BFH management, control the expenditure of funds, the desire to achieve quality housing and utility infrastructure services, overcome excessive dependence on government and commercial structures.

The NPO functions in HUI sphere can be divided into two groups: managerial (BFH management) and educational (distribution of legal and economic information necessary for effective management). Non-profit organizations use various forms and methods of work (for instance, consultations, meetings, seminars, round tables, business games, publishing and distribution of information materials, appeals to various bodies and institutions, as well as representation in them, checking the quality of housing utilities) to perform the functions.

An important condition for non-profit organizations development in HUI sphere, for improvement the efficiency of their work is constructive collaboration with the authorities. Promising forms of such interaction can be: grant support for non-profit organizations, competitive placement of state (municipal) orders among them, creation of public expert councils, holding joint events.

The conducted study showed that the non-profit organizations activity in the housing and utilities infrastructure sphere is a channel for realizing the potential of residents social activity, a factor of turning them into real subjects of block of flats managing, equipping residents with real powers and effective tools for the gradual resolution of acute housing and utilities infrastructure problems. Further monitoring studies of the non-profit organizations activity in the context of the ongoing housing and utilities infrastructure reforms in the Russian Federation are needed.

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