

*Center for European Studies  
Working Paper Series 105*

**Voluntary associations and region building.  
A post-national perspective on Baltic history**

by

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Abstract

Voluntary associations are a major topic of historical research on nation building and civil society in Europe. This paper focuses on the associational sphere in the Baltic provinces of Tsarist Russia and tries to outline the impact of associations on modern societies in this region. The first section addresses the legal and social frameworks of voluntary associations, followed by a sketch of developmental trends in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The next sections discuss the role of voluntary associations within the concepts of civil society and cultural nation building. Slightly different from conventional functionalist national discourses, it is argued here that, in the perspective of cultural history, voluntary associations contributed considerably to the emergence of the region of North Eastern Europe, a region shaped by close cultural contacts and inter-ethnic relations within the Baltic Sea region as well as by the strivings of the small nations to integrate with larger European structures.

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\* This paper is based on a talk given at the German Study Group at CES in November 2002.

## 1. Uncivil circumstances: Reval 1918 and Tallinn 1940

When German troops reached Estonia in February 1918, the German military administration occupied all three Baltic provinces of Russia as well as the Lithuanian region. One of the measures taken by the Germans, known for their excessive bureaucratization in the occupied territories under the command of *Ober Ost* (Liulevicius 2000: 77), was an order issued in May 1918, which stated that all voluntary associations must re-register and apply for permission to convene.<sup>1</sup> Records of those re-registered voluntary associations of Reval/Tallinn<sup>2</sup> have been preserved, and thus we are well informed about the city's associational life in 1918.<sup>3</sup> These sources also allow conclusions to be drawn in regard to earlier periods, as they contain such information as dates of statutes and statistical figures about membership. Although quantitative analysis of the number of associations and their members should be undertaken cautiously (there can be no guarantee these lists are complete), the range of associations is nevertheless striking in light of the circumstances of war and occupation. All in all, records indicate c. 270 active associations with some 37,000 members during the German occupation in 1918.<sup>4</sup> Some of the associations with explicit national-liberationist or proletarian aims had been founded just a year earlier, in 1917, but the vast majority dated back to the nineteenth century or at least to the period following the 1905 revolution. That said, the fact that only eight out of those more than 270 associations were disbanded, raises questions as to the actual effectiveness and importance of the bureaucratic control and regulation of the associational sphere.

Two decades later, when the Soviets annexed the Baltic states and modeled them into Soviet republics in the summer of 1940, such lists of associations were compiled once again – this time by the occupation authorities. In this case there can be no lingering doubt as to the effectiveness, as total dissolution of the association sphere was not only intended but carried out almost completely; social clubs and singing societies were replaced by “people’s houses,” cinemas, etc.<sup>5</sup> Only a few societies, such as the Estonian Naturalists’ Society (*Naturforscher-Gesellschaft/Looduseurijate Selts*)<sup>6</sup> of 1853, managed to survive the Soviet purge and existed continuously throughout the Soviet era. What one may learn from these events of 1918 and 1940 is that the associational sphere (*Vereinswesen* in German) of the East Baltic region faced severe breaches and hardships.

## 2. Why research voluntary associations?

Why, then, should one be interested in a historical analysis of voluntary associations in the region, if they appear to have been forcefully marginalized? In fact, historical research on that region has concentrated for quite a long time on the actions of imperial powers and the resistance to imperial policies. However, the importance of voluntary associations in Baltic history cannot be derived simply from contrasting a perspective from the repressive “top” with that from an idealized and suppressed “bottom” – although self-perceptions within the contemporary societies surely had an impact on the late- and post-Soviet developments.

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<sup>1</sup> Verordnung über das Versammlungs- und Vereinsrecht des Oberbefehlshabers des A.O.K. 8, Abt. V, 21.5.1918 (TLA, f. 196, n. 1, s. 171, fol. 173); for background, see Janssen 1971.

<sup>2</sup> I’m referring to cities by their native German, Estonian or Latvian names only once, and then keep to the contemporary names of cities.

<sup>3</sup> I’m indebted to Bradley Woodworth for giving me a hint to these sources. Although the regulation concerned *Livland*, too, there are only very few materials preserved for Dorpat / Tartu in the files of the Estonian State Archives.

<sup>4</sup> The population of Tallinn in 1918 totaled c. 110,000 inhabitants (the figures for 1917 and 1919 are c. 159,000 and 102,000, respectively); cf. Пуллар 1972: 167.

<sup>5</sup> Eesti Riigiarhiiv R-1252, nim. 2, s. 4; and Tallinna Linnaarhiiv R-1, nim. 12-I, s. 27A, fol. 1-6; cf. Riigi Teataja 1940, nr. 27, art. 270 and 1940, nr. 34, art. 390.

<sup>6</sup> In this paper, names are given according to the language used by the societies themselves.

Generally speaking, two main research paths can be distinguished with regard to the phenomenon of voluntary associations in the last decades. The first path is linked to the research of national movements. Here it has been pointed out that voluntary associations had a significant bearing on the emergence of modern nations.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, illegal and secret organizations have attracted much of the attention in research on Eastern Europe, causing one to wonder whether such a perspective has contributed to a distorted picture of the region's social history. The second research path perceives voluntary associations as a major topic within the civil society discourse.<sup>8</sup> The first perspective has been most attractive for the study of small nations, while the second refers to Russia proper in particular, as is revealed in Joseph Bradley's recent overview (Bradley 2002). Regarding civil society in Russia in general, voluntary associations are considered an important feature of social life in the region, as in many other European regions where they are usually seen in close connection to *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (Dann 1984) and *Bürgerlichkeit* (Kocka and Frevert 1988). Voluntary associations not only shape the self-organization of the citizens' immaterial as well as material interests, but also promote a culture of discussing, negotiating and bargaining. So far, the two research trajectories have seldom been connected to each other. This is especially the case where civil society and nation seem potentially at odds with one another. Such conflict arises when nation building relies on an ideology of nationalism, which fosters exclusivity and discrimination, and is thus open to the charge of being uncivil (Wehler 2000: 90). Still, a clear analytical distinction between nationalist associations and civic self-organization does not seem to be appropriate regarding the traits of social emancipation in the nation-building processes within Tsarist Russia. One may even doubt whether such a clear separation is possible at all, at least in Northern and Eastern Europe, as will be discussed below. Instead, it is the relation of associational history to concepts of national society and civil society that demand our attention.

Apart from the research paradigms outlined above, there is another aspect of voluntary associations that draws attention: Any heuristic approach to the topic will soon be met with the observation that the history of voluntary associations in the Baltic region<sup>9</sup> is quite alive; hence one should include a discussion of its *longue durée* and its impact on shaping contemporary societies. The paper presented here combines results of empirical research with reflection on the history of the Baltic societies, with a focus on cultural rather than social history in the strict sense. It will first outline an interpretative framework and the developmental trends of Baltic associational history, and then discuss the two points addressed above: the relation of associational history to civil society and to nation building. The concluding sections set the associational culture into a regional framework.

### 3. Voluntary associations in Baltic history – an interpretative framework

Research of voluntary associations requires a definition from which to proceed. Here it is useful to draw on Joseph Bradley's recent description of associations as "modern, secular, self-regulating philanthropic, educational, cultural, and learned societies, membership in which was voluntary rather than compulsory or ascribed and that offered new forms of sociability and self-definition" (Bradley 2002: 1094). However, the Baltic case reveals some problems with taking such a definition as authoritative and exclusive.

Analytically, voluntary associations may be separated from corporative institutions of the *ständisch* society, where membership was compulsory either by birth, social rank or profession, e.g. town guilds, brotherhoods such as the Black Heads (*Schwarzhäupter*), or the *Ritterschaften*. As some Baltic corpora-

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<sup>7</sup> In general: Dann 1984; Hroch 1968 (English ed.: Hroch 1985); for the Baltic region: Jansen 1993 and Jansen, Arukaevu 1995b.

<sup>8</sup> With a special focus on voluntary associations: Clark 2000. The publications on civil society are legion; I have referred in particular to the following publications: Hall 1995; Keane 1998; Hildermeier, et al. 2000; Bermeo, Nord 2000.

<sup>9</sup> The focus of this working paper is on the historical Baltic provinces of Tsarist Russia, i.e. today's Latvia and Estonia. Lithuania still awaits a closer look at her associational culture, cf. Aleksandravičius, Kulakauskas 1996: 236-305, and Ochmański 1982: 216, 266-271. Her Prussian part, Lithuania minor, might be more easily included, however; cf. Traba 2000.

tions had begun developing their own voluntary associations at the end of the eighteenth century, and voluntary associations partially had a corporatist self-understanding (meaning that membership was regarded as compulsory for given groups), one may notice a persistence of the estate society and its corporative traditions in modern society. For when the old corporations lost their legal privileges, they did not disappear, rather they were transformed into associations without exclusive rights and still had an influence on social life.<sup>10</sup> This refers to the Baltic town guilds after the municipal reform of 1877 as well as the *Ritterschaften* after 1918.

Secondly: A clear delimitation of commercial or profit-oriented associations, which served the material interests of a limited group of people, seems simple only at first glance. Such a distinction between non-profit and commercial associations, however, did not begin to emerge until the nineteenth century, and even then it was slow in coming and widely blurred. In Russia, both types were regarded as *obshchestva* (societies), as the index of the *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov*<sup>11</sup> shows. Such a lack of semantic distinction was also common in other parts of Europe.<sup>12</sup> For the purpose of our analysis, even if one is guided by the German understanding *Verein* (used since c. 1800 to denote cultural and sociable – but not political – associations<sup>13</sup>) or the dominating English focus on the voluntary and non-profit character of the association, commercial associations should be included if they follow an aim connected to a community broader than its own group of shareholders or, in other words, if the association combines material purposes with immaterial values. A significant example of this is the Estonian *Linda* society, a stock company of Estonians who collected funds for an Estonian steamship in an effort to demonstrate the national capability towards shipping (Prants 1913).

Thirdly: The legal framework of the Tsarist Empire must be included in analysis of the associational sphere. Contrary to the widely perceived image of the overall repressive tsarist authorities,<sup>14</sup> the question remains open as to whether restrictions against the associational sphere were an exception during the nineteenth century; in other states, for instance Prussia and Germany (Düding 1984: 145), public activity of associations was also bound by legal patterns of behavior. While the *Allgemeine Preussische Landrecht* of 1794 outlawed associations with purposes that conflicted with law and order (*Ruhe und Ordnung*) (Hardtwig 1990: 795), the *Ustav Blagochiniia* implemented by Catherine II in 1782 stipulated that no association in a town could be founded without the consent of the authorities.<sup>15</sup> Although gentry associations such as the Livonian Charitable and Economic Society (*Livländische Gemeinnützige und Ökonomische Sozietät*) were excluded from this restriction (Engelhardt, Neuschäffer 1983: 21), all noble associations in the Baltic provinces – as it seems – were based on approval, too. Basically, the regulation of 1782 remained valid until 1905. Additions by an *ukaz* in 1867 on illegal associations (*protivozakonnye soobshchestva*)<sup>16</sup> addressed secret and illegal associations, and – if one were to turn the reading around – thus provided space for those associations founded legally.<sup>17</sup> In fact, this

<sup>10</sup> For a theoretical reflection of the connection between corporation and association, see Hardtwig 1990: 12.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. for instance Полное Собрание Законов Российской Империи (further: PSZ) III, vol. 25, 1905; there, divisions of *общества* were made into 1) benevolent, learned, agrarian and hunters' associations, etc., and 2) stock, industrial, insurance, railway, and steamship companies.

<sup>12</sup> The same holds for Finland and Sweden: There, *bolag* (company) and *förening* (society) have been differentiated only since the 1840s and replaced *association*, cf. Stenius 1988: 353.

<sup>13</sup> On the German *Begriffsgeschichte* cf. Hardtwig 1990: 809-811; cf. also the introductory remarks on different definitions by: Freudenthal 1968: 11-14.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the opinion of Iurii Afanas'ev, quoted by Bradley 2002: 1103; cf. also Mironov, Eklof 2000: vol. 2, 1-2 and 44-46.

<sup>15</sup> PSZ I, vol. 21, no. 15379, Art. 208 (p. 478). In a similar form, this regulation was included in the Свод Законов (vol. 14). For details cf. Степанский 1980.

<sup>16</sup> In: Продолжение Свода Законов Российской Империи изданного в 1857 году. С 1 Января по 31 Декабря 1867 года. Часть III, Санкт-Петербург 1867: 65-78; cf. Степанский 1980: 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> A similar tendency may be noticed in the Prussian decree of 11 March 1850.

scope had already broadened prior to the revolution of 1905, as is shown by “normal statutes” and manuals for the founding of societies.<sup>18</sup> Associational freedom was not granted until the temporary regulation on voluntary associations was issued in March 1906.<sup>19</sup> Previously, associations (with only few exceptions) had to apply for permission from the central authorities in Saint Petersburg. Thus, one could say the administration was exercising paternalistic control over self-organized social activities, as well as harboring a latent distrust of them; this attitude was based on the view that any citizens’ initiative was potentially harmful to the state and should therefore be subject to state approval. However, this policy did not differ fundamentally from the association policy of nineteenth-century Germany. Although freedom of association was brought onto the agenda with article 162 of the *Paulskirche* constitution of 1848, legal praxis in Prussia, for instance, continued to be restrictive as well. Although the German law of 1908 granted freedom of association to women, a clause requiring the German language to be used for public gatherings drastically limited the possibilities for associations among national minorities (Broszat 1986: 164).

Generally speaking, associations in Baltic provinces were to seek approval of their statutes from the central authorities in St. Petersburg: from the Ministry of the Interior, the Council of Ministers, and some received *vysochaishie* (the “very highest”) approval from the Tsar himself.<sup>20</sup> Unions or central associations were not permitted, excepting the all-Russian associations and the *Livländische Gemeinnützige und Ökonomische Sozietät*, which were allowed to build up a system of subordinate associations. With associational freedom granted in March 1906, special departments were established within the provincial governments,<sup>21</sup> thereby transferring the authority to approve or reject the registration of associations from the central government to the provinces. From that time onward, an association was regarded as approved if its application had not been rejected within 14 days (Plato 1906: art. 17). Restrictions on national aspirations in education (i.e. the organization of language courses) were abandoned after 1905; this resulted in the reformulation of many associational statutes to include a broad range of purposes, as well as the founding of umbrella organizations, which until then had rarely been permitted. Confirmed statutes were prerequisite for all legal associations but, as shown by early statutes in particular, they also served as rules regulating the social life within an association and were compulsory for each member of a society, as constitutions *en miniature*<sup>22</sup> so to speak.

Fourthly: One might question the criterion “secular” not only in regard to regions shaped by Catholicism (Latgalia or Lithuania “major” in our regional perspective) but also in the Protestant Baltic provinces; benevolent societies as well as youth and singing associations were often connected to church parishes, and the clergy played an important role in the development of the associational sphere.

A last point concerns the relevance of the social aspects of voluntary associations in relation to the political public sphere in Tsarist times as well as during the period of independent statehood and later. In Germany, the pre-political role has been exposed as the main feature (Dann 1984: 96-97), but it is argued here that the role of voluntary associations is not limited to a pre-political function in the discussed region. This issue will be addressed in the civil society section below.

#### 4. Voluntary associations in Baltic history – some developmental trends

A brief overview of the main features of associational development contributes to describing the specific nature of the Baltic associational culture. My main focus here is on the city of Tartu because it exemplifies in a nutshell the major trends of the Baltic associational sphere. Besides associations of local nature, there are

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<sup>18</sup> Положения 1903.

<sup>19</sup> PSZ III, vol. 26, part 1, 1906, No. 27479 (pp. 201-207).

<sup>20</sup> Good information on the permission of associations is provided by the Справочная книга Лифляндской губернии на 1892 г., Рига 1892, 5. отдел: Список частных обществ, касс и учреждений Лифляндской губернии 1892 г.; cf. also Степанский 1980: 8.

<sup>21</sup> EAA, f. 296, nim 1, f. 510-514: *Livland*; f. 44: *Estland*; LVVA, f. 420: *Kurland*. The quality of the preserved materials differs significantly; it is worst in the case of *Livland*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Bradley 2002: 1120, 1123.

those of major regional importance<sup>23</sup>; the emergence of a national “Estonian” association sphere can also be observed, followed by the re-formation of German associations in reaction to this process of nationalization.

The rise of voluntary associations at the end of the eighteenth century is marked by three trends: Firstly, noble agrarian credit societies, such as the Livonian Estates Credit Society (*Livländische Güterkredit-sozietät*) of 1789, emerged and served the economic interests of the estate owners. Secondly, the *Livländische Gemeinnützige und Ökonomische Sozietät*, founded in Riga in 1792, focused on the promotion of agricultural progress (Engelhardt, Neuschäffer 1983; Kivimäe 1994).<sup>24</sup> In 1813, its office was transferred to Tartu in order to be in close contact to the university, re-established in 1802. Membership in the society was restricted to the Livonian nobility but, following the *ständisch* ethos, it supported a furthering of agricultural development beyond the particular interests of the estate owners. Similar societies for the provinces of *Kurland* and *Estland* did not emerge until 1836 and 1839, respectively.<sup>25</sup> After the late eighteenth century, secret societies of Freemasons were joined on the associational scene by the first reading and social societies in Baltic towns (Jürjo 1990, 1991; Pistohlkors 1994: 305); the latter were mostly called clubs or *Musse* (“leisure”).<sup>26</sup> Their membership was initially limited to noblemen, officers, civil servants, literati, and merchants. Artisans, at least in Tartu, were included as early as the 1830s.<sup>27</sup> Regulations regarding the composition of the directors boards show that – contrary to the situation in Germany – the Baltic towns did not tend to break with the *ständisch* order of the old society through the establishment of those associations (see also below).

The first decades of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a variety of learned societies. They had either a regional focus on the provinces, as was the case of *Estland* and *Kurland*,<sup>28</sup> or a cultural-linguistic one, as in the case of the largest of the three provinces, *Livland*; a Latvian Learned Society (*Lettisch-Litterarische Gesellschaft / Latviešu Draugu Biedrība*) was founded in Riga, while Estonian learned societies emerged in Tartu and Kuressaare.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the Society for History and Historical Research in the Baltic Provinces of Russia (*Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde in den Ostseeprovinzen Russlands*) of 1834 in Riga intended to cover the history of all three provinces. Some years later medical and technical sciences became subjects of associations as well.<sup>30</sup> Initially, membership in such associations was not restricted to professionals, but rather was also open to interested laymen.

An even broader field was formed by charity and benevolent activities which, at least initially, were not clearly separated from purely social and learned purposes; the enlightened German term *gemeinnützig* includes both. However, one then sees a differentiation in specialized institutions, particularly within confessional communities, but also within professional associations or those combined with economic activities (e.g. self aid, mutual aid, saving banks). In addition, the 1890s saw the beginning of a

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<sup>23</sup> Besides the *Livländische Gemeinnützige und Ökonomische Sozietät*, and the *Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft / Õpetatud Eesti Selts*, mainly the Estonian societies, such as *Vanemuine Selts*, *Eesti Põllumeeste Selts*, *Eesti Kirjameeste Selts*, have to be mentioned; more below.

<sup>24</sup> For the background of the enlightenment cf. Hardtwig 1990: 791-793; and ImHof 1982.

<sup>25</sup> *Kurländische Ökonomische Gesellschaft, Estländischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein*.

<sup>26</sup> Some examples: *Bürgerliche Klubbe* (1781) and *Klubbe* (1782) in Tallinn, *Bürgerklub* in Arensburg / Kuressaare, *Bürgermusse* in Tartu (1791) and Weissenstein / Paide, *Musse* in Riga (1787), Pernau / Pärnu (1790), Fellin (1800); further sociable clubs were *Ressource* in Tartu (1835); *Euphonie* in Riga (1797), *Harmonie* in Narva (1806), *Bürgergesellschaft* in Pärnu (1805) etc.; cf. Jürjo 1997; a first overview is provided by Aarma 1993.

<sup>27</sup> EAA, f. 614, n. 1, s. 27, fol. 1-11, § 3; concerning artisans: EAA, f. 291, n. 1, s. 5971, fol. 1-2v.

<sup>28</sup> *Kurländische Gesellschaft für Literatur und Kunst* in Mitau / Jelgava (1815); *Estländische Literarische Gesellschaft* in Tallinn (1842).

<sup>29</sup> *Lettisch-Literarische Gesellschaft* in Riga (1824), *Arensburger Estnische Gesellschaft* (1817), *Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft* in Tartu (1838).

<sup>30</sup> For instance: *Rigaer Naturforscherverein* (1845) and *Naturforschergesellschaft* in Tartu (1853), and earlier even: *Rigaer Gesellschaft Praktischer Ärzte* (1821).

temperance movement emerging in the Estonian part of Livonia (Karu 1989; Raun 1991: 76); the movement, from its very inception, was part of the ethnically shaped associational sphere.

The broadening of the associational sphere beyond the circles of nobility and the bourgeois and academic elites took place through choral and singing societies, which had become popular in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> These music-oriented societies in particular extended their range of membership and organized public festivals (the first in Riga, 1835), thereby providing the framework for the emergence of a cultural public sphere. No clear social distinctions were drawn in the singing associations, because the traditional elites (noblemen and literati – and the Lutheran clergy in particular) also figured here as initiators, presidents, and so forth.

It was through cultural activity that ethnically defined associations of Estonians and Latvians, as well as those of the Russians<sup>32</sup> and Jews, emerged. Naturally, cultural and linguistic criteria were defining in their activities, but this did not immediately imply clear ethnic separations; in fact, many cross-ethnic overlaps are evident. This may be illustrated by the case of Tartu. There, the local artisans' association (*Dorpater Handwerker-Verein*) of 1862 and the Estonian *Vanemuine Selts* of 1865 both defined themselves as choral societies; they both had similar sociable profiles, and obviously many individual contacts existed among their members.<sup>33</sup> From the mid-1860s onward, ethnicity became an increasingly dominant feature in the new associations, thereby also confining the social space of the former non-national associations to ethnic borders.

Another feature of the new associations refers to the relationship between urban and rural environments. Beginning with the *Livländische Gemeinnützige und Ökonomische Sozietät*, one may notice that, from the 1870s onward, the associational sphere grew dynamically beyond urban confines to also comprise the agrarian population so important to the region. Specifically one can point to the Estonian and Latvian farmers' societies (*põllumeeste seltsid* [Estonian] and *lauksaimniecības biedrības* [Latvian], respectively), but the same holds for singing societies and notably for the voluntary fire brigades in the villages.

Sporting societies started with cycling clubs, first established in the late nineteenth century (e.g. *Taara* in Tartu, *Kalev* in Tallinn). Though gymnastic associations were strong in Germany and the Habsburg lands earlier in the nineteenth century, these activities did not take the form of specific societies in the Baltic provinces until after 1905. That said, gymnastics had previously been part of the voluntary fire brigades and health care, and as such was bound to a “useful” purpose.

Of particular interest are the student societies in Tartu and Riga. At first they had a provincial or *landsmannschaftlich* focus with the corporations being named *Estonia*, *Livonia* and *Curonica*; associations of Russian and Polish students in Tartu had existed since around the 1830s (Piirimäe, et al. 1996: 26-51). The ethnic character of such societies resurfaced in the 1870s, first within the Estonian Students' Society (*Eesti Üliõpilaste Selts*) and later within other national student corporations, such as the Latvian *Lettonia* of 1882 and the Jewish *Limuvia* of 1883. The *Eesti Üliõpilaste Selts* had difficulties registering as a corporation in 1882 and 1890, and thus functioned as a common voluntary association. After 1905, one can also see a broadening of the student corporations sphere among the Estonian students. The importance of these associations lies in their integration of the regional elites in the early nineteenth century, but also in the shaping of the national elites.

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<sup>31</sup> For instance: *Revaler Verein für Männergesang* (1849), *Dorpater Liedertafel* (1851), *Dorpater Gesangsverein* (1851), *Dorpater Sängerkreis* (1863), *Verein für Männergesang* in Pärnu (1854), *Rigaer Liedertafel* (1834), *Liederkrantz* (1857) and *Sängerkreis* (1860) in Riga.

<sup>32</sup> For instance: *Русский Клуб*, Riga (1867), *Родник*, Tartu (1889), *Русское общественное собрание* in Tallinn (1888) and Pärnu, *Кружок* in Jelgava (1891).

<sup>33</sup> The *Handwerker-Verein* remained the biggest of the sociable societies until 1905 (617 members in 1902 - EAA, f. 1641, nim. 1, s. 27, p. 49); *Vanemuine* had c. 300 members until 1905, but its membership figures rose to c. 700 in 1908; in comparison, the *Musse* had 202 members in 1910.

An outline of the associational scene during the Tsarist era also points to activities that are notably absent in comparison with other European regions: such as gymnastics and shooting associations,<sup>34</sup> which had, for instance, a strong presence in Germany and the Habsburg Empire. In the type of associations there were also ethnographic distinctions between the Estonian and Latvian, as shown by the Latvian beekeepers' associations (*biškopibas biedrības*) and the Estonian temperance societies (*karaskuse seltsid*).

My last point refers to the situation after 1918. Historical research on voluntary associations in the interwar period has been carried out only after the end of Soviet occupation. However, much literature from the interwar period remains (e.g. anniversary edition publications, etc.). Clearly apparent is the quantitative broadening, the formation of umbrella organizations, and the emergence of new accents in the associational sphere,<sup>35</sup> such as women's or youth associations. The post-1918 period raises further questions regarding the relation between the associational sphere and the new states. In this context, it would be interesting to have a closer look at which types of voluntary activities had been taken over or at least subsidized by state authorities, and to examine the legal framework and financial possibilities of the national minorities or the (new) non-dominant groups to which the Baltic German population now belonged.

### 5. Voluntary associations and the concept of civil society

The relevance of voluntary associations in the emergence of modern, democratic societies has been re-introduced into theoretical reflections by the extensive civil society discourse of the last decade. Historically, this connection had already been forcefully underlined by Alexis de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America" (Tocqueville 2000), and may serve as a heuristic starting point. The recent debate has been shaped not least by Robert Putnam's study on civic traditions in Italy (Putnam 1993), which has attracted the attention of historians (Clark 2000: vii-viii) as well as political scientists. This debate focuses on how voluntary associations via the production of trust and communitarian social capital contribute to the establishment of a democratic political culture of active citizens and, thus, also to the foundation of a stable democracy. From a historian's perspective, a major point in contemporary research refers to the impact of historical traditions that link civil society with the earlier association movement. This is a current topic particularly (although not solely) in the transition societies of Eastern Europe as they strive for cultural reorientation, which is mainly sought in national traditions. However, an uncritical view on such a conception of civil society meets criticism from Jürgen Habermas, who, in discussing the relevance of the civil society approach, stressed that the existence of a politically functioning public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) is the major key to the emergence of democratic structures (Habermas 1990: 46-48).<sup>36</sup> Thus he is rather critical of placing the whole importance on voluntary associations, a point that has also been recently addressed by Chris Hann with regard to East Central Europe (Hann 2000: 87).

If one tries to apply a civil society concept to the field of research outlined here, there are three points to discuss:

The first concerns the normative aspect, which shapes the civil society discourse. It has been concluded several times that for social research purposes on Eastern Europe in particular, civil society cannot be applied as a normative concept for judging whether or not a given society is a civil one.<sup>37</sup> For an analytical study one should discuss the "civility" or civil features within a society (Kocka 2000: 19; Rouner 2000). It seems useful to start from a generic description like the one given by Jürgen Kocka, denoting civil society as the space of social self-organization between state, market and private sphere (Kocka 2000: 21). Another definition adds "ordered, nonclandestine, and collective activities" (Bradley 2002: 1094, with reference to Bermeo, Nord 2000). If one were to trace patterns of how collective interests are articulated

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<sup>34</sup> The *Rigaer Schützenverein* of 1859 is a seeming exception.

<sup>35</sup> For this period see in general the contributions in: Aarelaid-Tart 1993.

<sup>36</sup> For English contributions by Habermas and their discussion cf. Bradley 2002: 1097-1098.

<sup>37</sup> On this extensive debate, see Cohen, Arato 1994, and the discussion by Bradley 2002: 1095-1096.



within a society and negotiated with the authorities, then many indications of the social and public relevance of voluntary associations in the fields of education, sciences, culture and welfare (see above) within the Tsarist Empire would become evident. Thus, it is not so much the actual limits set by the authorities that draw our interest, but rather the ways in which cultural and social interests were organized. Such a picture becomes quite colorful when considering that even cultural societies and voluntary fire brigades promoted issues of education and welfare by way of organizing lectures, courses, setting up saving banks, etc.

The second point refers to the already-mentioned “pre-political” role of voluntary associations, or in other words, the political impact of non-political associations. Here, one may again begin with the Habermasian approach, describing cultural associations as the foundation for the emerging political public sphere. As already pointed out, Tsarist Russia and Eastern Europe in general require a perspective that largely differs from the one generally taken with regard to the German and Western cases, for civil society in Tsarist Russia was not based on the freedom of assembly. This is not to say one must assume essential differences between East and West, but the methodology has to be adjusted to the political setting of Eastern Europe. This implies that publicly active political associations must be excluded from our perspective before 1905. Thus, one has to look at where and in what shape the political aspect enters the sphere of voluntary associations, and by the same token, one must discern the associations’ political impact. In regard to long-term impact, it would be more appropriate to speak of sociable and learned activities as having occupied a widely empty political space, instead of a “pre-political” role of voluntary associations. After the organization of political associations was permitted, cultural shaping of society beyond the articulation of social and political interests remained an important feature of the associational sphere in the region.

The relation between sociable and political activities shall be highlighted here with the case of the Baltic Germans since 1905. They emerged as a distinct national group only with the formation of the *Deutsche Vereine* (German Associations), which initially concentrated on educational issues. As school education had been strictly controlled by the imperial authorities in the period of Russification following the 1880s, school societies took on major importance after 1905. Comprising almost 25 percent of the German-speaking population of the Baltic provinces in 1908, these German associations appeared to constitute a social movement. Even after broadening their goals, as was expressed in the shift in name from *Deutscher Schulverein* to *Deutscher Verein*, cultural aims prevailed. Although close interrelations existed between the leaders of the Baltic Constitutional Parties, run by representatives of the Baltic German elites and the *Deutsche Vereine* (Pistohlkors 1994: 439-442; Kinkar 2000: 23-31), clear distinctions were made between the political sphere of the party and the social sphere of the German associations, implying that the latter should comprise the whole German society regardless of individual political affiliations. Henceforth, cultural integration was an aim in itself and different from the organization of political interests through the Baltic Constitutional Party.

This leads to the third point, which concerns the relation between voluntary associations and the public sphere. As revealed by the disputes since the 1860s, the theatre of political action was usually the press, mainly in Riga.<sup>38</sup> While the *Ritterschaften* were generally rather cautious about the role of public opinion and relied on their political backchannels to the authorities, voluntary associations primarily played an important role in setting the stage for the rising national movements of the Latvians and Estonians. From this perspective, voluntary associations appear as part of the political public sphere alongside newspapers and social movements. This notion has been particularly stressed by Ea Jansen and Jaanus Arukaevu in regard to the emergence of a national Estonian public sphere in the 1870s (Jansen, Arukaevu 1995a). Social movements among the Estonians and the Latvians were especially strong around 1880, as demonstrated by the Estonian Alexander school movement and the peasants’ petitions of 1881 in Livonia (which requested the introduction of the *zemstvo* administration in the Baltic provinces), following the revision by Nikolai Manassein (Jansen 1997; Raun 1981). Both movements were mainly

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<sup>38</sup> This topic has been largely discussed since Wittram 1934; for the Russian press, see Renner 2000.

supported by the leading national protagonists, who were organized in Society of the Estonian Literati (*Eesti Kirjameeste Selts*) and the Riga Latvian Association (*Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība*) (Tuglas 1932; for Latvia: Plakans 1981). Nevertheless, the political role of the associations reaches far beyond the organization of a political public sphere, and brings us back to cultural issues.

From a cultural standpoint, one may ask whether the Habermasian *bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit* went along with the *Bürgerlichkeit* of its protagonists. This has been an important topic of the German discussion, where it is underlined that the *bürgerlich* way of association defined modern society (Nipperdey 1972). Since the bourgeoisie as an economically defined group was weak in Northern and Eastern Europe, one may follow Bradley's argument that one has to detach civil society from the bourgeoisie as its "sociological basis" (Bradley 2002: 1101) and refer to the forming of identity through voluntary associations. Thus, *Bürgerlichkeit* would depend on a specific way of forming associations with equal members who focus on a defined purpose. However, as one sees close contacts between the single estates in associations throughout the Baltic region, at least outside of Riga,<sup>39</sup> one might ask whether the associational sphere promoted a specific *bürgerlich* mentality or cultural norms of the upper strata of the *ständisch* society. In the Polish case, where the cultural patterns of the nobility became a model for the new nation, one speaks of the "ennobling" of society (Jaworski, et al. 2000: 282). But such a finding cannot be transferred directly to the Baltic case, as the German nobility was primarily oriented towards the family, not society (Whelan 1999). Nevertheless, it may serve as a starting point for determining the cultural impact of the nobility. It seems one must operate with the tools of both terms here. On the one hand, one sees the contacts between the nobility and civic elites in the town associations but on the other hand, one may notice that – different from the German case – the separation from the *Stände* remained in force, and the literati (*Bildungsbürger*, those graduating from a university) were regarded as their own estate within the *ständisch* society, particularly in the nineteenth century (Lenz 1953) and were hardly a vanguard of a *bürgerlich* elite. Thus, a rather conservative orientation towards the cultural patterns of the "good" society prevailed, and a clear distinction between civic and noble orientation cannot be drawn. In regard to the Baltic region, it is obvious that civil society was not primarily shaped by an anti-feudal tendency, and thus a broader approach than the notion of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is required.<sup>40</sup>

## 6. Voluntary associations and cultural nation building

Having underlined the close inter-relation between the associational sphere and nation building, it is from this angle that the relevance of the national issue on strategies of emancipation and maintaining social standing will be addressed. Such an approach extends the conventional civil society concept discussed so far. Research has often times cited the intrinsic relation between voluntary associations and the building of national structures.<sup>41</sup> In fact, it seems to be impossible to look at one of the features without regarding the other. Therefore, one must again emphasize that voluntary associations played a major role in forming the nations and, thus were also instrumental in society's change from a *ständisch* to a democratic one in the Baltic region. Nation building, however, is not only related to the emergence and advancement of small, non-dominant groups, as is conventionally perceived<sup>42</sup>; it is also about the strategies of the dominating elites for maintaining their position.<sup>43</sup>

The emancipation of the non-dominant group of Estonians has been well researched by Ea Jansen and others (Jansen 1993; Jansen, Arukaevu 1995b; Raun, Plakans 1990), who belong to a long historiographical

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<sup>39</sup> On Riga, see Hirschhausen 1999.

<sup>40</sup> With regard to the contemporary Central and East European societies "in transition", one should also pay attention to the critical question posed by Chris Hann: whether or not the formal structure of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* guarantees civic quality (Hann 2000: 105); this problem, however, refers to the case of Germany in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, too.

<sup>41</sup> For Germany, cf. for instance: Nipperdey 1972; Langewiesche 2000.

<sup>42</sup> See the research initiated by Hroch 1968.

<sup>43</sup> Such a point may be *ex negativo* perceived in Reinhard Wittram's writings, cf. Hackmann 2001.

tradition dating back to Friedbert Tuglas' monograph on *Eesti Kirjameeste Selts* (Tuglas 1932). Unfortunately, we are less informed about the Latvian case, because no monograph on the Latvian Society in Riga has yet appeared; nevertheless, the outlines of the Latvian national associations are visible in some publications (Plakans 1981, 1995; Berzinš, et al. 2000). If one returns to the case of Tartu, close interrelations between cultural, social and public activities within the Estonian association movement are clear. Johann Woldemar Jannsen, the founder of the "first" Estonian association, the *Vanemuine* singing society, was a journalist and editor of the "first" Estonian newspaper, *Eesti Postimees*. He was also the main organizer of the "first" Estonian song festival in 1869, founded the Association of Estonian Farmers (*Eesti Põllumeeste Selts*) in 1870, and gave inspiration for the foundation of *Eesti Kirjameeste Selts*.<sup>44</sup> All in all, one may describe the *Vanemuine Selts* as the centre of the first tier of the Estonian association topography. In its history one can observe the main features of nation building at work: the inclusion of the main strata of the Estonian population, artisans and merchants, literati and peasants; the establishment of a public sphere through newspapers focusing on the Estonian institutions; and the creation of a national cultural sphere. The role of voluntary associations in paving the way for the building of a nation is stressed here because the sometimes fierce conflicts between journalists and newspaper editors, such as Johann Woldemar Jannsen, Carl Robert Jakobson and Ado Grenzstein, and the political differences between Jaan Tõnisson and Konstantin Päts, for instance, might lead us to believe that there was not one Estonian nationalism, but several. The case of *Eesti Kirjameeste Selts* is illustrative in that respect; the political discrepancies between the more radical representatives, such as Jakobson, Johann Köler and Mihkel Veske, and the more conservatives, around Jacob Hurt, led to the dissolution of the society as early as 1893. Nevertheless, the Estonian nation was a joint cultural construction, and remained their common project despite the different political attitudes of the protagonists. Associational life thus contributed to the cultural moulding of the nation. This role becomes particularly visible in the theatre and society buildings of the Estonian cultural associations. Similar statements may be made in regard to Latvia and the role of *Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība* (Hanovs 2000).

Hence, one may speak of a cultural nationalism, which leads us to reflect on the character of nationalism in North Eastern Europe. A comparative look at the Northern European case highlights a rather affirmative and undisputed attitude towards nations and national identity; "Danishness" (Sørensen, Stråth 1997) is an illustrative example. It is mainly due to the non-aggressive notion of the region's "small" nations that they do not entirely match Langewiesche's definition of nationalism as the highest value (Langewiesche 2000: 21) or with Wehler's conclusions on the violent potential of nationalism (Wehler 2000: 90). The crucial point here seems to be the accordance with "civility" as the "appropriate action of citizens in a civil society" (Rouner 2000: 4). This Nordic or Northern type of nationalism, although it has to be cautiously analyzed, is of course a constructed one – yet, as it has only limited discriminatory features, it seems to be widely accepted within the Northern European societies and has served as the model for the other small nations in the Baltic Sea region.

Can such an approach be applied to the Baltic states? The recent discussion on nationalism has already shown that one cannot apply a principal distinction between (a negatively connoted) nationalism and (a positively connoted) national identity or patriotism, nor can one continue the old West-East dichotomy introduced by Hans Kohn – a distinction that can still be found in Adam D. Smith's differentiation between "civic" and "ethnic" nationalism (Smith 2000: 20, Langewiesche 2000: 18). In this respect, I am rather critical of speaking (in historical terms) of an exclusive "ethno-nationalism" if it is understood as being contrary to inclusive state nationalism. It is already conventional wisdom that the old dividing lines between Eastern and Western (ethnic and inclusive) models and pre-modern and modern models do not display fundamental differences – only different phenomena of the same issue, namely collective identity. At first glance, this may be refuted, as features of ethnic democracy can be seen in the contemporary political situation of the Baltic states (Järve 2000). Such a finding might be in agreement with the prevailing contemporary perception of nationalism: It focuses mainly on violent and discriminatory phenomena in Eastern and South Eastern Europe, and it is often shaped by a modernist twentieth-century

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<sup>44</sup> His diary was edited recently: Jannsen 2001.

reading<sup>45</sup> that nationalism is an evil to be replaced by some kind of “globalism.” The manners of deconstructing such phenomena of nationalism are numerous, and they are not very difficult to employ. However, such an approach appears to be insufficient, as we are used to operating with national identity as one of the important factors of the history of mankind (Smith 1991: 143). The dispute between those who pursue a primordial understanding of national identity and those who speak with Benedict Anderson of imagined nations might be resolved in Anthony Smith’s notion of “cultural primordialism” (Smith 2000: 21). This notion underlines the mutable character of nationalism and allows it to be perceived as a social construction. In support of this theory one may cite the widely accepted cultural result of the nationalism in the Baltic region: the emergence of small modern nations from pre-modern society. The Baltic perspective allows a critique of the prevailing discussion on nationalism. Hence, one may speak of the construction of national public spheres, as does Ea Jansen with regard to Estonia (Jansen 1994).

### 7. Voluntary associations, mutual relations and region building in North Eastern Europe

With the general tendency to link the associational culture to the nation-building processes of the Estonians and Latvians, the issue of regionalism, or of the regional shape of the associational sphere, has largely been ignored; it has been primarily regarded as a problem of the “other side” – as an expression of the interests of the feudal, *ständisch*, the German society in decline. The tradition of the song festivals might serve as a litmus test here: Usually, with very few exceptions, Estonian, German, and Latvian authors refer only to their own national genealogy of song festivals, mentioning the others with a few words at most. Cross-ethnic regional coherence received only limited attention during the twentieth century. Indeed, the special, regional character of society in the Baltic provinces was a major argument in the battles with Russian nationalism, as is shown in the writings of Carl Schirren and those of his liberal colleagues. Besides those Baltic German notions<sup>46</sup> of regionalism, there were also several concepts of regionalism among the small nations, comprising the three Baltic nations (in contemporary understanding) as Aleksander Loit has pointed out (Loit 1985), or stressing the Finnish-Estonian connections (Raun 1985). In the 1980s, these different regional discourses led to the discussion of “regional identity under Soviet rule” (Loeber 1990) – regionalism connoting a certain distance from Soviet rule at the periphery.

Two points speak in support of replacing the common perspective of voluntary associations and nationalism with a post-national one, as I will argue here. Besides the specific situation of small nations discussed earlier, nation building in Eastern Europe (including Finland) was closely linked to the interrelations of various ethnic groups. In this respect, nation building was different from the nationalization of a non-national population in the nineteenth century, e.g. that of Southern Germany (Langewiesche 2000: 132-155). It was not limited to homogenization of culture and language – it was shaped by a dynamic rivalry of national integration strategies. Hence, I argue in favor of applying an approach based on the concept of the history of mutual relations (*Beziehungsgeschichte* in German) in writing a multiethnic history.

Such a perspective can be related to three research aspects. The first refers to questions of cultural transfer. As previously indicated, the associational culture of the Baltic provinces was closely related to other regions in various ways: The choral societies as well as the students’ corporations were obviously inspired by German associations and models, whereas the temperance societies spread to the Baltic region through Sweden and Finland (Jansson 1993: 147-148). An impact was also made by all-Russian organizations, such as the Russian Technical Society, which in 1881 began organizing lectures in Tallinn in cooperation with Estonian associations (Rosenthal 1912: 258-262). Thus, there are different research approaches to the history of voluntary associations in the Baltic region. Following the paradigm of European culture of the small nations engenders what might be called an “ethnocentric” perspective; attending to the processes of cultural transfer and diffusion leads to *Beziehungsgeschichte*. This latter perspective is far from the ideological *Kulturträger* approach, as it has nothing to do with legitimizing or claiming political power. The focus on reciprocal processes of cultural influences and confluence must henceforth be

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<sup>45</sup> For instance: Mommsen 1992.

<sup>46</sup> This has been outlined by Pistohlkors 1984, 1987; cf. the critical response by Rebas 1988 and the recent remarks by Whelan 1999: 217-218.

placed into a specific regional framework to remove them from the dominant national discourses related to small nations theory or to the imperial perspective of a “civilizing” nation. As outlined above, there is no doubt the contribution of voluntary associations to the nation building of the non-dominant ethnic groups is a major issue, but here I argue for a wider perspective. The research field of cultural transfer<sup>47</sup> is obviously broad; not only does it include transferred patterns on fields of terminology, literature and music, art and architecture, and patterns of sociability, for example, but also how these features were perceived and adapted into the countries’ “own” cultural products.

A second point of *Beziehungsgeschichte* refers to the inter-relations between associations within a multiethnic region. In 1865 Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, the editor of the Estonian epos *Kalevipoeg*, demanded that an Estonian learned society of the Estonian literati be modelled after the Finnish Literary Society (*Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura*) of 1831 in Helsinki. This move implied a distinction from the already-existing Learned Estonian Society (*Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft/ Õpetatud Eesti Selts*) in Tartu, even though it was the latter society that had published *Kalevipoeg*, the counterpart to the Finnish epos *Kalevala*. A similar rivalry can be detected in Riga, where the leaders of *Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība* were excluded from the *Lettisch-Litterarische Gesellschaft/Latviešu Draugu Biedrība* in 1881 (Pistohlkors 1994: 389). Indeed, multiethnic history is a dynamic process that requires a more precise look and differentiated perspective than just one focused on cohabitation or conflict of different static ethnic groups. I propose that future research look closely at changes in “associational topography”; this research approach would attempt to locate the associational structure of a town or region by looking at the premises of its associations and the activities taking place there. For Tartu, this approach reveals that some of the associations were between the German and Estonian public spheres. Close connections can be found between different societies, across the different types of associations<sup>48</sup> and across social<sup>49</sup> and ethnic<sup>50</sup> borders. These ties also tell of the cultural rivalry and cultural markers visible in the theatre and society buildings of the Estonian singing societies as Vanemuine in Tartu, Estonia in Tallinn, and *Endla* in Pärnu.<sup>51</sup>

Besides the previously mentioned “cult of family” found among the nobility (Whelan 1999) and political measures to suppress the Estonian and Latvian nationalist propaganda, which are visible in attempts by the *Livländische Ritterschaft* against Jakobson’s newspaper *Sakala* around 1880,<sup>52</sup> there is another regional feature connected to the point of multiethnic associational interrelations. One of the strategies employed by the traditional Baltic (German) elites for maintaining their status was to apply a civil society strategy for their own national interest;<sup>53</sup> they simply founded their own *Deutsche Vereine*. Impressed by the success of the Latvian and Estonian associations, the foundation of a German mass association was an intentional strategy developed in Riga c. 1900, which broke with traditional attitudes that predisposed these elite to be distant from the public sphere. Attempts were made to integrate the lower strata into the “good” society as a national one. Of course, this Baltic German strategy must also be viewed against the background of the *alldeutsch* policy of the *Reich* and contacts to *Deutschtumspolitik* in the Habsburg Empire (Chickering 1984; Weidenfeller 1976). Yet it seems that the influence of such contacts was not predominant among the Baltic German population before the First World War. Until that time, the German strategy of maintaining hegemony did not leave the framework of loyalty and cultural nationalism within the Tsarist Empire. This might be explained through an analysis of the *Heimatlied* by Christoph von Mickwitz, which was originally composed on the occasion of the centenary of Tartu University but later became the hymn of the Baltic Germans. Its content is much closer to Johan Ludvig

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<sup>47</sup> See also, the general remarks by: Middell 2001.

<sup>48</sup> For instance, between *Vanemuine*, *Eesti Kirjameeste Selts* and *Eesti Põllumeeste Selts*, as indicated above.

<sup>49</sup> Between *Musse* and *Handwerker-Verein*.

<sup>50</sup> Between *Vanemuine* and *Handwerker-Verein*.

<sup>51</sup> For further details, see my paper “Redefining urban space. Cultural associations in Estonian towns (c. 1860-1960)” at the Sixth International Conference on Urban History, Edinburgh, September 4-7, 2002 [http://www.esh.ed.ac.uk/urban\\_history/text/hackmannS26.doc](http://www.esh.ed.ac.uk/urban_history/text/hackmannS26.doc)

<sup>52</sup> EAA, f. 296, nim. 5, f. 2758, fol. 151-163v, 164-188v.

<sup>53</sup> For examples, see: Schilling 1908; this approach did not develop much past the stage of conception, and was only partly put in action.

Runeberg's anthem for Finland ("vårt land" of 1846)<sup>54</sup> than to an *alldeutsch* reading of *Deutschland Deutschland über alles*, as it praises the land, not the ethnic identity of the singing "we." That such tentative tensions between an expansionist German nationalism propagated by the German Empire and a cultural nationalism of the Baltic Germans did not produce an immediate conflict might be explained by Langewiesche's concept of federative German nationalism, in which regional *Heimaten* had a distinct place (Langewiesche 2000: 79).

The third aspect of the regional approach refers to the scholarly shaping of a supranational framework of associational culture. Such an approach has been undertaken by Torkel Jansson, who speaks of a Balto-Scandinavian setting (Jansson 1993, 1994, 1996), thereby filling a concept of the early twentieth century with new contents.<sup>55</sup> Another traditional German approach would be the talk of a German-shaped Baltic region (*deutsche Ostseeprovinzen*) following the example of Julius Eckardt and others, to combine cultural relations with a judgment on the cultural mission of the Germans.

In addition to the Balto-Scandinavian and Germano-centric regional mapping of associational culture, another pattern may be derived from the "civil society against the state" notion based on a comparison of the social, national and political functions of voluntary associations in other regions of the Tsarist Empire; Poland and Finland must be mentioned first and foremost. Voluntary associations provided the basis for forming national units in opposition, or at least apart from, the central state's institutions. A broader perspective might include the national emancipation of the Poles and Lithuanians in Prussia and the Slavic nations of the Habsburg Empire. But there are at least some reasons for separating a smaller, North Eastern European region from such a large one. With regard to the outlined special framework of Russia, one clearly notices the differences in the northeast, where open political organizations emerged only recently, as did sectors of the associational sphere that were politicized elsewhere (gymnastic clubs, for instance; confessional aspects and features of loyalty might be named as other differing aspects).

If one takes a closer look at the aspect of how society is shaped through voluntary associations, then one sees similarities with the associational culture among the "small" nations in the Baltic Sea region. These comparative features allow us to apply a concept of North Eastern Europe consisting of three aspects: Firstly, the cultural orientation of the small East Baltic nations towards the Northern European ones<sup>56</sup>; secondly, close cultural relations to Germany; and thirdly, the role of the association movement in shaping modern societies.<sup>57</sup> This North Eastern European perspective is not only defined by territorial delimitations towards East, North, and (East) Central Europe, but focuses on similar traits and trans-regional interferences. In this respect, one may relate the associational culture to Scandinavian history, where it forms an important feature of social self-understanding.<sup>58</sup> The relevance of the temperance movement and rural associations might be mentioned here, but there are many more relations, particularly between Finnish and Estonian associations.

## 8. Concluding remarks

My concluding remarks refer firstly to the question: What is new with such a regional and post-national approach as compared to the conventional national approach that looks at the associational sphere from a functionalist angle? In looking at the contemporary historical discourses in the Baltic nations, one may notice blank spots, as the discussions clearly centre on the Estonian and Latvian ethnic groups. Even there, where more sophisticated perspectives are revealed, a holistic view on the region is still missing. These perspectives are not based on the assumption of a primordial national identity, but on social construction and the emergence of national public spheres, as in regard to Estonia, for instance (Jansen 1994). Thus, the

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<sup>54</sup> It was translated into Estonian by J. V. Jannsen for the song festival of 1869, and became the Estonian national anthem in 1920.

<sup>55</sup> For further details, see Lehti 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Hackmann 2002.

<sup>57</sup> This will be explained in the forthcoming book: Götz, Hackmann 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. the contributions in: Scandinavian Journal of History 13:4, 1988.

old function of historians as nation builders still plays vividly there, as is also the case in other transition societies.

Secondly, one may ask whether a specific Baltic associational culture exists. In my understanding, there are specific patterns of interaction and orientation among the societies on the East Baltic rim. As a key to their approach one may transfer the quotation ascribed to Johan Vilhelm Snellman (Jutikkala 1976: 277-279): “Let us be Finns” (because we cannot be Swedes and don’t want to be Russians) to the Estonians: “Let us be Estonians” (because we neither want to be Germans nor Russians, nor can we become Northern Europeans). But as Snellman was a Swede transforming himself into a political and linguistic Finn, this leads to another question: What about the Baltic Germans? A slogan like “Let us be Estonians (or Latvians, respectively)” could have been expressed by very few people; the most prominent example one might think of was Paul Schiemann, the liberal German journalist from Riga and promoter of minority rights in the inter-war period. This specific situation of the Baltic Germans was obviously due to the fact that the *ständische Ordnung* continued as a mental attitude, and the German Balts finally could become Germans; some had already done so in the first decades of the twentieth century, and the majority – although hardly voluntarily – in 1939/1940. These specific interrelations might be illustrated with the discourses on architecture in Estonia and Latvia showing different patterns of public representation and cultural orientation.

The last question centers on the impact of voluntary association research on contemporary societies in North Eastern Europe. As I have argued here, my emphasis is on analysis of the mutual relations of nation building and region building processes in the region. If one describes the results as cultural nationalisms, then one must also look at their relevance and limits. Today, voluntary associations form an important element of cultural memory. The importance of this topic for Estonian scholars is undisputed, and is thus of more or less significance for the society as a whole. One sees the traditions of civil society revealing a political influence as identity politics, first of all. This may be illustrated by the re-foundation of associations such as *Õpetatud Eesti Selts*. This issue has been discussed here in the Estonian case, but it is also visible in all other transition societies. Although no micro-study has been presented here, the attempt has been to locate an important social concept as a cornerstone of a region that may be described as North Eastern Europe. Comparing the interwar situation with East Central European cases, one may hypothesize that its social and political conflicts were less acute than in many other regions. Of course, one cannot claim that the emergence of civil society predicts the emergence of civility within a society *ad infinitum*, but it may contribute to an explanation of the forces of de-Sovietization in the region.

If one were to reiterate the long-term impact of the associational culture addressed at the beginning, it would be clear that this impact is not strictly limited to the national perspective. Although the national perspective is still predominant, there is an undertone that refers to patterns of associational culture in general. While one may speak – following Langewiesche – of nationalism in nineteenth-century Germany as materializing in regional forms, one might say that seen from the Baltic perspective regionalism in North Eastern Europe is materializing in national forms.

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