

Introduction to Societal Change and Ideological Formation among the Rural Population of the Baltic Area 1880-1939

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Is there a special Eastern European agrarian path to modernity and citizenship, and if so, what are its characteristics? On the most general level, this is the question raised by this anthology. All but one of the contributions were originally presented at a workshop organized by the Södertörn University College project *Agrarian Change and Ideological Formation – Farmers’ Cooperatives and Citizenship in the Baltic Sea Area 1880-1939* in Haapsalu, Estonia, in August 2007.¹ The aim of the project is to explore the founding and growth of cooperative organizations in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and Poland (Galicia) 1880–1939. The main focus is on explaining how citizenship and emancipation of the peasantry evolved in the region as a result of these organizations. The focus on agrarian cooperatives is vital, as these organizations were the primary organizers in the rural areas. As the Baltic Sea Region was an agrarian area, the cooperatives had a large impact on the formulation of citizenship. The period between 1880 and 1939 was formative for the cooperative movements in the region.

There are two major theoretical approaches used to explore democratic development within the agrarian arena in the Baltic Sea Region: citizenship (defining the relationship between state and individual) and “Volk” (defining the relationship between collective and individual). Gender perspectives (with a focus on masculinity) and ethnicity are also integrated parts of the theoretical framework. The primary source informing the discussions on citizenship here is the framework developed by T. H. Marshall in 1950. His ideas on citizenship mainly involved Western liberal-reformist view on how

¹ The organizers would like to thank Sofia Holmlund, Olof Mertelman, Kristi Niskanen, Kai Struve (who also contributed with an article), Matti Peltonen, Ronny Pettersson and Roman Wysocki for fruitful commentaries. The editor would like to express his gratitude to the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press for granting the permission to use maps 1 and 2. According to a definition of the Baltic Foundation (*Östersjöstiftelsen*), which finances the research at Södertörn University College, the Baltic Area encompasses countries on the Baltic coast but also countries with tributary rivers to the rivers that discharge their waters into the Baltic Sea.

citizenship was created on 3 different levels: civil, political, and social.² The three levels corresponded to different forms of citizenship. The civil arena involved legislation (land ownership) and some of the basic individual liberties. The political arena involved political rights (voting rights etc.) while the social arena involved economic rights. Marshall believed that the different levels followed each other chronologically, and also that each stage brought the creation of new institutions. The typology of Marshall has been developed in recent years into a broader perspective, as the original was based on only British history.

In general, theories concerning citizenship have not focused on the peasantry, but more on the bourgeois and working classes. However, Marshall's definition can be used as a structuring agent to direct the study of cooperative and agrarian citizenship. For instance, laws governing land-ownership were extremely important for farmers, and also influenced membership in agrarian organizations. At the same time, however, there were ideas in operation that left little choice for the individuals, but instead included people in vast communities on the basis of their ethnicity. Pursuit of individual rights on the various levels described by Marshall was frequently restrained by a collective pursuit of what one could call clusters of rights as a group, in the name of "Volk". The agrarian citizenship seems to have frequently oscillated between these two variants.³

Factors such as ethnicity and gender have been critical in the process of the construction of a citizen. Ethnic minorities were often discriminated against because the idea of economic nationalism meant maximizing the common, national benefit as opposed to the individual benefit.⁴ Ethnicity is also important since the agrarian movements were vital catalysts in the national liberation groups.⁵ The concept of economic nationalism is related to the concept of "Volk", as ethnicity is utilized as an organizing principle for all levels of society, including the economy. Generally, ethnic nationalism meant economic mobilization along ethnic lines.

The research on gender in the field of citizenship research has mainly been concentrated on the political and civil citizenship of women.⁶ However, the project also chooses to focus on the issues of masculinity, as the agrarian

² Marshall, T. H., *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge 1950), p. 21.

³ See the text of Anu-Mai Köll in this volume.

⁴ Schultz, Helga, „Wirtschaftsnationalismus in Ostmitteleuropa – Thesen und Fragen“, in Kubu, Eduard and Schultz, Helga (eds.), *Wirtschaftsnationalismus als Entwicklungsstrategie Ostmitteleuropäischer Eliten* (Praha-Berlin 2004), p. 21.

⁵ Thaden, Edward C., *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland 1855–1914* (Princeton 1981). Weeks, Theodore, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia. Nationalism and Russification of the Western Frontier, 1863–1914* (DeKalb 1996).

⁶ Björk, Gunnela, *Att förhandla sitt medborgarskap. Kvinnor som kollektiva politiska aktörer i Örebro 1900–1950* (Lund 1999). Hobson, Barbara and Berggren, Ann-Marie (eds.), *Crossing Borders. Gender and Citizenship in Transition* (Stockholm 1997). Florin, Christina and Kvarnström, Lars (eds.), *Kvinnor på gränsen till medborgarskap* (Stockholm 2001).

citizenship was thoroughly male, similar to other forms of citizenship. As an example, the definition of the complete citizen in Sweden in the mid 19th century was a Swedish, independent, adult, property-owning, educated, married male with a direct relationship to the state, which in turn gave certain privileges.⁷ This definition is not entirely agrarian, but all of the criteria mentioned are also central to agrarian citizenship.

The processes discussed in the articles contributed to the increased economic and political participation of the peasantry in the life of their respective countries. Economic citizenship – the securing of assets that would allow one to maintain one’s family and (as a further step) stimulate economic relations that would spur one’s participation in the political and cultural life – is an important feature in several articles.

In the study of the formation of citizenship within cooperative movements in the region, the focus is on exploring how democratic or undemocratic structures were established and/or created within the cooperative movements. This is also connected to the process of nation building in the region. In the national rhetoric, farmers were portrayed as bearers of the national heritage and as a pillar of society. The agrarian sector was seen as healthy and character building, in contrast to industrialised sectors.⁸ At the same time, the farmer was always described as male, and as a result, most of the “healthy” farm work became coded as masculine, something that became an important part of the cooperative self-image.⁹ This brings forward the question of who is the ideal farmer, and it also relates to how citizenship was constructed and viewed by the state. Central exponents for the definition of agrarian citizenship are inclusion and exclusion. By examining who were allowed to be members in cooperatives and on what basis, it is possible to determine the societal separations of the period. This affected the forms of democracy along ethnical, gendered, or religious lines.

Needless to say, a project that spans several countries, as does *Agrarian Change*, allows comparative analysis as well. This volume, however, mirrors the first steps of our joint research. A future publication involving the project participants will deal with the main questions of the project in a comparative perspective. This comparison will be based on studies of local, regional, and central organizations as well as historiography.

⁷ Florin and Kvarnström, *Kvinnor på gränsen*, p. 14.

⁸ Mylly, Juhani, *Suomalaisen talonpojan muuttuva ideaalkuva* (Turku 1985). Blom, Ida, ”Global könshistorie – et nytt forskningsfelt?”, *Kvinnoforskning*, no 2 2001. Fredrik Eriksson, *Det reglerade undantaget. Högers jordbrukspolitik 1904–2004* (Stockholm 2004).

⁹ See Eellend, Johan, *Cultivating the rural citizen: modernity, agrarianism and citizenship in late tsarist Estonia* (Stockholm 2007), and the comparative article in Swedish by Eellend, Johan; Eriksson, Fredrik and Wawrzeński, Piotr, “Den agrara modernitetens spegel”, *Presshistorisk årsbok* 2008, p. 105-127.

The articles

The anthology mirrors a work in progress, as the name of the publishing series – *Research Reports* – suggests. Nevertheless, the articles constitute an important contribution to the history of the peasant movements and organizations in the Baltic Area. Anu-Mai Kõll's contribution questions the east-west divide of nationalism in a territorial ("western") and ethno-linguistic ("eastern") in the Baltic Sea area. Such a view appeared only during the Cold War, and was then applied to the past. In fact, there was a period of convergence of east and west prior to the First World War. While there has existed a wide diversity in the Baltic Area when it comes to historical processes and development, there have also been common features. For instance, the impact of the romantic idealization of the people – particularly the peasantry – has made itself felt all over the area, with vital consequences for political development. The activists of the popular rural movements in the Baltic Area mixed romantic nationalism and Enlightenment ideas to produce a type of emancipating fusion. Particularistic ideas were frequently mixed with ones of rationality and the utilisation of science as a way of modernising agriculture. Kõll explores the emancipating and democratising features of ethno-linguistic nationalism. The development diverged due to the rise of authoritarianism in the southern part of the Baltic area, while preserving democracy in the northern part.

Johan Eellend's article gives a broad picture of Agrarianism, the rural-based ideology that guided most of the East- and Central European agrarian political parties during the inter-war period. A basic feature of East European agrarianism was its conviction of being a third force in politics and economy, falling between liberalism and socialism. By identifying ideas presented by liberals and Marxists as not progressive, but instead as a threat to rural society, the ideology confronted the two dominating paths of modernization. As it involves regions who were on the losing side of history, this brick in the complex edifice of the history of interwar East- and Central Europe is often neglected, even forgotten. Therefore, the intention of the article is to summarize the main features in political programs and discussions on agrarianism in order to create a framework focusing primarily on explaining the agrarianist view of history, and the mechanisms of social change, political power, and the organization of society.

Angela Harre takes the reader from the general level examined by Eellend to specifics, presenting the theory and practice of Romanian agrarianism in the years preceding the First World War and during the interwar time. She finds a peasant movement trapped between the need to modernise agriculture and the economy of the country in general (meaning market adaptation and industrialization), and the need to defend the will of the rural voters and fight the transformation to capitalism. The choice fell on the latter alternative, but

the solution did not bring about substantial improvement, and proved to be disastrous after the Great Crisis hit Romania in the 1930s. The popular anti-capitalist and antidemocratic sentiments deepened considerably and confined agrarianists to the margins of Romanian politics, paving the way for the Fascists, who promised quick solutions.

Kai Struve's article "Citizenship and National Identity: The Peasants of Galicia during the 19th Century" illuminates the process of peasants acquiring and performing citizenship in the political sphere in the Habsburg Crownland of Galicia 1848-1914. In 1848, serfdom was abolished in Galicia and the door to political representation was opened for the peasantry. Among Polish and Ruthenian peasants, a long process of learning and adaptation to the changed judicial and political circumstances began. When the Austrian constitutional reforms of the 1860s opened new substantial possibilities of political participation for the peasants, peasants initially resorted to this opportunity to represent their concerns and interests with great enthusiasm. But after the acceptance of Polish autonomy in Galicia by Vienna in 1868, peasant representation in the Galician Diet and the Reichstag decreased drastically. Nevertheless, in the 1880s and the 1890s, there was still a rise of peasant parties among the Polish population with increased roles and participation of peasants in the Ruthenian political structures. While the Polish and Ruthenian peasants acquired a growing importance in the civil society and public sphere in Galicia, they were guided on their way by members of the Polish and Ruthenian intelligentsia, who claimed the function of the tribunes of the people, and formulated the needs and interests of the peasantry in exclusivist national terms. However, this essentially emancipating process also functioned as a catalyst of increasing national tensions, which in the near future would wreck havoc upon the eastern parts of the Crownland.

Piotr Wawrzyniuk's text takes the reader to eastern Galicia of 1904-1914. The author explores the reasons behind the founding of Ruthenian cooperatives, and studies the work of the cooperatives. The organization of a dynamic and modern economic life, one that would fulfil the basic material needs of the peasants, was viewed as a crucial step towards the full political emancipation of the Ruthenians. Only if the Ruthenians secured a substantial degree of economic strength could they then reach for the civil rights enjoyed by other peoples of the Double Monarchy, which Ruthenians of present enjoyed only nominally, it was stated. The cooperatives, frequently founded and guided from above, were to be the tool of this emancipation. There were groups whose activities (or passivity) hampered the growth of the Ruthenian cooperative movement: Poles, Jews, Moscowphiles and many of the Ruthenian women. While the cooperatives had to be protected from the obstructive activities of the first three groups, who were to be excluded from cooperative activities, women were to be educated and disciplined for the cooperative, and consequently, the national cause.

Among the features that added to the ongoing process of modernization were the revised laws and patterns of inheritance. The text of Ülle Tarkiainen discusses the consequences of the changed pattern of inheritance of rural property in the decades after the emancipation of the peasantry from serfdom in Estonia 1816. The right to own the land in perpetuity, and consequently to dispose over it unreservedly enabled the peasantry to increasingly participate in the cultural, social, and political processes in Estonia. Land ownership itself was a crucial precondition for economic citizenship in the countryside. The inheritance law also turned out to be important in preventing the fragmentation of farms into unproductive units (a process at its extremes in Austrian Galicia) that could hardly sustain a family by only allowing one main heir. A social security system of a kind was created, as the heirs often were obliged to provide a material minimum for the retired parents. The emerging class of peasant proprietors were to become the backbone of the national movement in the Estonian countryside.

Fredrik Eriksson's article shows that Swedish agrarian press used strong modernising discourse. However, technical modernization and the great emphasis placed on the importance of education did not mean that politically radical ideas gained ground among the agricultural elites. Although distrustful of cooperative ideology, the predominantly conservative agrarian elites saw the cooperation as a way of pacifying radical tendencies among the rural poor and small holders. The emancipatory ideas of cooperation were deliberately overlooked, while the economic advantages of the cooperation and its modernizing capacity were stressed. Education was of utmost importance, as it not only would bring improvement and efficiency to agricultural and dairy production, but would also ensure peace between the various strata of society. The conservative agrarian elites viewed the ownership of land as a prerequisite of positive citizenship. Ownership of land shaped autonomous and responsible men who were able to handle agricultural and political rights alike. The smallholders were frequently viewed as problematic, as they were seen as traditionalist and selfish. On the other hand, the group was also described in romantic terms by journals which aimed at smallholders as their readership.

Ann-Catrin Östman's text examines cooperative organizing patterns in the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland. The interplay of class relations, gender positions, and local interaction is studied against a background of, on the one hand, a strongly gendered and feminine coding of milking and dairy farming and, on the other hand, communal-egalitarian traditions. Furthermore, the importance of language on local as well as regional levels is considered. The older forms of organizations had a considerable impact on the ways in which new and more modern forms of organizations in the local community were established. The author stresses the importance of traditional and homosocial patterns of social interaction during a period of mod-

ernization, and how traditional notions of masculinity were, in part, created anew through co-operative organizations.

Peter Aronsson's "The Peasant at National Museums in the Nordic Countries" studies how changing ideas of citizenship influenced the way in which the peasantries of the Nordic countries were exhibited at the national museums in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. The peasants' route into the national narratives has hardly been a straightforward one and turns out to have been rather similar in the countries studied. Thus, in Sweden, the image of the peasantry underwent several changes due to the political needs of various political groups. From the conservative vision of an organic peasant community as a golden age, the image of the peasantry was transformed by the rising bourgeoisie into an image of carrier of traditions to be remembered and cherished in a world where modernization and progress were viewed as inevitable. This image was reinterpreted into one of an unbroken pursuit of the rights to property and political influence, only to be succeeded by the view of the peasantry as an obsolete, if not exotic societal group that had to compete with the industrial heritage in order to be treated as a relevant part of the past.

The articles presented in this anthology therefore provide various perspectives on the political, economic, and social transformation of the rural populations of the Baltic Area between 1880-1939, and – more indirectly – the relationship between the rural populations and the rest of the society. The texts tell the story of various attempts to adapt to the world in a time of rapid political and economic change – not only for the rural population, but also for society as a whole. There are stories of relative success (cooperatives) and of failure (Agrarianism); of peasant societies with long traditions as well as very short and problematic traditions of peasant political participation (Sweden and Galicia respectively); of the impact of the organization of production and distribution of agricultural goods, products, and property on gender positions and other relationships; of the imagining and visualizing of the peasant by the non-rural society as an important element of modern nation building; and of the seemingly unlikely mix of ideas of romantic nationalism and the Enlightenment as a cornerstone of the emancipating agenda produced by the activists of the rural movements during the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries.