

Anna Poltavtseva

Historical Philanthropy in Russia

A Tradition of Charity in
Close Relationship to Government

The Author

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Preface

Philanthropy is a world-wide phenomenon and has been since antiquity. We know that philanthropic institutions existed in ancient Egypt, in the hellenic communities of Asia Minor, throughout the Roman Empire and from a very early age in the Islamic world. When the Emperor Justinian in 6th century Constantinople issued the collection of Roman law that became known as Codex Iustinianus, philanthropy was given extensive mention. It is therefore safe to assume that Russia was never void of philanthropic ventures. But we know virtually nothing about them. From 1917 to 1991, foundations not only did not fit the ideology of the Soviet Union, but did seem to not merit any academic attention.

The Maecenata Institute for Philanthropy and Civil Society has been active in attempting to find the historical roots of philanthropy as much as in looking at its present forms in a comparative approach. For this reason, we have always been curious to know to what extent there is a history of philanthropy in such a great and important country as Russia. Therefore, we are very happy to be able to present a first attempt at exploring this area. The findings suggest that the role of the Orthodox Church and of the ruling family add a special dimension to the rich variety we find as we look at the relationship between philanthropy and the overall cultural framework in any given society.

Anna Poltavsteva, a fellow in the German Chancellor Programme for future global leaders, made it her research project to look into what appeared to be a black box. What she has come up with merits applause as a first attempt to lift the veil. It may be hoped that her findings will induce researchers to follow suit and add to the global history of philanthropy by unearthing further details.

Berlin, in March 2015

Dr. Rupert Graf Strachwitz

Director, The Maecenata Institute

Introduction

The Russian tradition of philanthropy has a long and rich history. However, after the October Revolution in 1917, the charitable practice and support for people in need was almost completely destroyed. In the communist system, philanthropy was seen as a left-over of the bourgeois society. The communist government argued that there are no disadvantaged individuals in a properly organized society. In this course, they tried to reorganize the system rather than to support the helpless. During the Soviet period, the state took over the role of the modern foundations, provided social benefits to impoverished parts of the nation, and supported educational and cultural initiatives exclusively from the public sources.

The period after the collapse of the Soviet Union was especially hard for those who relied on the financial support from the state, since the majority of the social benefits were cancelled or reduced. At the same time, a new wave of modern Russian philanthropy started, albeit hesitantly. Therefore, this paper provides a broad introduction on the history of Russian philanthropy in order to show where it was before its disappearance in the Soviet Period and path the way for modern foundations in Russia.

1. Terminology

Although “philanthropy” can be literally translated with the Russian word “Philanthropia” (Филантропия), for the description of the altruistic actions, the more common term is “charity” - “Blagotvoritelnost”¹ which means “creation of blessing” or “creation of benefits”. The latter term is used more commonly in the traditional description of society. However, in recent years, “Philanthropy” became a modern expression used by progressive organizations. Even in the western world, some researchers are trying to differentiate the two descriptions and draw the line between them. R.H. Bremner² concludes that in the Western understanding the term charity in its meaning is more associated with religion and church while the meaning of philanthropy is associated with secular assurance, humanity and love to mankind in general.

2. Pre-Christian Rus

Since ancient time, according to the Russian historian of the 19th century Mikhail Pogodin³, taking care of older and ill people, single mothers and children was a widely accepted responsibility among the Slavic folks. Western travellers who visited the land of the Eastern

¹ In Russian: благотворительность

² Bremner R.H., «Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History», Transaction Publishers, 1994.

³ Ю. Годунский, «Откуда есть пошла благотворительность на Руси. Из истории меценатства»: Журнал «Наука и жизнь» №10'06.

Slavic folks often pointed out in their memories that humanity, compassion and supporting others were very common characteristics for them long time before they adopted Christianity.

Vasiliy Kluchevskiy, a historian of the 19th century, stated that people of the early Rus appreciated personal charity in forms of direct support for people in need, donations “from hand to hand”, feeding the hungry and visiting imprisoned persons.⁴ Moreover, many proverbs in the Russian language, which reflect the living attitudes and common rules of Russia, show that a charitable lifestyle was highly valuable and seen as the only right one, e.g. “the beggar is fed by the rich, the rich is saved by the blessing of the beggar”⁵.

In the 6th century, the Slavs lived in family clans which composed bigger tribes. In this period of time, the family clan was the source of support for any kind. It was a mutual duty for all members of the family to ensure the welfare assistance and protection of each other if needed. After the transition to the community based way of life, this tradition was continued not only among blood relatives, but also among people inhabiting joined territories building a neighbourhood support. There were many traditions of mutual supportiveness. One of them, the so called “mowing”⁶, was a combined collective volunteer work during the harvest time with the following celebration in the host’s house. Additionally, according to the traveller of the 16th century Ivan Lepehin⁷, during this period widows and orphans were widely supported with everything they needed in any houses they approached. These were the first traditions of charity which were continued during the first century of the Kievan Rus after the eastern Slavic tribes were united in the 9th century.

3. The Role of the Church and the philanthropy of the Rus Princes

With the Christianization of the Rus in 988 driven by Vladimir Svyatoslavovich, mayor steps in the development of charity in the Kievan Rus took place. In honor of his marriage with Anna Porphyrogenita, the sister of the Byzantian emperor Basil II, Vladimir Svyatoslavovich ordered the establishment of the church of the Sacred Virgin in Kiev, which helped the elderly, the sick, widows and orphans. At this period, the establishment of poorhouses hospitals and similar organisations were documented for the first time. Monasteries and correlated charitable centres were financed with the amount of the tenth of the state income, which were very considerable funds. After the victory over the Pechenegs, Vladimir donated 300 silver coins to

⁴ Ю. Годунский, «Откуда есть пошла благотворительность на Руси. Из истории меценатства»: Журнал «Наука и жизнь» №10'06.

⁵ See: «Нищий богатым питается, а богатый нищего молитвою спасается».

⁶ In Russian: дожинки, обжинки.

⁷ Лепёхин И. И., «Дневные записки путешествия доктора и Академии наук адъюнкта Ивана Лепёхина по разным провинциям Российского государства в 1768 и 1769 году. Часть 1.» — СПб., 1771.

spread among people in need. In 996, he issued a decree in which he put charity under the supervision of patriarchs and other entities under his observation.

Special attention was paid to children born with physical handicaps. In the patronage and education of the deaf-mute children, the Kiev Pechersk Lavra monastery, established in 1051, played an important role. Feodosiy Pecherskiy, an orthodox monk and one of the establisher of the Lavra, collected

the funding and created a house for blind, deaf, mute and people with other disabilities. For the maintenance of this organisation, he spent 10% of the monastery income⁸. In addition, he created a hospital that supported all the neighbourhoods and once a week donated bread to local prisoners.

Many Princes continued the tradition of kindness. Nikolai Davidovich, ruler of Kiev in the first half of the 12th century, created a medical cloister that became the first poorhouse outside the territory of the church. Andrey Bogolyubsky, Grand Prince of Vladimir-Suzdal from 1157 until 1174, ordered to distribute food among the poor. Another example of early philanthropy action was the order of Roman Rostislavovich, Prince of Smolensk, enacted to donate all his possessions to the poor after his death in 1180 without leaving money for his own funeral. After a fire disaster in 1185 that destroyed the majority of the wooden buildings in Vladimir City, Vsevolod Yurevich, the Prince of Vladimir City, organized a major charitable donation of his own treasury in order to build new houses for the citizens. Furthermore, the tradition of charitable giving was communicated through generations of Russian rulers. In their wills, many Princes listed philanthropic instructions. Konstantin Vsevolodovich, the Prince of Rostov who reigned from 1216 to 1218, asked his successors to have a "kind hand" to any person in need. Another example is Mikhail Yaroslavich, Grand Prince of all Russia from 1271 to 1318, who instructed his son to have no contempt for the beggars since this would be the will of God.

This development of the charitable tradition in Rus faced difficult times during the Mongol-Tartar invasion in the beginning of the 13th century. For almost 150 years, Rus was ruined and destroyed, weakened financially, morally and culturally under the regimen of the Golden Horde from 1238 until 1380. During this time, violence, cruelty and anarchy became part of daily life, destroying national habits, humanity and moral norms. However, for the duration of supremacy of the Golden Horde, the church took over the major role in charitable actions. The charitable actions of the church were made possible through the fact that at least during the first half of its domination in Rus, Tatar Khans had dismissive attitudes towards the Orthodox Church,



Picture 1: Illustration of the text "Lives of Saint Antoni Siiski" from 1648, showing him taking care of the ill and unable.

⁸ Мария Максимова, «Попечительство и благотворительность в дореволюционной России: Журнал «Индекс/Досье на цензуру», 28/2008.

which established more and more organizations, hospitals, asylums and poorhouses to help people in need. Some monasteries created stocks of grain in order to support the hungry during famine years. The battle of Kulikovo in 1380, in which Russian Princes were victorious over the Golden Horde, changed the dynamics of charity again. However, it took much time to recover from the war years.

4. Legislation of Ivan The Terrible in the Middle of 16th century

By the early 16th century, it became a well-established custom to make donations, support the poor and organize charities for infirm people. However, this custom had an adverse effect on the social situation. In times when the amount of people in need was constantly growing, begging turned into a “profession”. Many beggars who enjoyed being supported for nothing settled around churches or loafed between cities and villages, avoiding work and any kind of efforts to make themselves independent from donations. This attitude reduced the resources for those who were really in need.

Consequently, Ivan The Terrible, Tsar of All the Russia in the 16th century, recognized the need for an intervention. On the Stoglav, a conference of Russian bishops held in 1551, he spoke up for an organized charity and the need for cities to build their own poorhouse and hospitals. These institutions were supposed to be founded by the private donations and supervised by the priesthood and administrative officials. These announcements led to the connection between secular authorities and the church.

Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich, noun as Alexis of Russia, continued this effort. In his official council code from 1649, he implemented relevant statutes in civil law for public assistance. Moreover, he set up special decrees responsible for the construction of the poorhouses and supervision for disabled people. In 1682 his son, the young Tsar Fedor Alekseevich, who was crowned at the age of 15 and died with 20, commanded the adequate temporary accommodation for sick, handicapped or injured persons in poorhouses and hospitals and the obligation to work for professional-beggars.

In the middle of the 17th century, Russia faced hard times again. The war with Poland, epidemics and famines increased the need for charitable actions. Fedor Rtishev, close confidante of Tzar Aleksey Mikhailovich, placed enormous efforts in the establishment of charitable institutions, combining private and community efforts and becoming the leading philanthropist of that time. The Russian historian Vasiliy Kluchevskiy described his actions in

detail.⁹ Financed out of own resources, Fedor Rtishev organized a precursor of the Red Cross supported wounded Russian soldiers during the Polish Campaign. Although being physically frail man, Rtishev personally took part in the recovery operations during battles, transported wounded in carts with no place for himself left and followed the cart on foot, which was very unusual for high officials of his level. With the support of Maria Ilyinichna Miloslavskaya, wife of Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich, and his private savings, he established a fund to exchange war prisoners, helping thousands of fellow compatriots. Under his coordination, disabled, elderly and drunks were picked up from the streets and placed in special houses where they received medical care. He established two types of organization: in one of them, people received temporary help and left after the recovery; in the second, people stayed their entire lives. He spent the majority of his private income for the construction and maintenance of the houses. In case of financial difficulties, he sold his private belongings. In this way, he supported the entire Vologodsk region, which experienced a dramatic famine at that time.

His humanity extended to property sales, since he became short on finance. As stated by biographers, Rtishev lowered the agreed price of his estate in exchange for an oath from the new landowner that he would treat all the peasants the same way Rtishev had and would never increase feudal homage.

5. Philanthropy in the Russian Empire in the 18th century

A new wave of reform regarding charity started with Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia from 1682 to 1721 and Emperor of All Russia from 1721 to 1725. Being a reformer with progressive views, he was a hard working personality and expected the same from everyone else. In order to fight professional begging, he adopted a decree in 1691 stating that any person caught begging, but actually able to work, were sentenced to be flogged. In case the same persons repeated the crime, they were condemned to forced labour in Siberia. However, those who handed themselves in, were placed in state organized houses where they were assigned to a workplace. Moreover, in a following decree published in 1712, Peter the Great prohibited any kind of asking for donations. He even gave orders to punish those who gave alms on the streets, concluding that these people were “adverse for the state”. Any violations of this restriction were fined with a penalty of 5 Roubles for the first instant and 10 Roubles for the second. In total, he passed over 20 decrees against poverty and begging.

On the other hand, Peter the Great also established a programme for the patronage “of orphaned and people in need” to build hospitals, poorhouses and orphanages and asked

⁹ Vasilij Kluchevskiy, Russian historian of the 19th century, professor of Moscow University, was the author of many books about history of Russia. In his “Aphorisms and Thoughts about History”, he offers a retrospective of Russian history and historical figures, including the activities of Fedor Rtishev.

wealthy people to support these organizations financially. He assigned money from the State Treasury to fund the so-called “estovers”¹⁰ – money for feeding. Special attention was given to the care of injured veterans.

Peter the Great also sought for reforms in the existing structures of charity. He attempted to remove the care for people in need from the range of responsibilities of the church in order to transfer it to the state and other secular organizations, for example the provincial government in cities and the deputies in villages. In 1721, he reassigned the general administration of the charitable institutions to the Holy Synod, however, reassigned it three years later again to financial authorities. During his regency, the administration of charity was removed from the church and became part of the state activity. Despite strong attempts of Peter the Great to reform the system of charity and to fight welfarism, he was not able to overcome poverty and begging mainly because he used drastic measures and forces that only targeted the consequences, but not the causes.

The next epoch of philanthropy in Russia started with the regency of Catherine the Great from 1762 until 1796 under whose influence European ideas of humanitarianism have reached the Russian Empire. Although, Catherine continued the anti-beggars policy, but less rigorous than Peter the Great. Instead of physical punishment, she introduced a system of the forced labour and established new workhouses for rambles and beggars, which were under the supervision of the police. However, everyone resisting to work or misbehaving was punished with a maximum of three blows, put on a bread and water diet for a maximum of three days or imprisoned for one week.

Further innovation organized by Catherine the Great was the establishment of educational institutions for orphaned and illegitimate children and existed until the October Revolution in 1918. These institutions were government-owned or government-controlled public enterprises under the monarch’s protection and financed from private funds. The first educational house established 1764 in Moscow was realised by donations of Catherine who invested 100,000 Roubles in the first years followed by 50,000 every year. Shortly afterward in 1770, a second house was established in St. Petersburg with a special department for infants and a programme for nurse education¹¹.

Supplementary, several famous public person of that time supported educational programmes, e.g. Ivan Ivanovich Belinskiy. He was inspired by the growing middle class in Europe (e.g. tradespeople, industrialists, craftsmen) and was very disappointed by his observation that there were only two groups of citizens in Russia: nobility and peasant. Therefore, he established several educational houses where orphans and children of poor families could

¹⁰ In Russian: кормовые деньги.

¹¹ Ю. Годунский, «Из истории меценатства»: Журнал «Наука и жизнь» №. 10'06.

become craftsmen or artisans in order to build a valuable part of the society. They were given a basic education and at the age of 14-15 would further be assigned to workshops belonging to these houses or to the local handworkers.

Other institutions for children accepted girls and boys from middle class families with seven to eleven years in order to provide them professional skills and to help them finding a career in public offices, factories or workshops where they continued their education. Furthermore, Belinskiy organized the first closed educational school for women that had the goal “to provide to the state educated women, good mothers and valuable members of families and society”. In 1764, the school was opened for daughters of noble families at the age of four to six years and provided twelve years of high-level education that was completed by a state exam in attendance of the monarch family. One year later, a department for middle-class families was opened in Smolensk academy.

In 1775, Catherine the Great established the offices of public assistance¹² at regional level. Catherine personally prepared and adopted this law to reorganize the administration of provinces in the Russian empire providing that every province should create public assistance orders that were connected to the social security system of the state. These agencies were monitored by supreme authorities and the senate independently from governors and included the administration of schools, hospitals, poorhouses, orphanages and other public institutions. In total, they were implemented in 20 out of 55 provinces and financed by government funds and private donations. In order to increase the financial reserves, these institutions were allowed to play the role of the modern local banks, taking deposits and issuing credit secured by real estates. With the decentralization of the charitable initiatives from the capital to the province, Catherine aimed to reduce poverty in remote regions and assigned the local units to take care of people themselves. In addition, she ordered to issue special credit plans for people facing the threat of insolvency.

Catherine’s emperorship brought concrete institutionalised handling of charity and moved the country from a simple humanitarian attitude to a state system of social care and private donations. An anecdote of this time refers to Catherine trying to become the model of philanthropic attitude and to inspire others for actions with her own examples. One day she was informed that there were 52,000 Roubles collected for the establishment of a monument in her honour. Very disappointed, she stated that she rather remain in people’s hearts than in

¹² In Russian: Приказ общественного призрения.

marble and added another 150,000 Roubles of her private resources to this fund with the condition that it is used to build additional hospitals and educational houses.¹³

6. Empress Maria's Department of Institutions

The next step in philanthropic development is connected to the actions of Maria Feodorovna (Sophie Dorothea of Württemberg), wife of Paul I, Emperor of Russia from 1796 and 1801. Assigned by her husband, she became the head of educational houses and noble-minded maiden society¹⁴ in St. Petersburg and Moscow in 1797. In the same year, Maria established the Department of Institutions¹⁵, which administered charitable organizations in a philanthropic mission. Initially, the activity of the institution was limited to the patronage of only few organisations, but soon it grew to one of the major philanthropic foundation in the Russian history. In this role, Maria Feodorovna developed excellent organisational skills and charisma, which helped her to engage many smart, energetic and wealthy persons in order to fulfil duty to her. In this way, she financed all the organisations by a stable support from the State Treasury and through private donations. Driven by the success of Maria's Department of Institutions, other independent organisations asked to be taken under the institution's umbrella in order to secure their financing. Being a mother of 10 children, Maria Feodorovna was especially concerned about infant mortality, which was about 90% at that time. After the death of her husband, Maria established widow houses in order to support families of deceased soldiers and civil servants.

Maria Feodorovna led the Departments of Maria's Institutions for 30 years and transformed the concept to the leading system of the social support, which existed even after her death. In her last will, Maria Fedorowna asked her followers and wealthy personalities to combine their efforts with childcare, protecting the motherhood and supporting the poor and those in need. After her death in 1882, the patronage of the Maria's Department of Institutions was passed to the following Russian empresses.

In 1884, the wealth of all the Departments of Maria's Institutions were marked with 90,000,000 Roubles collected from 595 documented donations. In 1902, the department comprised 1,000 establishments, including two educational institutions, about 200 orphanages, and a number of special educational organisations such as 21 colleges for blind and one for the deaf-mute



Picture 2: Poorhouse in Dmitrov, built at the beginning of the 19th century

¹³ Мария Максимова, «Попечительство и благотворительность в дореволюционной России: Журнал «Индекс/Досье на цензуру», 28/2008.

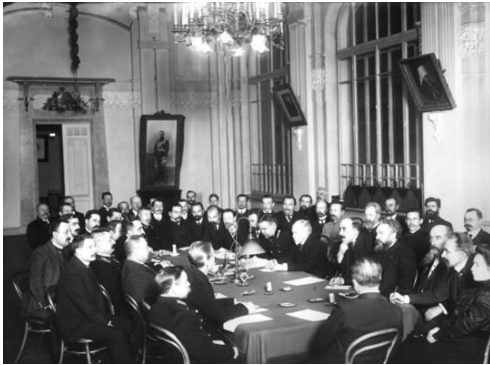
¹⁴ In Russian: Общество благородных девиц.

¹⁵ In Russian: Ведомство императрицы Марии.

children, six institutions for blind adults, women's institutions and academies, two commercial colleges, the Alexandrovsky Lycee, 36 poorhouses, and 40 hospitals. In total they were 710,000 people who received support from these organizations. The financial situation of the departments was so stable that the government was able to subsidize the construction of Vittegor'skiy channel¹⁶ in Saint Petersburg - the major waterway already planned by Peter the Great, but up to that point not realized due to insufficient financial resources. This waterway is also known as "Maria's water system".

7. Imperial Philanthropic society

In the beginning of the 19th century, another philanthropic institution arose comparable to the Departments of Maria's Institutions. The "Beneficial society"¹⁷ was founded in 1802 and renamed "Imperial Philanthropic Society"¹⁸ in 1814. As recognizable by the name, the



Picture 3: Committee meeting of Imperial Philanthropic Society, 1915

organization was established by the Emperor of those years, Alexander the First. His personal participation in the project helped to establish a stable and secure foundation that existed over 100 years. From his personal finances, the Emperor spent 40,000 Roubles. The remaining finances were collected from the private donations of wealthy individuals: e.g., Prince Golizin donated 600 Roubles every year and left 142,000 after his death to the society, Lieutenant

Ivanov donated a three-floor house in Moscow and Prince Odoevskiy his private estate. Furthermore, donations from bourgeois citizens contributed to the assets of the Imperial Philanthropic Society of 100,000 Roubles, as documented in 1818.

Initially, the organization existed mainly from state subsidies. However, after the peasant reform in 1861, one of the many reforms by Emperor Alexander II¹⁹, the majority of income of the foundation came from private donations. In 100 years of existence, the correlation between private and state foundations was described as 11:1. Gradually along with the Departments of Maria's Institutions, the Imperial Philanthropic Society became effectively the public body independent from the state.

The society had three main fields of operations: firstly, the patronage of impoverished, who were incapable to work due to physical reasons, secondly, the creation of working opportunities

¹⁶ In Russian: Вытегорский канал.

¹⁷ In Russian: Благотельное общество.

¹⁸ The exact Russian name is «Человеколюбивое общество», to mean Human Loving Society, or Humanitarian or Philanthropic Society

¹⁹ The most famous reform of Alexander II was the abolition of serfdom.

for poor people, including the provision of materials and support to sell their production, and thirdly, the education of orphans and children from the poor families. An especially established inquiry office, which was an innovative approach of that time, managed the actions of the society. The office collected reliable information about the relevant person in need and created a centralized informational stock in order to avoid that aid receivers were able to apply to several different offices. The network of the society grew very rapidly all over Russia. In the beginning of the 20th century, it counted 274 centres in Moscow, St. Petersburg and 37 in other Russian provinces and the total amount of support exceeded 1,500,000 Roubles yearly. About 5 million people requested support of the society in the 100 years of its existence. Many leaders of the society have been awarded by the government and the most valuable members wore personalized tags stating the motto: "Love thy neighbour".

When Russia joined the first treaty of the Geneva Conventions three years after it has been signed in 1864, Maria Alexandrovna, wife of Emperor Alexander II, supported the establishment of an organisation later named the Russian society of the Red Cross. Her daughter-in-law and mother of Nicholas II, Maria Feodorovna (Dagmar of Denmark), led the organisation from 1880 to 1917.

8. Poorhouses in the 19th century

It is difficult to determine the number of poorhouses in Russia due to inconstant record keeping in some provinces. However, the article about poorhouses by Yanovsky provides considerable information about the situation in St. Petersburg between 1890 and 1907.²⁰ The author stated that during that time all the poorhouses of the capital were distinguished into two groups: estates and non-estates. Both groups divided their responsibility according to the confession and class of the person requesting help. Non-estate poorhouses divided between all the classes of orthodox, all the classes of other confessions and all the classes and all the confessions together. Whereas the estates poorhouses set categories between the privileged classes, the priesthood, the merchants and craftsmen as well as the military men.

The total, they were up to 80 poorhouses in 1884 excluding houses with free or cheap housing. The majority of them with a number of 24 belonged to institutions of orthodox churches. Administered under the umbrella of all other confessions were 10 poorhouses, 5 under charitable foundations, 4 under the philanthropic society, 10 under private individuals and the other by diverse institutions. In 1885, the number of people situated in the poorhouses had

²⁰ Яновский А. Е. Богадельня // Энциклопедический словарь Брокгауза и Ефрона: В 86 томах (82 т. и 4 доп.). — СПб., 1890—1907.

reached 8560, 684 of them women. The total amount of financial means spent for their support was 150.000 Roubles.

In comparison to the major European cities of that time, St. Petersburg had more poorhouses, but spent less money for their support. Excluding the private donations, the average spending for one citizen in St. Petersburg was 1,5 Roubles, whereas in Berlin it was 2,9 Roubles, in Paris 5,7 Roubles and in Vienna 6,2 Roubles. This disproportion can be explained by the comparable low development of private charities, the lack of alternatives to poorhouses and some legislative rules that put more responsibility to the communities.

9. Charity in post-reform Russia

The liberal reforms of Alexander II had a great influence on the development of philanthropy. Around the turn of the century was a period of prosperity for charitable actions. Three types of charitable organisations could be distinguished in the post-reform Russia depended on the respective establisher: the church, the state and private persons.

In the period of 1870-1880, the Orthodox Church established about 40 new monasteries with social departments of different kinds. At the End of the century, the church maintained about 660 poorhouses and about 500 hospitals. Based on a statistic of 1907, at that time over 200 out of 907 monasteries were involved in the permanent charitable activity for orphans, homeless, poor, elderly and disabled.²¹

Regarding state organisations, the main trend of this time was the decentralization of a number of charitable institutions and the empowerment of the municipal authorities.²² They appreciated the given responsibility and were able to take concrete actions, e.g. increasing the efficiency of received capital, searching for new income sources, and improving the overall infrastructure of the charitable institutions. The result was immediate: whereas 784 charitable establishments were documented in Russia in 1860,²³ this figure raised to 4,500 in 1891.²⁴ Furthermore, the major cities in Russia found new courses of actions in order to support poor people. In 1894, the Municipal Guardianship of the Poor²⁵ was founded in Moscow. Starting with 24 subsidiaries, this number grew up to 27 in 1897. For administrative reasons, the city was subdivided in several districts, each with their own administrative territory. Volunteers who supported the new organisation financially or with their own labour were the patrons of the Municipal Guardianship of the Poor. The scope of duties included the collection of donations, visiting the poor, caring for the ill and other social activities. The members were split into three

²¹ Е.И. Холостова «Генезис социальной работы в России». Москва, 2008. p.128.

²² In Russian: Земские учреждения.

²³ Data collected from 55 Russian provinces.

²⁴ Data collected from 44 provinces.

²⁵ In Russian: Городское участковое попечительство для бедных.

groups: sponsors, employees and honorary members. The Municipal Guardianship of the Poor was funded by the city parliament subsidiaries, which were 40,000 Roubles per year, membership fees, donations, funding from charitable events such as benefits concerts. In order to avoid the inflow of beggars from other regions, only those were covered by, who were born or had a permanent residence for at least two years in Moscow.²⁶ In Russia, this was the first organisation based on community based volunteer work that was operative and effective.²⁷

Over the same period, the City Council of Charitable Activities²⁸ was established in Moscow in attempt to combine the efforts of the state, public and private initiatives. This organisation created a database about any person receiving support or those who are in need. This centralized source collected information about all organisations, institutions and foundations in Moscow practicing charitable activities, including the nature and amount of their spending.²⁹

The Regulations of the State Assistance³⁰ issued in 1892 were an important code of laws and a unique legislative act in Russian history spelling out the principles of the charitable activities, e.g. the definition of the field of actions, financing methods, procedures of donations, and other actions of the members. It stated that every charitable organization had to introduce a memorandum that had to be proved to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The charitable institution had to be established in a specific authorization-based procedure.

This way, in the beginning of the 20th century, the Ministry of Internal Affairs had information's about the majority of all philanthropic and charitable institutions. 82% of the private institutions were under the purview of the ministry, which represented 49% of the total number of charitable institutions.³¹ This was the peak of prosperity of private foundations in Russia. The statistics show that the majority of total organisations were located in cities (72,4%). The major source of income for the foundations was through donations (64,4%), followed by state grants (14,5%), support from founding institutions (9,8%), and subsidy from the municipality (4%) and district councils (2,6%).³²

Another innovative type of associations of at this time were the so-called Mutual Aid societies³³, statistically classified as charitable institutions, but with a slightly different form of organisation. The idea behind the Mutual Aid Societies was to build closed professional societies in which members make a certain payment in a joined treasury in order to build up a financial fund. In

²⁶ Максимов Е. «Городское общественное управление в деле помощи бедным», СПб., 1905.

²⁷ Lindenmeyr, Adele. A Russian Experiment in Voluntarism: The Municipal Guardianship of the Poor, 1814-1914. In: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. Bd.30, New York: Franz Steiner Verlag 1982, p. 429-451.

²⁸ In Russian: Городской благотворительный совет.

²⁹ Мерсиянова И.В., Якобсон Л.И. «Потенциал и пути развития филантропии в России»: Высшая школа экономики, 2010.

³⁰ In Russian: Устав общественного призрения.

³¹ «Благотворительные учреждения Российской империи», СПб., 1900.Т1. р.6.

³² Ульянова Г.Н. «Система благотворительности в Российской империи». р. 29.

³³ In Russian: Сообщества взаимопомощи.

case of need, each member was eligible to request support. Moreover, this support was not limited by financial compensations. Members also received medical care, education as well as professional or legal assistance. Creative intellectuals (artists, writers, and painters), teachers, doctors and craftsmen found this type of societies.

With the Countryman Associations³⁴, public universities of that time provided a specific support for students. Coming from all over Russia into the major cities, young people often felt left alone or lost. The role of the Countrymen Associations was to establish communities in which students with similar backgrounds were brought together in order to ease the adaptation process to the new life and to assure mutual the financial support of the members.³⁵

The Grand Duchess Elisaveta Feodorovna (Elisabeth Alexandra Louise Alice of Hesse and by Rhine) left a special mark in the history of the charity. Her philanthropic approach was between church and state organized. Being the wife of Gran Duke Sergei Alexandrovich of Russia, brother to Emperor Alexander III, she enjoyed the life of nobility. However, after the assassination of her husband, she sold all her luxurious belongings and her magnificent collection of jewels. With the proceeds, she established the Marfo-Mariinsky Convent³⁶ in 1909, an institution for women who devoted their lives to God. For many years, this convent was a centre of charity, participating in a number of philanthropic activities in co-established organisations such as hospital, educational institutions, and pharmacies. During the First World War, the convent assisted sick, wounded and maimed soldiers in their recovery. In 1916, Elisaveta Feodorovna established the first in Russian prostheses manufactory, which is still working today, before being murdered by the Bolsheviks two years later, like many others of her relatives. For her impact on charity, Elisaveta was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in 1981, and by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1992.

Among the two larger state based institutions, Imperial Philanthropic Society and Empress Marias's Department of Institutions, there were also number of smaller philanthropic activities from the Royal family. The First World War enlarged the scope of charitable actions when thousands of people fled to Russia from the disastrous effects of the war. In order to coordinate and support the influx of refugees, on 14th September 1914, Grand Duchess Tatiana Nikolaevna of Russia, second daughter of Tsar Nicholas II, established the committee of Tatiana Nikolaevna³⁷. Aiming to provide a temporary relief to the refugees, the organisation was initially set up geographically along the frontline, but later spread countrywide and became the major charitable organisations for refugees. The committee was funded mainly by state finances and to the smaller extent by public donations. During the First World War, Alexandra

³⁴ In Russian: Земляческие ассоциации.

³⁵ For example: Иванов А.Е. «Студенческие корпорации России конца XIX- начала XX века: опыт культурной и политической самоорганизации». М., 2004. р.44-46.

³⁶ In Russian: Марфо-Мариинская обитель.

³⁷ In Russian: Комитет Великой княжны Татьяны Николаовны.

Feodorvna, wife of the last Russian Emperor Nicholas II, and her two elder daughters Olga and Tatiana completed the training as a nurse and assisted during medical operations.

In general, it became a good tone to be involved in philanthropic activity. The humanitarian attitude of the Imperial Family was a great example for other aristocratic families and wealthy individuals to be more involved. As a result, patronages and private foundations were blooming in this period. Entire families supported some philanthropic actions, e.g. the Oldenburgsky dynasty, in which the male family members established hospitals, educational institutions,



Picture 4: Foster children and medical staff next to the Petr Oldenburgsky memorial, centenary of his birth, St. Petersburg 1912.

and orphanages, while the female part of the family organised various art organisations and humanitarian communes. In 1889, the head of the Oldenburgsky family, Duke Peter Georgievich of Oldenburg, was honoured posthumous with a monument in St. Petersburg stating “To an educated philanthropist”. The monument was destroyed in 1917.

Nonetheless, the focus of philanthropic commitments was not limited to social issues. The support of art was also very common type of engagement among philanthropist during the turn of the century. One of them, Savva Mamontov dedicated his villa in Abramtsevo, located near Moscow, to become a centre of arts. Many outstanding Russian painters of the beginning of 20th century lived and worked there, e.g. Ilya Repin, the Vasnetsov brothers, Vasily Surikov, Mikhail Vrubel, Valentin Serov. Together with his wife Elizaveta, Savva Mamontov organised several talent workshops to support popular art in Russia.



Picture 5: Tretyakov gallery and monument of Pavel Tretyakov, Moscow.

In 1874, the art collectors Pavel and Sergeym Tretyakov finished the construction of a gallery in order to store and display their collection. The building and the collection were presented as a Gift to the Moscow City Council in 1892. Before his death six years later, Pavel Tretyakov last words were said to be: “Save the gallery and take care”. Until today, the State Tretyakov Gallery is an outstanding collection of Russian fine art, attracting yearly over thousands of visitors to Moscow.

The construction of churches was also widespread among wealthy persons of that time. The intention behind these donations could have been the wish to wash away the guilt for their wealth, which was often correlated with as a sin in the orthodox culture. P.A. Burishkin, a historian specialised in Moscows merchants at the turn of the century, stated that they saw their activities not as sources of wealth accumulation, but rather as a special mission given by God, who will exact their contributions later. V.P. Ryabushkin stated that founders of business

associations in Russia were concerned that the opportunities sent by God were not used sufficiently in order to support people in need.³⁸ In this way, the patrons of that time created and left a valuable heritage of museums, libraries, theatres, schools, hospitals, galleries and other institutions, which still contribute to Russian culture and social development today.

10. Decline of Russian Philanthropic Tradition: the Revolution 1917

The Soviet Revolution of 1917 set an end to the Russian tradition of Philanthropy. It was seen as the invention of capitalist in order to give the impression of generosity without changing the system that created the unequal society. The Soviet State declared to take over the care of all social issues of the country's citizens and their approach excluded the need for charitable organisations. The entire assets and the properties of the foundations were seized by the state and nationalized. Out of hundreds, only a few organisations were allowed to continue their activities, among them Russian Red Cross and All Russia Association of the Deaf. Even the Lenin Children Foundation, established in 1924, only existed until 1938, before it was re-established in 1987. Soviet citizens were able to provide aid to African or Cuban children, but there were no private foundations or other charity within the country anymore.

Many Soviet enterprises provided social care to their employees in the form of free vacations trips, medical support, education for children and much more. However, all the enterprises belonged to the state and, therefore, all these activities were indirectly state organised. Another volunteer organisation was the pioneer movement, which again was lead and managed by the state administration and, therefore, slightly different from modern volunteer institutions.

The methodology and knowledge of establishing and leading philanthropic organisations were lost for almost 70 years. With the support of Raisa Gorbachev, wife of Mikhail Gorbachev, the first foundations of the modern Russia were only established shortly before the break-up of the Soviet Union.

11. Conclusion

This paper provides a brief historical review of the centuries of charitable tradition in Russia. However, there is an open field for further in-depth research.

Through history, many motivated personalities actively participated in the development of Russian charity. However, the major meaningful actions were initiated top-down by powerful and charismatic leaders who created the frameworks and rules for charity. Moreover, the state led and organised activities that had a significant role for many years. In this environment,

³⁸ Никитина Н.Ю. "От благотворительности и меценатства к социальной ответственности в истории России": Русский экономический вестник, №. 6, 2007.

smaller independent organisation had to work hard for receiving trust and social acknowledgement.

In addition, Russian charitable organisation provided the office in the state civil services including professional growth opportunities, which was a rather unusual characteristic for altruistic social work. It was not uncommon that the privately organised charitable structure merged with a state organised institution, because it was easier to achieve set goals under its umbrella due to stable financing and good reputation. However, since the population had almost no influence on the regulatory and legal framework of state run institutions, the control of effectiveness of these institutions was very difficult for the public.

Furthermore, the geography of Russia with its distribution of the population through large territories caused certain difficulties in the implementation of shared standards for the philanthropic actions, establishment of Russian-wide institutions and the control over their actions. All this factors led to the fact that for a long period Russian charitable sector was primarily driven by the will of the monarchs and elites leading the country at the respective time, accompanied by actions of the citizens and church-run activities.

The situation changed with the liberal reforms of Tsar Alexander II in the 60-70 years of the 19th century, which brought more flexibility to charitable actions of private individuals and easing of admission requirements for the institutional philanthropy. Supported by the general flourishing of some Russian private entrepreneurs and the accumulation of private capital, these factors led to a boom of charitable and philanthropic activities at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. This period enjoyed a bright palette of social and private engagement. However, the period of charities in Russia was set to an end by the revolution in 1917 and establishment of the communist state, which prevented the development of the charitable tradition.

For the present philanthropic development in Russia, the historical specifics have significant meaning. In its aspiration to rebuild the country in a tradition based and authentic way, it is crucial to consider that a modern philanthropy cannot and should not be state driven. The top-down approach in terms of the development of the philanthropic field will never be as effective as it could be with the wider public support. Therefore, active citizens, companies and private individuals should not hesitate to take actions in providing positive changes to society. In addition, there should be no contradictions in creating a modern and effective philanthropic context inside the country using national values and principles. Legal framework, transparency and active social position are the keys to success. Almost 25 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, modern Russia is preserving the nostalgia for the collective handling, common goals and values. The development of an authentic philanthropic environment could be a very suitable target, which would lead to the self-fulfilment of the citizens on the one hand and resolve accumulated social problems on the other.

In contemporary Russia, interests in philanthropic foundations grows every year. Some of the new organisations copy existing Western models and some of them are trying to invent their own way. The need for a rebirth of the charity movement is definite, since the gap between rich and poor grew steadily over the last years. The role of philanthropy in the modern society is expected to be effective in resolving existing social and cultural problems. The lack of philanthropic traditions for over 70 years brought certain passivity among the citizens, who for many years were used to state run models without any private actions. However, the history of Russia's charitable tradition based on simple humanitarian activities to well organised countrywide institutions provides a profound basement for the re-development of philanthropy in Russia.

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Picture 1: Illustration of the text “Lives of Saint Antoni Siiski” from 1648, showing him taking care of the ill and unable. Source: <http://charity.lfond.spb.ru/rus/5.html>

Picture 2: Poorhouse in Dmitrov, built at the beginning of the 19th century. Source: Wikipedia - Dmitrov

Picture 3: Committee meeting of Imperial Philanthropic Society, 1915. Source: Photo studio of Karl Bulla

Picture 4: Foster children and medical staff next to the Petr Oldenburgsky memorial, centenary of his birth, St. Petersburg 1912. Source: Photo studio of Karl Bulla

Picture 56: Tretyakov gallery and monument of Pavel Tretyakov, Moscow. Source: <http://www.tretyakovgallery.ru/>

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