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# **Institutional Logics and Diverging Organizational Forms: An Empirical Study in Russia**

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Using an institutional logics approach, this study investigates how the institutional logics of leaders of grassroots social service nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Russia changed over time and how these changes related to changes in organizational mission, people served, professionalization, and interactions with the government. Relying on interviews as well as other data gathered, this analysis of organizational leaders' narratives reveals the identities and experiences that these leaders turn to in their sensemaking of significant events. The findings show that, on the one hand, social welfare NGOs continued to provide services, increased their advocacy efforts, and professionalized their staff. Volunteer organizations, on the other hand, discontinued provision of social services turning instead to the recruitment and development of volunteers. Theoretically, this empirical case illustrates how an interplay of factors at multiple levels can affect the expression of logics at the organizational level.

Keywords: Institutional Logics, Russia, Social Service, NGO, Microfoundations

Using an institutional logics approach, this study focuses on two types of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) emerging from similar beginnings; it highlights how changes in logics of social service NGO leaders interacted with societal level logics and contextual factors to influence organizational development. In doing so, the study provides an empirical case for further theory development in this area.

Institutional logics, as defined by Thornton and Ocasio (2008), are the “socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, assumptions, values, and beliefs by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their daily activity” (p. 101). There has been a great deal of scholarly attention directed at the macro and meso levels of logics and how these levels influence institutional change and organizational decision-making (for summaries, see Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012; Zilber, 2016). These studies have been useful in illustrating the structural constraints of logics.

However, the institutional logics perspective assumes that the exercise of agency by individuals is both limited and facilitated by logics. Moreover, this perspective assumes that individual action can transform organizations and their associated logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Sewell, 1992). Yet, it has only been recently that researchers have begun to explore the

micro dimension of logics and the connection to other levels (Ocasio, Thornton, & Lounsbury, 2017; Zilber, 2016).

The microfoundations of institutional logics, at a granular level, are situated in the sensemaking of individual minds and in the interactions between individuals. Although the current study is not focused at the level of cognition or social interaction, it is focused just one step away. That is, this study is based on narratives of key actors making sense of their organizations' histories and change. The research questions are: *How do the institutional logics of leaders of grassroots social service NGOs change over time? And, how are these changes related to changes in organizational mission, people served, professionalization, and interactions with the government?*

This research focuses on NGOs that have emerged from grassroots social service volunteer groups in the city of Nizhnii Novgorod, Russia. The post-Soviet Russian context was characterized by multiple competing institutional logics at all levels due to the introduction of new governmental (and other) institutional forms and the sudden influx of ideas from abroad. In addition, social and organizational policy changes often occurred, making the Russian NGO setting ideal for examining changes in leaders' logics.

Through an analysis of interviews with leaders in these organizations, this study contributes an empirical case study to the theoretical literature on how the sensemaking of individuals, embedded in a particular context, can affect the expression of logics at the organizational level. The findings from this study should be of interest to practitioners working in cross cultural contexts, both internationally and locally, as they work to understand how competing logics in a single historical context might produce varying organizational forms.

The article is organized as follows: the next section lays the theoretical foundation, defining institutional logics and microfoundations of logics. Following this is a section covering the historical, economic, and policy setting of social service NGOs in Russia (along with attendant societal level logics) to provide context for the individual sensemaking of the interviewed organizational leaders. Next, are sections on data and analysis. Finally, the findings and discussion sections use the microfoundations model to demonstrate how the identities and experiences of leaders in initially similar organizations served to guide their sensemaking in a constantly changing environment. Their developing logics diverged into two different streams, each with specific repercussions on organizational mission, people served, level of professionalization, and types of interactions with the government.

## **Literature Review**

Alford and Friedland (1985) described institutional orders such as capitalism and state bureaucracy and defined the term institutional logics as sets of practices and beliefs in relation to specific institutional orders. The institutional logics perspective focuses on the effect of various institutional logics on individuals and organizations. Although later work has developed these ideas further with varying emphases (e.g., Jackall, 1988; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999), Thornton and Ocasio (2008, pp. 101-102) have argued that,

the various definitions of institutional logics all presuppose a core meta-theory: to understand individual and organizational behavior, it must be located in a social and institutional context, and this institutional context both regularizes behavior and provides opportunity for agency and change.

Logics exist at several levels. There are societal, organizational, and individual logics. At the societal level there exist institutional orders and their associated logics. Theorists and researchers have defined several logics, including family; community, social, and civil society; social welfare; religion; state; market; profession; and, corporation among others (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Jay, 2013; Pache & Santos, 2013; Thornton et al., 2012). Nested within societal level logics, organizational and individual level logics draw from these logics. Embedded agency is the phrase commonly used to describe the structural constraints of institutional logics on social actors while still allowing for agency.

### **Microfoundations of Institutional Logics**

Thornton, et al. (2012) developed a model regarding microfoundations of institutional logics. The aim of the model was to understand not only the structural constraints on individual actors, but also the ways in which actors influence adaptations and creation of logics from the bottom up. Undergirding their model are three concepts they use to explain human behavior.

The first concept is cultural embeddedness, which they define as the embeddedness of individuals in social groups. Cultures provide “individuals with symbolic structures to understand and construct their environments” (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 79). The concept of cultural embeddedness allows for the influence and constraints of meso- and macro-structures and ideas on individual actors.

The second concept is bounded intentionality. This concept blends social identity, goals, and cognitive limitations. The concept also recognizes that actors’ intentions are influenced by their choice of social identities and goals at any time and they are bounded by limitations (such as limitations on what they can attend to).

The third concept is situationism, which acknowledges that individual behavior is influenced by the characteristics of a situation. For example, the resource environment can influence the types of practices that are enacted. Thus, this results in the creation of institutional logics (Jones, Maoret, Massa, & Svejnova, 2012).

Thornton and colleagues (2012) blend these concepts in their model with the theory of dynamic constructivism to describe how “individuals learn multiple contrasting and often contradictory institutional logics through social interactions and socialization” (p. 83). Research has affirmed that most organizations and individuals embody multiple logics simultaneously (e.g., Besharov & Smith, 2014; Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011; McPherson & Sauder, 2013; Pache & Santos, 2010; Vickers, Lyon, Sepulveda, & McMullin, 2017).

Constructivist elements such as availability (i.e., knowledge and information in individuals’ memory that can be used for sensemaking), accessibility (i.e., information that actually comes to mind), and activation (i.e., the use of this knowledge in social interaction) are all important in shaping institutional logics. Thornton and colleagues (2012) purport that “given cognitive limitations, only a subset of the categorical elements of an institutional logic affects the cognition of actors at any moment in time and place” (p. 89).

One might question, then, how the attention of actors is focused. However, the institutional logics of the structures in which actors are embedded are there to focus attention, as are their past experiences, identities, and goals. Interactions with other social actors also provide opportunities to focus attention on specific aspects of various logics.

Thornton and colleagues (2012, p. 93) describe attention as either automatic or controlled, with most individual attention being automatic. This leads actors to apply those logics,

identities, and goals that are more readily available and accessible. Controlled attention involves intentional thought by individuals in choosing logics and applying them and is often activated when a situational shift occurs or contradictions between logics and practices are perceived. When actors interact, their foci of attention are expanded and shaped by each other.

Decision-making by actors is also influenced by sensemaking, “an ongoing retrospective process that rationalizes organizational behavior...Institutional logics are both building blocks of sensemaking and sensemaking is a mechanism by which logics are transformed” (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 96). Mobilization occurs when the sensemaking of a group moves people toward collective action. Language is critical to the sensemaking process and to the articulation of frames and narratives. Frames, as defined by Thornton and colleagues (2012), are “general symbolic constructions, applicable across a wide variety of practices and social actors” (p. 155).

Narratives, on the other hand, use language to make sense of and give meaning to specific actors, events, and practices (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 155). Narratives are mechanisms of sensemaking based on the salient stimuli to which actors are paying attention. Narratives shared between actors serve to guide group sensemaking and decision-making in turn leading to the adaptation and/or creation of new practices and institutional logics.

### **Russian Social Service NGOs and Societal Logics: Historical, Economic, and Policy Context**

This section summarizes the social service context and related societal level logics in which NGOs in this study were embedded. The Soviet Union’s social policy structure and attendant logics were still lingering in the institutional environment when the ideas and values of Western NGOs entered the arena.

#### *The Soviet Period*

During the Soviet period (1917/22-1991), the government provided universal social welfare benefits through workplaces, schools, and municipalities. In this system, independent organizations or grassroots initiatives were nearly nonexistent. When services were provided on a local level by these organizations, they did not engage in policymaking or advocacy roles (Evans, 2006).

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation began providing targeted and means tested social welfare at the regional level (Balachova, Bonner, & Levy, 2009; Evans, 2006; Ferge, 2001; Standing, 1996; Trygged, 2009; Zimakova, 1994). NGOs, both grassroots and international, then emerged in Russia to provide social services (Petukhov, 2008; Salmenniemi, 2010; Wathen & Allard, 2014). Social service NGOs became a majority share of the Russian civic organization sector (Cook & Vinogradova, 2006; Henderson, 2003; Tarasenko, 2018).

Over time, collaboration between local governments and NGOs increased (Belokurova & Vorob’ev, 2011; Fröhlich, 2012). However, even to this day, NGO social service provision still comprises only a small share of services available (Benevolenski, 2014; Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, 2017; Cook & Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2018).

Given that many definitions of institutional orders and their corresponding logics presuppose a Western setting, they do not always fit the Soviet and Russian contexts. Looking historically at the Soviet Union, the institutional order of the “state” would include logics of state authority over most aspects of life, hierarchical institutional structures with centralized control, the value of the collective over the individual, an emphasis on national goals, and state responsibility for the wellbeing of citizens (Richter & Hatch, 2013). The idealized institutional

logics of citizenship in the Soviet system included loyalty to the party and the nation, support of a societal mission articulated by the national authorities, commitment to serving the state (and thus fellow citizens) through involvement in state-directed activities, and patriotic defense of the physical and ideological borders of the nation.

### *The Russian Federation*

Once Russia opened itself to the outside world a deluge of foreign organizations and ideas swept into all areas, including social policy and service provision. In 1995, Russia passed its first law establishing NGOs as an institutional form (Skokova, Pape, & Krasnopolskaya, 2018). An influx of foreign funding and training in the 1990s had an impact on all NGOs whether they were funded by international sources or not (Jakobson & Sanovich, 2011). These trainings introduced NGO leaders to leadership styles, methods, values, and organizational structures different from those they were accustomed (Henderson, 2003, p. 8).

Several scholars have argued that international philanthropic donors were the drivers of the diffusion of Western NGO logics into Russia over the past 25 years (Aksartova, 2009; Jakobson & Sanovich, 2011). These logics include a flatter organizational leadership structure, a governance structure that includes a board, fundraising as an ongoing activity, advocacy work, and the values of organizational independence from outside control and a moral high ground focused on a specific mission.

As international organizations poured money into Russia to establish and support human rights and other organizations, the government began to take notice. Events in former Soviet republics raised concern about foreign influence in the political sphere through internationally funded NGOs. Revolutions in Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004, and Kyrgyzstan in 2005 were seen by Russian political leaders as social movements funded by the West (Bogdanova, Cook, & Kulmala, 2018; Skokova et al., 2018). As a result, the government increased regulation of all NGOs.

In 2005, Russian President Vladimir Putin created the Public (or “Civic”) Chamber of the Russian Federation to act as a structure of communication between citizen organizations and the government (Stuvøy, 2014). In 2006, the “NGO law” introduced stricter registration and reporting requirements for NGOs (Cavanaugh, 2010; Kamhi, 2006; Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2014). Organizations receiving foreign funding were subject to stricter oversight and foreign funding dramatically declined (Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2011; Johnson & Saarinen, 2011; Sperling, 2006).

In 2012 another set of regulatory laws was passed, including the law requiring NGOs to register as “foreign agents” if they received any funding from foreign sources (Flikke, 2016; Russian State Duma, 2012). In 2015, the “undesirable organization law” passed, allowing prosecutors to designate organizations as “undesirable” and shut them down without court proceedings (Russian State Duma, 2015).

While increasing government oversight has produced more work and stress for Russian NGO leaders (Crotty, Hall, & Ljubownikow, 2014), the government has also allocated greater funding for NGOs it considers to be doing desirable work (e.g., social service organizations) (Benevolenski & Toepler, 2017; Bogdanova et al., 2018; Tarasenko, 2018). These NGOs can apply for funding from the national, regional, and local levels of government (Gromova & Mersiyanova, 2016; Wathen & Allard, 2014); and, from 2015 forward, the government created policy conditions for these NGOs to take a greater role in social service provision (Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2017; Mersiyanova & Benevolenski, 2017). It should be noted, however, that since the largest increase in government funding for social service NGOs did not occur until 2016 (Skokova et al., 2018), their influence is not relevant to the logics and organizational adaptations of the period covered in this study (i.e., 2011–2014).

Another contextual element pertinent to these organizations was the development of volunteer opportunities. Although volunteerism existed during the Soviet Union, for the most part volunteerism during this time was highly controlled and organized through official communist party channels at workplaces and youth organizations (Hemment, 2015, p. 24). Near the end of the 1990s and early 2000s grassroots volunteering began in local settings and around local issues.

A response by the government to these developments was to simultaneously encourage civic engagement while at the same time harnessing it in a way that supported the government (Kulmala, 2016; Owen & Bindman, 2017). For instance, as described above, the government provided increased support for social service NGOs. In addition, the state began to intentionally support volunteerism through programs and monetary support (Hemment, 2015, p. 7).

For the 2013 XXVII Summer Universiade in Kazan and the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, the government created volunteer opportunities by offering a vast network of organizations funding in order to recruit volunteers. This spurred the development of “volunteer centers” in a number of cities, where social projects that volunteers created were vetted and funded mainly by local administrations. Although these volunteer centers often rely on patriotic rhetoric (reminiscent of Soviet collective values) to promote participation, in a recent study Hemment (2015) found that much of what occurs in these centers focuses on individual self-actualization within a tightly controlled government structure (p. 175).

## **Data**

This study was conducted from September 2013 to May 2014 in the city of Nizhnii Novgorod, a regional capital of Russia with more than one million residents and a per capita income of less than half that of Moscow. Much of the foreign investment in NGOs and civil society development has taken place in Moscow and St. Petersburg (Henderson, 2003, p. 10); and, to date, the majority of NGOs are located there (Agbas et al., 2015; Skokova et al., 2018). Since this study focuses on grassroots social service NGOs, I chose to undertake the analysis in a city that is somewhat removed from international influence and the political and economic power of the major cities.

I conducted 22 two-hour individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews with NGO leaders, each of whom represents one of thirteen organizations. For four of the organizations, two different leaders were interviewed. Five leaders were interviewed twice, once in 2011 and again in 2014. The leaders were either the director of the organization or the assistant director, if a second interview was conducted.

Interviews focused on leaders rather than other members of the organizations due to cultural expectations of authoritarian leadership, as found by Spencer (2011) and Kets de Vries (2001). In the interviews, leaders were asked to reflect on societal level forces and their perceived effects on their decision-making regarding organizational roles, goals, and practices. As stated by Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012), “the use of qualitative methods is important given that at the core of understanding institutional logics is gaining insight about meaning making” (p. 145).

The NGO leaders in this study oversaw a variety of organizations providing services such as crisis counseling, mentoring of youth in the care of the state, services for families in crisis, domestic violence prevention and therapeutic consultation, services for people with a range of disabilities and their families, support groups, training of community leaders, and mobilization and training of volunteers. In order to recruit these leaders for interviews, I relied on NGO characteristics. Criteria for an NGO’s inclusion in the study were: 1) having existed

for at least five years, 2) having been founded and still being managed by Russian citizens, and 3) having provided direct social services to families and/or children. In addition to these criteria, in order to be included the organization had to be legally registered at the time of the study. However, the organization did not have to have been legally registered for all of the five or more years of its existence. The interviews were conducted, digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in Russian.

To reveal interview subjects' individual logics regarding their roles and organizations in the civil society sphere, I gathered demographic information and asked about how they became involved in NGO work. I also asked about how their work and organization had changed over time. Other questions focused directly on their opinions of social policy and the role of the government and NGOs in social service provision.

I used an indirect questioning strategy, which has been described by Gamson (1992) in his book *Talking Politics* (pp. 194-196), to further reveal respondents' ideas. Specifically, I presented scenarios of social problems and asked the respondents to reflect on the problems and provide possible solutions. Scenario topics included unsupervised children after school, families in poverty, and an imaginative scenario in which the interviewee had to create social policies for a newly inhabited island. Through the use of both direct and indirect prompts, I elicited interview subjects' reflections that exposed their underlying meaning-making as well as their evolving logics.

From 2013–2014, I gathered additional data by engaging in participant observation in three of the study's Russian grassroots volunteer organizations that provided social services to families and/or children. Participant observation took place for five hours a week over a nine month period. This included attending training and leadership team meetings and serving alongside volunteers and paid staff. I also spent at least twelve hours at nine other organizations in the city. After each incidence of participant observation, I wrote field notes, paying specific attention not only to what was said, but also to what I observed. Throughout the nine months, I conferred with trusted cultural informants in order to check my understanding and interpretation of observations. Newspaper articles, government legislative reports, and print and web based NGO public relations materials from 2004–2014 were also collected and then analyzed.

## **Analysis**

To analyze the interviews, I used methods of grounded theory in an iterative process of coding, writing memos, and analysis. Specifically, I first looked at each interview as a case, taking the time for multiple readings of the transcription, thoughtful reflection, and purposeful writing. The outcome of this stage was a list of common concepts, themes, and gaps. A local informant read a sample of the interviews and wrote separate narrative reports. We then compared our reports to verify that our findings were similar.

Using the themes identified, I next focused on conducting line-by-line coding of individual transcripts in Nvivo qualitative data analysis software. Both during and after coding, I made systematic comparisons within and between interviews and I identified patterns and variations (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). This led to an overall conceptual framework to further analyze and represent the findings.

Using best practices to reduce bias, I triangulated the interview data with participant observation and documentary data such as NGO brochures and websites along with newspaper articles and legislative reports. In doing so, I was able to verify critical events and information mentioned in the interviews. NGO brochures and websites also provided information about how the organization presented its mission to the public over time,

recruited volunteers, and provided services. These data were put into timelines in order to assess changes over time in content and tone within organizations as well as comparatively. Observations were recorded in a Word document on an ongoing basis over the study period and all materials were saved in digital form.

Quotations selected for inclusion in the findings are those that best characterize narratives and themes emerging from the data. In preparation for sharing my results in English, I translated the quotations myself, and then a bilingual Russian and English speaker back-translated them. This process was repeated until the best translation was agreed upon. To maintain the confidentiality of interview participants, each quotation is noted by interview number.

## **Findings**

As the summary of the historical, economic, and policy context of voluntary and social service NGOs describes, the societal level logics of the past 25 years display a mix of local and imported logics (Heydemann & Hammack, 2009, p. 24). These logics are mirrored in the interviews with organizational leaders in this study. The sensemaking of these leaders shows evidence of initial intermingling logics at the founding of their organizations with the development of two separate streams of logics over time. The solidifying of primary logics for leaders coincides with distinctive instantiations of those logics in their organizations. In other words, similar beginnings in organizational forms and leaders' logics began to diverge over time.

### *Similar Beginnings*

All of the organizations included in this study began as small grassroots volunteer groups that eventually registered as NGOs. Interviews with leaders of these organizations provide information on their meaning-making over time through two avenues, repeated interviews and/or leaders' presence at the organization since its inception.

For five of the seventeen leaders in the study, I have interviews at two time points (2011 and the period 2013–2014). Three of these individuals are leaders of current social welfare organizations (SWNGO); and, two are leaders of what are now volunteer organizations (VO). In total, 12 of the 17 leaders I interviewed were founding members of their organization after having started as volunteers with an informal group. For the most part, these leaders' logics were similar to each other in the early years of their organizations. Moreover, the ways in which their logics were instantiated were also similar.

The early logics of the leaders show a blend of Soviet influence and Western NGO logics. As leaders described their first three to five years, their words alluded to the state-building narrative of citizen involvement during Soviet times.

*We thought that if we all helped, we would build a strong country again. That is what we learned from our parents and grandparents. (Interview 10, SWNGO)*

Every NGO leader that I interviewed began as an informal volunteer in some type of social service activity before many NGOs in their city existed. Their interviews evidence a framework where they expected the government to set policies and provide services, but with an understanding that the government was unable to do its job during the transition. They expected, however, that the government would eventually recover and take over its role.



*Those were hard times and we couldn't expect the government to rebuild everything all at once. So, we decided to do our part until the country was stronger again. (Interview 1, VO)*

These leaders also described how their organizations started with a goal to ameliorate specific social needs. They recalled the Soviet values of citizen activity in supporting their country's development. However, every leader (with the exception of one) described how the mindset of the general population had negatively been altered when democracy and capitalism were introduced.

*In the 1990s people became selfish. All they thought about was themselves and their family and their career. They didn't understand that we should be helping our country to develop, like in Soviet times. (Interview 7, SWNGO)*

While leaders drew on the Soviet past when speaking about values in the early years, they also mentioned the direct and indirect influence of foreign organizations and consultants as expanding their vision of what an NGO could do and how it could be done. In the early years, most of the influence was indirect, with these leaders going to seminars led by other Russian NGO leaders who had participated in trainings by foreign funders.

*We were exposed to a lot of new ideas in the trainings. Ideas about how to be involved in society and in promoting positive change. And we learned a lot of skills, such as managing organizations, recruiting volunteers, writing proposals, and fundraising—although not everything applied to our situation. (Interview 11, SWNGO)*

To summarize the early logics of these organization leaders, they believed that they were change agents as well as responsible citizens in building their nation. Initially, they felt that their government was responsible for taking care of the social welfare needs of citizens, but when “difficult times” hit they would pitch in. The changes they made occurred in their local city by providing various services to individuals. They perceived that the country had entered an era of “selfishness” due to the influx of what they understood to be capitalism, democracy, and individualism. For these leaders, their initial entry into volunteering and later registration as NGOs served not only to meet specific social needs, but also to promote rejuvenation of collective values of mutual care. Volunteers were “doing good” works similar to how communist youth organizations trained young people to do good in their society. On the other hand, their imagination about the types of services they could provide and their conceptualization of how their organizations fit within larger society were broadened by Western NGO trainings and exposure.

The way in which this blend of logics was instantiated was similar across organizations. In their early years, each of the leaders focused on local social problems and providing services to address these problems. For example, they visited orphanages to socialize with children; they collected clothing, diapers, toys, and candy to bring to orphanages; they volunteered to care for orphans who were in the hospital; they created and manned domestic violence crisis lines; and, they organized meetings for parents of children with special needs or for adults with physical disabilities or mental illness.

Each leader (and their associated group) was devoted to one or two of these specific activities. They all used volunteers almost exclusively to provide services. In the initial stages, funding was minimal, and the grassroots volunteers and their organizations depended on self-funding and donations from friends and family. The volunteers had minimal connection to city or

**Table 1.** Characteristics of NGO Leaders at Time of Second Interview

	Mean Age	Mean Years Volunteering	% Female	% Religious	% In or Completed Higher Education	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i> Orgs
Social Welfare NGO Leader							
<i>social welfare logic</i>	41.3	11.8	75	75	83.3	12	10
Volunteer Organization Leader							
<i>government-directed community logic</i>	32.6	9	80	20	100	5	3
Total	38.7	10.9	76.5	58.8	88.2	12	13

regional government officials, but rather used personal connections with individuals who ran government agencies to access potential service recipients. For example, the head of a pediatric wing in a hospital would give permission for volunteers to care for orphans. In other instances, the organizations found service participants through informal personal networks and social media. At the outset, these leaders did not consider themselves as advocates for widespread social change but rather as change agents for individuals and families in their communities.

### *Emergence of Primary Logics*

Whereas the recollections of these leaders evidence an interplay of multiple logics in the early years of their organization (as described above), by 2013–2014 the leaders could be sorted into two main groups, both groups with one logic as primary and others as distinctly secondary. This study labels the two primary logics emerging from the data as either social welfare logic or government-directed community logic. Both of these logics contain convictions about the roles of the citizen and the government. Leaders who espoused a social welfare logic were part of Social Welfare NGOs (SWNGOs) and those holding a government-directed community logic were part of Volunteer Organizations (VOs).

VOs did not begin as government organized volunteer centers (like the ones that currently exist in Russia), although they have subsequently joined this network. In the early years of all organizations, as illustrated above, the organizations displayed a blend of SWNGO and VO characteristics and logics. Thus, none of the organizations fit neatly into either category. The categories of SWNGO and VO created for this study illustrate the instantiation of logics by organizational leaders in response to salient events.

The demographic characteristics of interviewed SWNGO and VO leaders are similar in many respects (see Table 1). The leaders are majority female and have completed higher education. SWNGO leaders tend to be slightly older on average and more religious than VO leaders, with slightly more years of volunteer experience. The three organizations categorized as VOs in 2014 had been in existence for five, 12, and 15 years at the time of the interviews. The 10 SWNGOs had been in existence for a minimum of six years and a maximum of 22 years, with an average of 12.5 years of existence. Only three of the 10 SWNGOs had been in existence for less than 11 years at the time of the interviews.

The sections below illustrate how attention to particular experiences and identities helped to shape leaders' individual logics in response to societal level pressures and, in turn, the logics

of their organizations. These themes are also included in Table 2 along with the instantiation of organizational logics.

*SWNGO Leaders' Logic.* SWNGO leaders' response to salient events relating to increased government regulation was controlled attention to identities as experts and legitimate actors in providing social services. In addition, they chose the available and accessible knowledge of advocacy gleaned from Western influence. They described their foundation for advocacy efforts as their personal connection to the issue and past successes. These key themes blend to create a shared social welfare logic among SWNGO leaders.

For the most part, SWNGO leaders leaned on their identity as experts to explain understanding of their organization's development. Their expert identity was forged from years of experience working with certain populations and issues. Because of this, they espoused a system of public-private partnership. In particular, they held a strong opinion that citizens and NGOs should be included in setting social policy and providing services. The government, they believed, should provide support through legislation and financing. Indeed, one leader declared,

*We see the issues up close, and we are flexible and have tried different things. We know what works. It would be the wise thing to invite us to be involved in creating new policy. Bureaucrats don't know what's happening with real people. (Interview 6)*

Another SWNGO leader expressed a similar idea.

*The government should provide legal and policy foundations for society to be involved, and some institutions to help. Naturally, I think that the problems that the government should solve should be solved with the input of experienced NGOs who already do things and know how to do them. (Interview 13)*

Yet another leader emphasized the importance of partnership with the government, alluding to the resource environment in which NGOs are embedded as well.

*It should be a government-private partnership. If the government cannot provide full support [to SWNGOs], it should provide office and facility space or pay for the rent for such a place. The organization can find other sponsors to help as well. (Interview 15)*

While the NGO leaders were sympathetic to the government's need to protect the country through regulation of organizations and foreign funding, they felt that policies were unnecessarily harsh. Leaning into their identity as experienced experts, SWNGO leaders were not afraid to criticize policy toward NGOs.

*The politics in Moscow are now such that on the one side, one hand is supporting the development of NGOs, while the other is trying to drive them into a certain mold. If earlier control was maintained by force, now it's done by economic means, which is just as tough. So now, the party policy is to ensure that on the one hand volunteering and NGOs develop in the direction of government-overseen organizations, by giving funding to those that fit into the*

*system, and the other hand represses those that do not fit.*  
(Interview 8)

SWNGO leaders' understanding of advocacy was enriched by exposure to Western influenced NGO trainings. Thus, the logic of advocacy became not only available and accessible but activated when SWNGO leaders exercised controlled attention in response to salient changes in the NGO and volunteering fields. They described their journey toward (and commitment to) advocacy, often mentioning a personal connection to an issue. For some, it was simply firsthand exposure to a glaring need and learning about the system over time.

*It was only after going to the orphanages for a while and seeing what was really happening that I began to see the deeper issues. It took a couple of years before we understood how the system worked and that the government was not necessarily going to change anything. We realized that to do something for the kids we had to try to change something in the system, even if it is just something small.* (Interview 6)

For others, it was the experience or diagnosis of a loved one that sparked initial involvement in a group of people whose families were experiencing similar challenges. After this experience, they then understood that as a group they could motivate changes in services for the affected patients and the family members. As one parent described,

*Through the internet I found other parents of children with disabilities, and we got together and started this organization. Then we were able to start a pilot project with the local Ministry of Education for a kind of inclusive education that has been successful, so we are hoping to expand it.* (Interview 16)

These statements reflect a personal commitment to, and experience with, an issue and a logic where citizen initiative is critical to changing policy and/or service provision. This form of advocacy taken by these leaders is strongly influenced by their context. Consistent with findings from other scholars (e.g., Henry, 2006, 2009), leaders reported the use of insider tactics (Mosley, 2011) (e.g., participation in committees and roundtables and building relationships with individual authorities). On the one hand, for instance, they spoke of advocacy as a taken-for-granted part of their work (e.g., raising a problem with government officials or working to pass a new law).

*We currently have a bill before the DUMA (Russian parliament). Our organization and colleagues in other such organization around Russia have helped with this, and a lawyer is working with a Duma deputy to help pass this bill.* (Interview 9)

On the other hand, however, SWNGO leaders usually qualified their descriptions of advocacy-type work by alluding to issues of power, fear, and hesitancy. They recognized that the power differential between them and those with government authority was immense. Indeed, government authorities could withhold permission for their activities at any time. This power differential was evident in the mixed feelings of leaders regarding government regulation of the NGO sector—where a misstep could lead to serious consequences.

*There is a tendency for NGOs to develop into more professional organizations. The qualifications of their staff*

*are higher, new opportunities arise, and their system of financing develops. But I don't know (pause) For example, the trends in the country, they are contradictory. The government says it supports NGOs. But, for example, the law about "foreign agents." I, for one, am against it. On the grounds that participation in legislative activity is unclear. Can we, for example, communicate our views on the social protection of disabled people, or is this political activity? It's unclear. Therefore, it is a problem. (Interview 14)*

As these quotes illustrate, these SWNGO leaders drew on their identities and personal experiences by choosing logics that were triggered by salient events in the institutional context and an understanding of available alternative logics. The notion of social welfare logic comes from Pache and Santos (2013) who described this type of logic as being structured around a predominant goal—that is, making products and services available to address local social needs. For the purposes of this study, this logic is used to understand citizens and NGOs as change agents in the lives of both clients and social policy.

The social welfare logic of these leaders blended the Soviet expectation of government responsibility with the Western value of citizen influence in shaping social service policy and provision. SWNGO leaders held a strong conviction that the government should be responsible for addressing social problems and meeting needs. However, they believed that the government should do so with public–private partnerships and an acknowledgment of the benefits that NGOs provide in recognizing and defining problems, creating solutions, and delivering services.

The SWNGO leaders in this study, then, clearly expressed a commitment to advocacy as a vehicle for social change. Next, I explore the logics of VO leaders. Then, I examine how these logics shaped their organizations.

*VO Leaders' Logic.* VO leaders' response to increased government regulation and government funded volunteering was to focus on their identities as dedicated citizens. They did not voice deep personal connections to any population or issue and their organizations offered services to more than one population. As such, these leaders found it easy to shift their attention to volunteering in the service of the state rather than focus on providing social services. The narratives of these leaders reveal how their sensemaking focused on state and citizen logics reminiscent of the Soviet era. In particular, they rejected portions of a Western NGO logic. Soviet era logics were readily available and accessible for activation in the context of a changing resource environment and increasing media rhetoric of patriotism.

VO leaders expressed doubt about "Western" logics of citizenship and NGO advocacy. They recounted difficulties in past attempts to promote change and concluded that Western practices did not fit in their culture.

*In our country we have a different mentality and system, so the methods that people use in other countries to change things doesn't work here. Here, we need a strong government, and people need to support the government so that life improves for everyone. (Interview 2)*

VO leaders also spoke of the Russian government's increased interest in, and funding of, the growing volunteer movement of the 2000s. They also spoke of the steps that the government took to guide this development. Specifically, they described how they, as NGOs, were well positioned to receive government resources to become key players in the volunteering movement.

*We have a centralized government, everything is at the center, and the central authorities have paid attention to volunteering... The government is providing money to develop volunteering and volunteer centers. We are a part of building this volunteer movement. We already have ways of connecting to volunteers. (Interview 4)*

These quotations allude to how the resource environment influenced the decision-making of these leaders. They also hint at an underlying identity and associated logics that these leaders began to strengthen. In particular, these leaders chose to embrace their identities as patriotic citizens who contributed to their society by following the government's lead. In other words, they put the needs of the collective above their own. Their identities as patriotic citizens infiltrated their thinking about the role of their organizations in the social system. This resulted in an embrace of a government-directed community logic.

The most striking difference between SWNGO leaders' social welfare logic and VO leaders' government-directed community logic is in the centrality of the government. Leaders of VOs were dedicated to the idea of a strong government that articulated a vision for citizens to follow. The role of the citizen, according to these leaders, was to participate in fulfilling this vision. In contrast, SWNGO leaders never once mentioned such ideas. As one VO leader stated,

*Some kind of mutual purpose should be propagated by the government, as we live in one country and shouldn't do things separately. It seems to me that it's not right when we don't agree; we should be united toward one goal, and strive towards it, so that we develop together. Certainly, local society and volunteers and NGOs should be involved in the creation of this society and together we can build something good... (Interview 5)*

VO leaders placed responsibility for policy and service provision on the government. SWNGOs were considered necessary only insofar as the government was not fulfilling its responsibility. However, VO leaders did not completely exclude SWNGOs from their vision of society, thereby showing that their logic, while drawing from the Soviet era, was different.

*The responsibility should be on the government. You could say that NGOs are simply quality executors of government tasks. So naturally, the financing should be different...But we have a strong centralized system, and through this central system you should look to solve things. (Interview 4)*

VO leaders never mentioned advocacy-type activities in their narratives. Instead, these leaders focused on promoting civic involvement and individual development. As one VO leader further explained,

*The mission of our organization is also to promote the development of the people, mostly young people, through volunteering. We're not a place to help people [not a social service organization], but a place for self-improvement. Helping people is just a side benefit. (Interview 2)*

In their interviews, no VO leader mentioned a positive experience with advocacy. These leaders also did not describe a personal connection to any of the social issues they had been addressing in their earlier years. In summary, VO leaders drew on their identities as responsible citizens and on accessible Soviet-type understandings of citizenship. The

**Table 2.** Logics and Their Instantiation in SWNGOs and VOs

		Social Welfare NGO (SWNGO)	Volunteer Organization (VO)
Logic		<i>Social welfare logic:</i> Government should be responsive to citizens and organizations. Citizens should be initiators in identifying needs, creating solutions, and suggesting policy revision.	<i>Government-directed community logic:</i> A strong government should articulate a social vision, and citizens should help to fulfill it. Through doing so, people can develop themselves.
How instantiated in organization	Mission	To provide a social service to a specific population. To advocate for the organization's target service population.	To develop the potential of volunteers, to serve society in general by channeling people's (especially young people's) energy in a positive direction. No advocacy activity.
	People Served	Groups who need services such as children, those with disabilities, those in precarious economic situations, families in crisis.	Volunteers, various groups of people based on the direction of local government and the interests of volunteers, many one-time projects, sometimes helping social service NGOs with one-time events.
	Professionalization	Have begun to hire professionals to deliver services, scaling back use of volunteers.	Continued use of volunteers.
	Interaction with Government	Insider advocacy at the local level, networking with similar orgs around country to advocate for national legislative initiatives, ongoing personal relationships with local government officials for permission and funding to carry out social service mission of organization.	Close collaboration of organization leaders with local government officials to develop volunteer opportunities.
Leaders' Individual Logics	Personal Connection to Issue or Passion for Specific Group	Present and motivating factor.	Minimal.
	Role of Citizen	Change agent for individual clients and families as well as of local and federal policy – have had some success with advocacy.	Not as an advocate for change but as a follower of government vision.
	Role of Government	Should invite citizen and organizational input in policy and provision, should be responsive to advocacy efforts, should fund services.	Guiding force—should set vision for citizens and provide leadership for societal development.

government led community logic of VO leaders included a belief in a strong government that communicated a social vision. They avoided advocacy aimed at government institutions and policy. Instead, these leaders focused on cooperation with local officials in channeling volunteer activity. VO leaders also hoped that an ethos of collective social responsibility would return to the population and they alluded to the Soviet past when talking about this possibility.

### *Emergence of Organization Types*

Analysis of the data reveal that the logics of organization leaders have been instantiated in distinct ways for each of the two logics, resulting in SWNGOs and VOs. As leaders reacted and interacted with societal level logics and changing policies toward organizations, they were forced to clarify the missions of their organizations and reconsider how these missions were carried out. How would the changing funding, regulatory, and political environment affect what they did and how they did it? Should they focus more on the volunteers in their organization or on a service mission? SWNGOs and VOs became distinguished by their mission focus, the people they served, their level of professionalization, and the type of interactions they had with government. Table 2 organizes these differences, while the discussion section describes how leaders' logics influenced these organizational forms.

The logics of SWNGO leaders blended the Soviet expectation of government responsibility with the Western value of citizen influence in shaping social service policy and provision. SWNGO leaders held a strong conviction that government should address social problems with public-private partnerships. They also believed that government should acknowledge the benefits of NGOs in recognizing and defining problems, creating solutions, and providing services. SWNGOs' missions continued to focus on providing direct services to a specific population and/or providing training to people who provided direct service. In this regard, SWNGOs have moved toward hiring professionals or asking these individuals to volunteer in service provision. They have begun scaling back on the use of volunteers from the general population.

SWNGOs strive to maintain strong relationships with city and regional social welfare administrators. However, they are wary of the power dynamics that these administrators have to arbitrarily shut down their organizations. They have, therefore, become more active in advocacy for disadvantaged populations and/or policy change; and, they conduct insider advocacy at the local level. They also network with similar organizations around the country to promote national level legislative policy change.

In contrast, VOs have shifted away from providing social services and now focus on facilitating volunteer opportunities mainly for young people. An example drawn from websites (2010–2014), printed material, participant observation, and interviews at one VO helps illustrate this change. The organization (referred to here as “OrgQ”) was organized in 1998. This organization was primarily focused on developing services for young people in the care of the state (i.e., institutionalized children).

In 2008, OrgQ continued to develop programs and recruit volunteers to help carry programs out on a long-term basis. Their website and published public relations material described their social mission along with opportunities they had available for the public to make a difference by serving these children. In early 2013, OrgQ discontinued providing direct services. However, as their website described, they refocused on cooperating with local governments to create volunteer centers and promote volunteering in schools and universities. In addition, they became points of volunteer recruitment for national large scale events, such as the 2013 Universiade and the 2014 Olympics.

OrgQ also served as a point of contact for social service NGOs that needed volunteers to pull off one-day or short-term events (e.g., running a craft day for children, organizing outdoor



games for a festival, putting on a holiday party for seniors or children) or fundraising. The stated primary motivation of this (and the other two volunteer organizations in this study) was to promote civic involvement in ways that supported the government and provided opportunities for individual self-development. These VOs, however, did not engage in advocacy activity; rather, they followed the lead of local and national government officials in deciding what types of volunteer opportunities and projects to promote.

## **Discussion**

Grassroots volunteer groups addressing local social problems arose in Nizhnii Novgorod, Russia, within a field of logics inherited from the Soviet Union and those newly introduced through international contact. The groups' origins were similar in that they arose from informal grassroots volunteering, they exhibited mixed Soviet era and imported logics, and they instantiated these logics similarly across organizations.

The rapidly changing Russian NGO regulatory environment and emerging state-sponsored volunteerism comprised the embedded context in which the socially oriented NGOs in this study were located. Over the course of two decades, leaders in these organizations were forced to respond to salient events. Each change in government policy toward NGOs served as a salient event, triggering both the automatic and controlled attention of leaders. Attention made certain logics more accessible than others. The leaders in this study meshed their own identities, experiences, and goals with both their own and contextual logics in making sense of salient events to create new logics for themselves and their organizations.

These leaders also made decisions and guided the missions and attendant activities of their organizations to more closely align with their newly emerging logics. As Thornton et al. (2012) describe, "Given a social actor's embeddedness within institutional logics and prior commitments and experiences, specific identities, goals and schemas will be readily accessible to attend to salient environmental stimuli" (p. 92).

The leaders in this study chose from an array of possible identities, experiences, and goals that guided their sensemaking. For example, VO leaders chose their Soviet influenced identity as patriotic citizens serving the good of the collective. Their unsuccessful experiences with advocacy efforts, however, led them to reject this as a viable option for action. As they had no personal ties to any specific social issue, their identities as volunteer leaders (rather than social problem solvers) was readily accessible. This led them to focus on volunteer activity in their organizations.

In addition, several contextual factors led to VO leaders increasing their focus on recruitment of volunteers. First, the federal government's efforts to reign in and organize the growing volunteer movement led to funding opportunities for organizations that worked in the volunteering sphere. Leaders with an emerging government-directed community logic decided to focus their limited staff time on applying for these funds and developing recruitment programs and organizational systems to support them. These leaders ended programs that provided long-term social services.

Second, increased regulation of NGOs and the attendant administrative burden for social service NGOs discouraged leaders from continuing in the social service arena. Instead, VO leaders met more often with local government administrative leaders to shape short-term volunteer opportunities (e.g., cleaning up a park or putting on a holiday program at a senior home).

Finally, negative coverage of NGOs as well as increasing patriotic rhetoric in the media further influenced the meaning-making that these leaders had. This pushed them to forge closer ties

with local administrators while avoiding any activity that challenged government policy. These contextual factors along with leaders' identities and experiences created a mutually reinforcing cycle toward Soviet influenced meaning-making about NGOs and their role in society. This led to a government-directed community logic and organizational changes that focused on volunteerism over social service provision.

The story, however, is more nuanced than this. When leaders enacted organizational changes, such as a narrower focus on volunteerism and strong connections with local and regional administrations, these organizational changes further strengthened a move to a government-directed community logic. Receiving funding to recruit and train volunteers and help spread volunteer centers as an institutional form immersed these leaders in the rhetoric of the government in this arena. Incremental changes in their programs over time had repercussions on future changes.

For example, once the organizational structure and job descriptions were changed to support intensive volunteer recruitment for national volunteering, these changes influenced the path of future program development. Additionally, the organizational level logics connected to this change had an impact on the meaning-making of these leaders. Thus, societal level logics and the logics of VO leaders were continuously interacting with the organizational level; and, the changes produced by these interactions were instantiated in the organization.

A question arises, then—why did SWNGO leaders' logics and organizations not shift in a similar direction? They were in the same context and they experienced similar pressures. The theoretical insights of microfoundations of institutional logics are helpful here as well. Indeed, one example is when foreign funding decreased. At this time, patriotic rhetoric increased; and, the government instituted tighter regulations on NGOs. As a result, these SWNGO leaders' focused attention was likely guided toward newly introduced NGO logics by their personal experience with a social issue.

In addition, this personal connection fueled the goals that these leaders had in meeting needs and solving social problems. This resulted in their embrace of primary identities as experts on specific social issues and as legitimate service providers rather volunteer organizers. The societal context blended with their identities and experience to create a social welfare logic. This logic guided the decisions they made in regard to their organizations. For instance, they took steps to align their organizations more clearly as social service providing NGOs by applying for social service specific grants. In addition, they shifted to hiring more professionals to provide services and they reduced their reliance on volunteers. They also increased their grant writing efforts and engaged volunteers in fundraising efforts more than service provision.

SWNGO leaders focused their government relationships on those officials in departments involved in social welfare provision. They participated in government sponsored roundtable discussions specifically related to their mission focus. SWNGO leaders could point to fruitful advocacy efforts in the past and this success reinforced the perceived usefulness of the social change strategies that they had heard about in Western influenced NGO trainings. Therefore, they continued to practice insider advocacy at the local level; and, they expanded their cooperative national level advocacy.

Although SWNGO leaders did not expect Russia to function as a Western style democracy, they envisioned themselves as advocates for societal change. In participant observation of leadership team meetings, I was able to witness the main leaders articulate their views that NGO social service provision was higher quality and more clearly focused on (and responsive to) client needs than government provision. Moreover, these leaders voiced that they would not abandon their social service mission under political or monetary pressure. SWNGO leaders also communicated their logics to their staff and volunteers. This shared narrative

guided group sensemaking and subsequent mobilization that became apparent in the instantiated logics of their organization.

Changes in leaders' logics in the embedded context of Nizhnii Novgorod and Russia resulted in organizational differences in mission focus, people served, level of professionalization, and types of interactions with local and national governments. In some ways, these organizations fit the typology of nonprofit agencies and nonprofit membership associations described by Smith (2017). They all began as grassroots, relatively informal, groups run by volunteers, as membership associations often are. However, they soon became formalized with top down structures, as nonprofit agencies often are. In this sense, the SWNGOs in this study fit the typology of nonprofit agencies. However, these VOs were not typical membership associations since the VOs retained their hierarchical structures and paid staff while at the same time trying to balance a newly adopted member focus with government suggested activities.

This study illustrates how an interplay of factors at multiple levels can affect the expression of logics at the organizational level, with a focus on the microfoundations of logics through the narratives of leaders. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that societal level context does not necessarily influence organizational development in a post-communist environment in a singular way. In both types of organizations that emerged (SWNGOs and Vos), NGO leaders considered themselves to be citizens contributing to positive change in their country. Their logics, however, envisioned the role of the citizen and the state in different ways.

A limitation of this study is the reliance on recollections of leaders through retrospective interviews. As much as possible, however, factual information was verified through other ways (as described). In addition, this study is limited in its geographic scope. Thus, the findings should be considered a springboard for continued exploration. Further research on organizational change and development in post-communist contexts should consider logics operating at various levels. This research, however, should leave room for differentiation even among organizations that have similar beginnings.

For practitioners working cross culturally, there are several lessons to be learned. First, the introduction of new models of grassroots action and organizations can create turmoil in historical institutional power structures and logics. This turmoil may lead to societal level reactions by those in power. In Russia, for example, the federal government used legislative means to promote their vision of a state-NGO logic. They also used the media to shape societal level logics of the population toward NGOs.

Second, organizational level logics can be shaped not only from above, but from below; in this case, these logics were shaped by the personal experiences and identities of the organizational leaders. Finally, even when policy, geographic, and historical contexts are similar, all organizations within these contexts may not be influenced in the same way by changes in policy, funding, and/or societal level logics. Working cross culturally, practitioners must be ready to respect, explore, and dialogue with institutional logics at all levels. In doing so, they can more wisely collaborate with local experts around mission and action.

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