

## ARTICLE

### **Civil Society and Biopolitics in Contemporary Russia: The Case of Russian “Daddy-Schools”\***

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**ABSTRACT:** This article deals with civil society organizations active in the field of family policy and demographic issues in contemporary Russia. This article uses Michel Foucault’s concepts of biopolitics and governmentality and later developments discussing technologies of citizenship. More specifically, using interviews, documents, and participant observations, so-called “daddy-schools” that have emerged in and around Saint Petersburg since 2008, are studied as a mode of governmentality. The analysis shows how the civic initiative studied attempted to empower fathers and how it has altered demographic discourses while approaching similar societal goals as the state does in its biopolitical strategies. Thus, the daddy-schools provide a complementary discourse concerning fatherhood while approaching the same perceived demographic crisis that the Russian state is challenged by.

**Keywords:** Civil society, biopolitics, governmentality, technologies of citizenship, fatherhood, Russia

#### **Introduction**

Russia has experienced significant demographic problems with a population decline of around 0.5% annually for the last twenty years (in total a decline of about eight million individuals since 1991). The Russian state has chosen to combat this issue primarily by attempting to increase fertility. All in all, the Russian state has been very active in attempting to cope with the demographic development, for instance, by developing family and population policies.

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\* I want to thank Johnny Rodin Ph.D. for the joint work in gathering the material this article is based upon. Earlier versions of this article have been presented at the “Seminar series on civil society and its organizations,” Stockholm, Sweden, September 2014 and at ARNOVA’s (Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action) 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference in Denver, Colorado, November 2014. I thank the participants in those forums for their comments and questions. I also wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for valuable input and constructive criticism. Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude for the funding made available by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies.

This policy work and the general interest from the state in demographic issues is related to what Michel Foucault called biopolitics.<sup>1</sup>

As will be elaborated on below, biopolitics brings issues concerning demography, health, reproduction, and family relations to the forefront of politics, which, given the demographic developments in Russia and the ensuing activity of the Russian state in this field, makes it an interesting conceptual tool to use. By adding the indirect governing principles inherent in the concept of governmentality, we also broaden the perspective on potentially influential actors.

Although previous studies have criticized Foucault's work for being too Western-oriented<sup>2</sup> and thus perhaps not universally applicable, I agree with Plamper in contending that the toolbox developed by Foucault needs to be tested on a case-by-case basis in different empirical contexts,<sup>3</sup> which is also what this article will contribute to.

Contemporary Russia can be argued to be an interesting context for an analysis of biopolitics. Although power became centralized during the last decade, the individual sphere has not been de-privatized as in Soviet society. Contemporary Russian society can be considered an interesting blend of liberal and conservative features.

With the Russian demographic situation as a background, civic initiatives and civil society organizations have also emerged. Here, we will look closely at one of these and study the emergence and development of Russian so-called "daddy-schools," i.e. spaces for fathers-to-be to meet, exchange experiences, fears and expectations. From the point of view of the daddy-schools the aim is also to expose the fathers to a particular set of fatherhood norms, with the purpose of promoting change in the behaviors of fathers.

In post-Soviet state discourse, as manifested in population and welfare policies, the focus has mostly been placed on the mothers, whereas fathers and fatherhood are marginalized.<sup>4</sup> If a fatherhood image is portrayed at all, it is that of a traditional breadwinner whose relation to the children is not emphasized. This is a legacy of the Soviet fatherhood discourse that emphasized men as workers and defenders of the country and women as the mothers and the primary care givers.<sup>5</sup> However, the daddy-schools, mentioned above, attempt to promote something quite different, an ideal of a more active and nurturing father who takes part in all aspects of family life and the rearing of children, including nurturing tasks. Thus, this could to some extent be understood as a counter-discourse to that of the Russian state but also as a

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics; Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Laura Engelstein, "Combined Underdevelopment: Discipline and the Law in Imperial and Soviet Russia," *American Historical Review*, vol. 98, no. 2 (April 1993), 338-353.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Plamper, "Foucault's Gulag," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring 2002), 255-280.

<sup>4</sup> Johnny Rodin and Pelle Åberg, "Fatherhood Across Space and Time: Russia in Perspective," *Baltic Worlds*, vol. 6, no. 3-4 (December 2013), 21-28; Anna Rotkirch, "The Man Question; Loves and Lives in Late 20th Century Russia" (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, Dept of Social Policy Research Report 1/2000).

<sup>5</sup> Zhanna Chernova, "Model' sovetского otsovstva: diskursivnye predpisanija," [Model of Soviet fatherhood: discursive prescriptions] in Yelena Zdravomysleva and Anna Temkina (eds.), *Rossiiskii Gendernyi Poriadok* [Russian gender order] (Saint Petersburg: European University of Saint Petersburg, 2007), 138-168.

complementary discourse, using a different approach to handle the same situation and problem the state is faced with. This ties into two different possible roles for civil society identified in previous research: (1) to be a complement to the state and, (2) to be a source of resistance to the state and the governors. The latter is what Foucault called counter-conduct.

Thus, this article investigates how we can understand the emergence and position of Russian "daddy-schools" by using the conceptual toolbox of Michel Foucault and, more specifically, the question asked is how the daddy-schools and their activities can be understood as a mode of governmentality.

Hence, the focus is on the Russian context and discourses of fatherhood in contemporary Russia and, more specifically, on the civic initiative of daddy-schools that has emerged in Northwestern Russia during the last seven years.

To approach the issues raised above, the article will proceed as follows: after a note on the methods used and the material that has been analyzed, we review the main concepts of this article, such as biopolitics, governmentality, civil society and fatherhood, and also discuss them in relation to the empirical context, i.e. Russia. Subsequently, we turn to the empirical analysis of the Russian daddy-schools before concluding with general remarks and highlighting the most important findings and their potential for generalization.

### **A Note on Methods and Material**

This article is based on analyses of primary empirical material in the form of interviews with those who are active in the daddy-schools as moderators (i.e. the individuals who guide the groups of fathers that meet in the activities) and organizers. Nine individual interviews were conducted and since around ten daddy-schools existed at the time the material was gathered in 2012 and 2013, almost all entities are covered by this material.<sup>6</sup> In addition, a focus group interview was conducted with six moderators.

Apart from interviews, participant observations were conducted in three different daddy-school groups, two in Saint Petersburg and one in Novgorod.

Finally, internal as well as more public documents from the daddy-schools were analyzed as well as state-issued policy documents, presidential speeches, etc.

### **Governmentality, Biopolitics and Family Relations**

Since the empirical focus of this article is on issues related to demography and more specifically both private and public aspects of parenthood, Foucault's notion of biopolitics is a relevant concept to use in the analysis.

What truths a certain discourse about proper family life, motherhood, fatherhood, and child-upbringing establish, and what kind of power relations are created, lie at the core of biopolitics. Foucault stated that: "biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem."<sup>7</sup> Thus, social processes that influence the living conditions of the

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<sup>6</sup> The number of moderators who are active in one daddy-school are between one and three.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, translated by David Macey (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 245.

population and, indeed, the population itself, are quintessential for government and are an area in which governors can practice surveillance, interventions, and design policies to influence their development.<sup>8</sup>

Biopolitics thus concerns both an interest in the individual body but also in the “species body,” which brings questions of demography and how to govern the health, sexuality, reproduction, and family life of the population to the forefront of politics and state concern. In the modern state, the population and its vitality is deemed to be an asset of the state, among other resources. It is necessary to control and take care of such resources since they function as tools to advance the position of the state in the international geo-political struggle between nations. Thus, the reproductive behaviour of individual members of society is interconnected with issues of power and national interests.<sup>9</sup>

The concept of governmentality was originally used by Foucault to discuss ways for governors to administer the population in the modern state. However, its meaning was subsequently broadened to include how to govern individuals and populations at different levels, i.e. not exclusively concerning the administrative or political level of society. This makes the concept of governmentality interesting for civil society studies. In the particular context of this article it also connects with the empirical context since relations in the family, between man and woman and parents and child, are significantly influenced by sociocultural conditions. One of the most important social conditions is governmentality as it involves how control, management and administration are exercised by the state as well as the ways through which the modern autonomous individual exercises self-control in family life, in the rearing of children, and concerning the economy of the household.<sup>10</sup> Thus, governmentality also concerns how to make individuals govern themselves in a certain way.<sup>11</sup>

In a Foucauldian spirit, the process of making sense of a demographic development such as the Russian one, described briefly in the introduction, can be seen as being shaped by a certain governmentality. It can be argued that in modern societies, state power is wielded less through the use of direct power over subjects, using legislation, discipline and punishment, but to a greater extent through regularization where the state is active through exper-

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<sup>8</sup> Bruce Curtis, “Foucault on Governmentality and Population: the Impossible Discovery,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Autumn 2002), 505-533.

<sup>9</sup> Samantha Ashenden, “Questions of Criticism: Habermas and Foucault on Civil Society and Resistance,” in Samantha Ashenden and David Owen (eds.), *Foucault contra Habermas; Recasting the Dialogue between Genealogy and Critical Theory* (London: Sage, 1999); Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*; Colin Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,” in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 5; Roddy Nilsson, *Foucault—en introduktion* [Foucault—An introduction] (Malmö: Égalité, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Lemke, “‘The Birth of Biopolitics’: Michel Foucault’s lecture at Collège de France on Neo-liberal Governmentality,” *Economy and Society*, vol. 30, no. 2 (May 2001), 190-207; Cf. Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Curtis, “Foucault on Governmentality and Population”; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*; Nilsson, *Foucault—en introduktion*, 124.

tise-giving and norm-setting. Again, this kind of governmentality is concerned with finding ways to make individuals govern themselves in a particular way.<sup>12</sup>

Even though the state and the welfare system of a particular society remain important actors for constructing and establishing this kind of standard, other actors, such as scientific experts and the media are important norm-setters in today's society. Also, civil society actors are often perceived as important norm-setters, public opinion creators and disseminators of independent information. Thus, civil society can influence societal norms and the construction of public discourses.<sup>13</sup>

Messages sent by those perceived to be authoritative actors, as discussed here, are part of exercises of power since such messages are internalized by individuals in society and have implications for what is perceived as either appropriate or inappropriate behavior. Thus, the knowledge created and disseminated by various actors, including the state and civil society, become tools of power. With the empirical focus of this article in mind, relevant messages can for instance concern the view on what a family should look like, or appropriate sexual relations.<sup>14</sup> What is important about modern governmentality is that it not only concerns governing other people or the conduct of other people but also how individuals govern themselves, which relates to what Foucault discussed as technologies of the self.<sup>15</sup> Barbara Cruikshank has also offered ideas of "technologies of citizenship," which:

[...]is a manner of governing that relies not on institutions, organized violence or state power but on securing the voluntary compliance of citizens [...]. Technologies of citizenship are voluntary and coercive at the same time; the actions of citizens are regulated, but only after the capacity to act as a certain kind of citizen with certain aims is instilled.<sup>16</sup>

Different state as well as non-state actors can for example set out to deliver programs (i.e. technologies of citizenship) as a way to deal with social problems of different kinds.<sup>17</sup> In the empirical analysis below we will see how the activities of the daddy-schools can be framed in such a way. And, these different techniques can be used in order to empower people by

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<sup>12</sup> Curtis, "Foucault on Governmentality and Population"; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*; Nilsson, *Foucault—en introduction*.

<sup>13</sup> Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization*, vol. 52, no. 4 (Autumn 1998), 887-917; Trine Flockhart, "Complex Socialization and the Transfer of Democratic Norms," in Trine Flockhart (ed.), *Socializing Democratic Norms—The Role of International Organizations for the Construction of Europe* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 43-62.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, Essential words of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 1*, edited by Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 2000), 225; Cf. Ian Burkitt, "Technologies of the Self," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, vol. 32, no. 2 (June 2002), 219-237.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

providing them with “help to self-help,” which resembles both Foucault’s notion of technologies of the self as well as the practices of the Russian daddy-schools, as will be further demonstrated below.

### **Civil Society**

Civil society has been a fashionable concept during the last 25 years. The conceptual history of civil society, however, goes far back in history, to ancient Greece and the very first expressions of democratic theory. Its popularity has varied over time but the concept, as it is most frequently encountered today, finds much of its origin in the Scottish enlightenment and scholars such as Adam Ferguson, Francis Hutcheson, and Adam Smith. Also Foucault argues that a massive redefinition of the concept took place in the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

Civil society is also a concept where no generally accepted definition can be found. Scholars differ in their views on the relations that exist, or should exist, between civil society, family, the state and the market, although nowadays civil society is most frequently viewed as separate from these other societal spheres.<sup>19</sup> The potential roles that civil society, voluntary organizations, and voluntary work performed by individuals can fill are also debated. Empirically as well as theoretically it is possible to discern at least two general roles connected to the relationship between civil society and the state. One is the classic idea of civil society as an arena for watchdogs that monitor and resist the state and government when needed.<sup>20</sup> Another common role ascribed to civil society organizations is that of providing services, where the work of voluntary organizations and individual volunteers can complement the welfare state.<sup>21</sup>

According to Foucault, making a distinction between civil society and the state, mentioned above as the most common way of understanding that relationship among civil society scholars today, is not a fruitful approach. In this line of thought, civil society does not exist as a separate sphere naturally positioned outside of and in opposition to the state and power. It is

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<sup>18</sup> Leonora Angeles and Penny Gurstein, “Introduction: Learning Civil Societies for Democratic Planning and Governance,” in Penny Gurstein and Leonora Angeles (eds.), *Learning Civil Societies: Shifting Contexts for Democratic Planning and Governance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Michael Bernhard, “Civil Society and Democratic Transition in East Central Europe,” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 108, no. 2 (Summer 1993), 307-326; Thomas Carothers, “Civil Society,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 117 (Winter 1999), 18-29; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 297f.

<sup>19</sup> Ashenden, “Questions of Criticism,” 146; Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Civil Sphere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Diamond. John Keane, “Civil Society in the Era of Monitory Democracy,” in Lars Trägårdh, Nina Witoszek and Bron Taylor (eds.), *Civil Society in the Age of Monitory Democracy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Helmut K. Anheier, *Civil Society: Measurement, Evaluation, Policy* (London: Earthscan Publications, 2004); Angela M. Eikenberry and Jodie Drapal Kluver, “The Marketization of the Nonprofit Sector: Civil Society at Risk?” *Public Administration Review*, vol. 64, no. 2 (March-April 2004), 132-140.

not a space that is external to the state but rather a space where government takes place. Thus, civil society is as much about power relations and the exercise of power as the state is.<sup>22</sup>

Civil society is, I believe, a concept of governmental technology, or rather, it is the correlate of a technology of government [...]. It is not an historical-natural given which functions in some way as both the foundation of and source of opposition to the state or political institutions. Civil society is not a primary and immediate reality; it is something which forms part of modern governmental technology.<sup>23</sup>

This does not mean that civil society, for Foucault, is simply a tool for governors. According to his conceptualization of civil society, it can also challenge existing power relations and governing processes, what he called “counter-conduct.”<sup>24</sup> In civil society, new, innovative techniques for government can be developed.<sup>25</sup>

What a Foucauldian understanding of civil society brings is a perspective that does not depart from a taken-for-granted separation between the state and civil society but rather opens up the possibility of many different actors, both state actors, non-state actors, and others, taking part in governance.

Government is for Foucault thus defined in terms of the “conduct of conducts,” involving a range of techniques and practices, performed by different actors, aimed to shape, guide, and direct individuals’ and groups’ behavior and actions in particular directions<sup>26</sup>

Thus, since power, according to Foucault, permeates all parts of life and society, rather than being more exclusively wielded by the state, this perspective allows us to interrogate the very

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<sup>22</sup> Ashenden, “Questions of Criticism,” 154-157; Acar Kutay, *Governance and European Civil Society: Governmentality, Discourse and NGOs* (London: Routledge, 2014), 36; Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, “Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 43, no. 2 (June 1992), 173-205; Cf. Gordon, “Governmental Rationality,” 23.

<sup>23</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 296f.

<sup>24</sup> Mathieu Potte-Bonneville, “Must We Defend Society? Governmentality, Civil Society, and Political Activism According to Michel Foucault,” in Michel Feher with Gaëlle Krikorian and Yates McKee (eds.), *Nongovernmental Politics* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 617f; Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population; Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Cf. Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?” in Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (trans.), *The Politics of Truth* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007); Carl Death, “Counter-conducts: A Foucauldian Analytics of Protest,” *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*, vol. 9, no. 3 (August 2010), 235-251; Cf. Graham Burchell, “Peculiar Interests: Civil Society and Governing ‘The System of Natural Liberty’,” in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Ashenden, “Questions of Criticism,” 154.

<sup>26</sup> Ole Jacob Sending and Iver B. Neumann, “Governance to Governmentality: Analyzing NGOs, States, and Power,” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 3 (September 2006), 656.

separation between state and civil society as well as other societal domains.<sup>27</sup> Hence, power relations are central to an understanding of civil society as well as of the state and there is no inherent conflict between civil society and the political power of the state.<sup>28</sup>

We will now move on to contextualizing the empirical phenomena before turning to the analysis of the Russian daddy-schools. Thus, first, civil society in Russia will be briefly discussed, followed by an analysis of fatherhood according to previous research, and consideration of the discourses concerning fatherhood that exist in Russia, today as well as those that existed during Soviet times.

### **Civil Society in Russia**

Many studies have dealt with civil society in Russia, discussing historical legacies, the potential weakness of civil society in many parts of the former Soviet Union and the post-communist space, etc. Looking back through time, there is no consensus concerning whether there was any “real” civil society during Soviet times or, if so, what that civil society was. In the same way, there is no contemporary consensus regarding the status of civil society in Russia. However, it is often stated that there was an upsurge of civil society organizations and collective action during the late 1980s. This was followed by a sharp decline in activity during the 1990s and there have been indications of a new upsurge in the last decade.<sup>29</sup>

In a Soviet and post-Soviet context, such as the Russian one, it is an interesting challenge to try to avoid a separation between civil society and the state. To a large extent, the relation was, especially during Soviet times, very much construed as civil society *against* the state.<sup>30</sup> It was also the events around the time of the breakdown of the Soviet Union that very much made civil society into a fashionable concept again, due to its perceived role in the transition as a challenger to the authoritarian system.

Concerning contemporary Russia, there is research indicating that a Russian-style civil society is emerging, in which civil society actors and organizations “maintain strong and dependent relationships with the state.”<sup>31</sup> This is also due to political and legislative developments in Russia during the last decade by which the state has been strengthened, leading to the current situation where the state also greatly influences civil society development.<sup>32</sup> In recent decades, the Russian state has also reduced the space for, and freedom of, civil society

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<sup>27</sup> James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, “Spatializing states: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality,” *American Ethnologist*, vol. 29, no. 4 (November 2002), 981-1002; Cf. Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower*, 58.

<sup>28</sup> Sending and Neumann, “Governance to Governmentality,” 658.

<sup>29</sup> Sergej Ljubownikow, Jo Crotty and Peter W. Rodgers, “The State and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia: The Development of a Russian-style Civil Society,” *Progress in Development Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2 (April 2013), 153-166; Marcia A. Weigle, *Russia’s Liberal Project; State-Society Relations in the Transition from Communism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2000); Marcia A. Weigle, “On the Road to the Civic Forum: State and Civil Society from Yeltsin to Putin,” *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Spring 2002), 117-146.

<sup>30</sup> Marc Morjé Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Cf. Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*.

<sup>31</sup> Ljubownikow, Crotty and Rodgers, “The State and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia,” 154.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



organizations through a number of legislative changes. Thus, the state has attempted to gain greater control over civil society and voluntary organizations.<sup>33</sup> However, this control appears to be aimed mainly at contentious action, whereas more service-oriented activities and organizations experience greater freedom. As long as the state does not perceive the activities as contentious or political, civic initiatives are tolerated and can even be supported.

Thus, as long as civil society activities are in alignment with state interests, or at least not in opposition to those interests, they have room but there may be less space available for the kind of “counter-conduct,” mentioned above. However, in the actual activities of various organizations and initiatives, technologies of citizenship can be employed and, as we will see, that is the case with the Russian daddy-schools.

### **Soviet and Post-Soviet Biopolitics and Fatherhood**

Issues of parenthood, including fatherhood, have become highly politicized as a demographic crisis has evolved in Russia over the last twenty years, as mentioned in the introduction. Fatherhood can be understood as a politicized social construction, which is located in the intersection between the public and the private. Discourses on fatherhood are expressions of a struggle between different normative pressures from political, religious and social authorities and institutions as well as from more personal and private relations.<sup>34</sup> This also implies that the meaning of fatherhood is contextually bound, both in space and time. How individuals live up to ideas about good or appropriate fatherhood, and indeed what is meant by “good” and “appropriate” here, is bound to the history and the socio-political context or, more concretely, to the ideologies and practices of being a father.<sup>35</sup>

In many contexts, the predominant role for the father has traditionally been that of the family provider, or the “breadwinner.” The breadwinner model portrays the father’s role in the family as securing the fulfillment of the material needs of the family and being the responsible decision-maker. He is, however, not expected to take much part in childrearing or other household-tasks. The man’s primary role is in relation to the public sphere while he is less intimately involved with the private sphere.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Elena Chebankova, “The Evolution of Russia’s Civil Society under Vladimir Putin: A Cause for Concern or Grounds for Optimism?” *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, vol. 10, no. 3 (September 2009), 394-415; Jo Crotty, “Making a Difference? NGOs and Civil Society Development in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 61, no. 1 (January 2009), 85-108; Christian Fröhlich, “Civil society and the state intertwined: the case of disability NGOs in Russia,” *East European Politics*, vol. 28, no. 4 (December 2012), 371-389.

<sup>34</sup> Barbara Hobson and David Morgan, “Introduction: Making Men into Fathers,” in Barbara Hobson (ed.) *Making Men into Fathers: Men, Masculinities and the Social Politics of Fatherhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-24.

<sup>35</sup> William Doherty, Edward Kouneski and Martha Erickson, “Responsible Fathering: An Overview and Conceptual Framework,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 60, no. 2 (May 1998), 277-292; Ralph LaRossa, “Fatherhood and Social Change,” *Family Relations*, vol. 37, no. 4 (October 1988), 451-457; William Marsiglio *et al.*, “Scholarship on Fatherhood in the 1990s and Beyond,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 62, no. 4 (November 2000), 1173-1191.

<sup>36</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.); Michael Lamb, “The History of Research on Father Involvement,” *Marriage & Family Review*, vol. 29, no. 2-3 (2000), 23-42.

However, today there is an alternative notion alive in many contexts where the father is expected to be more active in all aspects of family life. The expectation on the father to be the sole provider has given way to an expectation of a more equal relationship between man and woman in the family in which both partners should have the opportunity, and obligation, to balance work and family life. In this fatherhood model, sometimes called the “new,” “responsible,” or “active” fatherhood, the father should take on a nurturing and caring role *vis-à-vis* the children. Thus, the father is expected to take on a greater role in the private sphere.<sup>37</sup>

Previous research argues that, even though fatherhood in one way is intimately connected to the private sphere, more active fatherhood also has various public and societal benefits. Active, or responsible, fathers are suggested to be a contributing factor in reducing domestic violence, improving both the health of mothers, fathers, and children and promoting improved gender equality, among other things.<sup>38</sup> Given the Russian demographic situation, and with the assumption that the positive aspects proposed to result from more active fatherhood hold true, such a change in fatherhood norms and the behavior of fathers could be viewed as beneficial from a biopolitical point of view.

In the Russian context, the development of fatherhood ideals has been different from the Western European and American experiences.<sup>39</sup> The Soviet system and the gender contract that was part of that system led to certain developments concerning views on family, parenthood, and fatherhood. Issues of demography and fertility were also prominent during Soviet times and the population was seen as a necessary resource for the state, which clearly connects to Foucault’s concept of biopolitics.<sup>40</sup> Thus, studies were conducted of fertility trends, but the focus of this research was solely on women. Men were not viewed as important in decisions concerning reproduction. However, to women, motherhood was not only a right and something that should entitle them support, but was also a *duty* to society.<sup>41</sup>

The most prominent feature of the Soviet father was his lack of a clear role. Fathers were largely ignored both by societal institutions and by society.<sup>42</sup> His place was in the public sphere as a worker and a defender of the motherland. In the private sphere of the family he did not really have a purpose since the state had taken over the role as the main provider.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Kirsi Eränta and Johanna Moisander, “Psychological Regimes of Truth and Father Identity: Challenges for Work/Life Integration,” *Organization Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4 (April 2011), 509–526; Stephen Williams, “What is Fatherhood? Searching for the Reflective Father,” *Sociology*, vol. 42, no. 3 (June 2008), 487–502.

<sup>38</sup> Kimmel. Alice Rossi, “Gender and Parenthood,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 49, no. 1 (February 1984), 1–19.

<sup>39</sup> See Rodin and Åberg, “Fatherhood Across Space and Time.”

<sup>40</sup> Michele Rivkin-Fish, “Anthropology, Demography, and the Search for a Critical Analysis of Fertility: Insights from Russia,” *American Anthropologist*, vol. 105, no. 2 (June 2003), 291.

<sup>41</sup> Michele Rivkin-Fish, “From ‘Demographic Crisis’ to ‘Dying Nation’: The Politics of Language and Reproduction in Russia,” in Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux (eds.), *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 151-173.

<sup>42</sup> Chernova, “Model’ sovet’skogo otsovstva,” 139.

<sup>43</sup> Rodin and Åberg, “Fatherhood Across Space and Time”; Michele Rivkin-Fish, “Pronatalism, Gender Politics, and the Renewal of Family Support in Russia: Toward a Feminist Anthropology of ‘Maternity Capital,’” *Slavic Review*, vol. 69, no. 3 (Fall 2010), 707.

Also today, even though we have already noted the demographic situation in Russia, and following from that the Russian state's active involvement in trying to promote increased fertility, fathers are not present in the state discourse—an issue we will return to shortly.

It should be noted that talk of a demographic crisis is not a new phenomenon in Russian discourse—quite the opposite. Demographic problems and the importance of increasing birth rates have been parts of the discourse throughout Soviet times. However, there are certain differences between the Soviet and the post-Soviet discourse. During Soviet times, low birth rates were discussed as a problem for society in a similar vein as the population and biopolitics were discussed as central in the geo-political struggle between nations (see above). Since 1991, the discourse concerning demographic problems has remained but it has incorporated potential problems not only for the state and society, but for the Russian nation.<sup>44</sup>

The importance attributed to demographic issues in contemporary Russia can be exemplified by how these issues have been more or less significant features in every annual address to the Federal Assembly (in Russian: *poslanie*) given by the president of the Russian Federation since Vladimir Putin first came to office in 2000.<sup>45</sup> For instance, in the *poslanie* from 2006, it is stated that:

And now the main thing. What is most important? In the Ministry of Defense they know what is most important. I'm talking about love, women and children. About the family. And about the most serious problem of modern Russia—about demography.<sup>46</sup>

Apart from constituting an example of the weight attributed to demographic issues and the role of fertility and family there, this quotation also illustrates how women and children are presented as the two primary actors that constitute the family entity. This is made even clearer in the same *poslanie* when Putin explicitly establishes a link between fertility, on the one hand, and families and women (mothers), on the other. He mentions immigration as a potential *partial* solution to the population decline but then proceeds in a way which is typical of the discourse:

But no amount of immigration will solve our demographic problems if we do not create the right conditions and incentives for increasing the birth rate here, in our own country—if we do not take effective measures to support mothers, children and families.<sup>47</sup>

The view of fertility and reproduction as essentially a female matter is a distinct feature of the Russian demographic discourse. Mothers are claimed to carry the main responsibility for the raising of and caring for children, and they are discussed as the cornerstones of the family.

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<sup>44</sup> Rivkin-Fish, "From 'Demographic Crisis' to 'Dying Nation'."

<sup>45</sup> A *poslanie* is an authoritative political event. The speeches are often referred to as the basis for policy documents, for the analytical material presented to the parliamentarians in both chambers, and for individual speeches from leading politicians.

<sup>46</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Poslanie Federalnomu Sobraniyu Rossiiskoi Federatsii," [Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation] *Rossiiskaya gazeta* (11 May 2006).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Thus, women in their role as mothers are pointed out as the main bearers of fertility. Fathers are clearly excluded from the discourse, which appears to be part of a cultural legacy that stretches back through Soviet times and beyond.<sup>48</sup> A search in the main guideline documents on demographic policy shows that the words for “father” (*otets*), “dad” (*papa*) and “fatherhood” (*otsovstvo*) are not present at all.<sup>49</sup> This pattern is also reflected in the constitution of the Russian Federation.<sup>50</sup> If the father *is* discussed, it tends to be in the role of a breadwinner, while the discourse at the same time points to the difficulties of fulfilling such a role due to unemployment rates, low salaries, etc.<sup>51</sup>

### **A Foucauldian Take on Russian Daddy-Schools**

The remainder of this article will be devoted to an empirical analysis of how the civic initiative of Russian daddy-schools can be understood from a Foucauldian perspective. The discussions below are based on the interviews and observations conducted as well as the analysis of documents from the daddy-schools.

#### *The Aims and Strategies of a Civic Initiative*

The narrative of the civic initiative leading to the development of daddy-schools in and around Saint Petersburg starts in 2007, when soon-to-be key actors came into contact with ideas of father groups through contacts with Sweden where these kinds of groups had existed for a number of years.

The first official daddy-school was organized at the Nevsky District Center of Social Care for Families and Children in November of 2008. The daddy-schools provide a program where men meet to discuss topics related to parenting from a male perspective, i.e. future childbirth, the baby’s first days, the first month of a child’s life, and responsible fatherhood.

Daddy-schools and their activities have also spread further, with daddy-schools now also in operation in Novgorod and more on the way in Archangelsk and Petrozavodsk. The daddy-schools still have to be viewed as marginal phenomena. No official statistics concerning the number of activities or participants exist but an estimate can be made based on information from organizers and moderators as well as from two other studies interested in the daddy-schools.<sup>52</sup> Thus, at present, about ten daddy-schools, born from the civic initiative dis-

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<sup>48</sup> Svetlana Aivazova, *Russkie zhenshchiny v labirinte ravnopravii: Ocherki politicheskoi teorii i istorii* [Russian women in the labyrinth of equality: essays on political theory and history] (Moscow: RIK, 1998); Rotkirch, “The Man Question.”

<sup>49</sup> See for example *Konseptiia dolgosrochnogo sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [Concept for the long-term socioeconomic development of the Russian Federation]; *Konseptiia Demograficheskoi Politiki do 2015 goda* [Concept for demographic policy to the year 2015] (2001); *Konseptiia Demograficheskoi Politiki do 2025 goda* [Concept for demographic policy to the year 2025] (2007).

<sup>50</sup> Rodin and Åberg, “Fatherhood Across Space and Time.”

<sup>51</sup> Rivkin-Fish, “Anthropology, Demography, and the Search for a Critical Analysis of Fertility.”

<sup>52</sup> Olga Bezrukova, “Praktiki otvestvennogo otsovstva: ‘papa-shkola’ i sotsialnyi kapital” [The practices of responsible fatherhood: daddy-schools and social capital], *Vestnik: Saint Petersburg University*, Seriya 12, Vypusk 3 (2012); Aleksandr Malyshev, *Impact of Gender-Sensitive Social Services on the Transformation of Parental Values and Practices in Today’s Russia* (Saint Petersburg: Tuskorara, 2013).

cussed here, exist in different parts of Saint Petersburg as well as in Novgorod. The number of participants fluctuates greatly but on average a few hundred fathers-to-be participate each year. Again, this is a rough estimate, given that the activities depend on enough people being interested in participating.

Those acting as moderators, i.e. managing and leading the discussions in a daddy-school, do so on a voluntary basis without any economic or other form of compensation. Thus, this is a clear-cut example of voluntary work, where the aim is to work for the public good and where the activities take place outside of both the state machinery and the for-profit business sphere, which would make almost any researcher view them as civil society activities.

As noted above, the Russian state discourse on families, demographic issues, fertility, etc. has largely left out the role of the father. The civic initiative of daddy-schools takes a different approach, instead emphasizing the importance of an active, or “new,” father who takes part to the same extent and performs the same tasks as the mother, thus sharing an equal responsibility for the upbringing of children. However, it is not only responsibility that is supposed to be shared between spouses but also the opportunity to be part of the private sphere.

The main ambition of the daddy-schools is, thus, to promote a more active and responsible father. One of the founders of the daddy-schools in Saint Petersburg stated their view on fatherhood, and what kind of fatherhood they are trying to promote, in terms that clearly connect this initiative to an ambition to promote a father who is more involved in all aspects of family life and child-rearing.

To me everything is very clear. It is all about the man’s active actions in child-rearing. Not formal actions but everyday, practical, ordinary tasks that the wife usually performs—he also has to do the same every day. That is, not just say hello, pat on the head, ask about how the day has been and play [...]. It is important to teach men to talk to other men about their children—that is not commonplace. Men should be actively involved [...] the involved father is he who takes the child to the doctor, takes the child for a walk—not just on weekends but as she [the mother] does. The involved father performs the same tasks as his wife does.<sup>53</sup>

As this quote demonstrates, the ideas behind the daddy-schools are different from the mainstream discourses on the role of fathers in contemporary Russia, discussed in previous sections. Here the father is very much present as an equal actor in the family whereas he is marginalized in public and state discourses. Hence, the daddy-schools aim to develop a strand that is currently neglected by other segments of society, a role frequently addressed by social movements and civil society organizations in various contexts around the world. The discourse of the daddy-schools may not be in “open conflict” with the state, or concern the kind of resistance implied in Foucault’s notion of counter-conduct, but it is at the very least *in contrast* to the state discourse.

In interviews with organizers and moderators as well as in documents from the daddy-schools, the development of an active and responsible father figure is linked to other goals with perceived beneficial effects for society. What the daddy-schools wish to accomplish by

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<sup>53</sup> Interview, 121122, author’s translation.

promoting more active fathers is greater gender equality, higher fertility rates, a reduction in domestic violence and a reduction in the number of divorces as well as better conditions for children when they are growing up, as is also demonstrated in the quote below.<sup>54</sup>

Essentially, Father School is an informal men's club where future fathers meet to receive new knowledge, to discuss real issues and to get peer support. They do it for the benefit of their children and families. Father School programs are designed to update father's behavior pattern and to create the so called 'new father' model. In our opinion, trainings in male groups and the organized group work will enable us to change gender stereotypes about father's role not only in fathers but also in their spouses and to reduce domestic violence and risks of divorce.<sup>55</sup>

The ambition to solve social problems, such as gender inequality and domestic violence, through the activities of the daddy-schools and the changes those activities can instill in participants, i.e. fathers and fathers-to-be, relates to the ideas concerning technologies of citizenship and how it is possible to approach social problems by promoting changes in how we govern ourselves, rather than by institutional or structural changes.<sup>56</sup>

What we also see in the quote above is that one important aspect is the role of the mothers/the men's partners. Thus, changing gender stereotypes is at the heart of the daddy-schools' activities.

Why is the importance of fatherhood so often underestimated? Maybe it is because we believe that only mothers can really cope with parental responsibilities, while fathers have to put up with a supporting role. Studies show, however, that fathers can care equally well for children, respond to their requests, arrange for their care as newborn babies as well as when the children are older. In general, fathers are more similar to than different from mothers.<sup>57</sup>

At the center of the ideal of a more active, nurturing father is, as stated previously, that he takes part in all aspects of family life, sharing chores and responsibilities with his partner. This in itself speaks to a more gender equal relation, i.e. it is difficult to see how it would be possible to promote such a fatherhood ideal *without* also promoting gender equality.

How do the daddy-schools then proceed in order to promote a more active fatherhood and instill the norms inherent in that ideal in the participants of their activities? One aspect that is stressed by respondents in interviews as well as in documents about the daddy-schools is that the groups should consist only of men.

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<sup>54</sup> Nikolay Eremin, "Otvetsvennoye ottsovstvo: muzhskoy vzglyad" [Responsible fatherhood: The male gaze] document from the Russian daddy-schools (Saint Petersburg, 2010); "Papa-shkola.ru," document from the Russian daddy-schools (Saint Petersburg, 2010); Mats Berggren *et al.*, *Father School: Step by Step* (Moscow: Best-print, 2010). This publication was produced as a collaborative effort by organizers of daddy-schools and similar activities in Sweden, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.

<sup>55</sup> Berggren *et al.*, *Father School*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower*, 88.

<sup>57</sup> Eremin, "Otvetsvennoye ottsovstvo," author's translation.

[...] joint sessions of future mothers and fathers (though having evident advantages) do not allow fathers to openly discuss a whole range of themes and issues of future fatherhood due to the presence of their wives. Thus an idea of organizing special classes for fathers-to-be attended by men only and run by male psychologists was born. It marked the beginning of Father Schools designed for future and new fathers.<sup>58</sup>

It should be noted that it is not only the aim of developing more actively engaged fathers that is new or different in Russia, but also that the methods and techniques used are stressed as crucial for furthering these ambitions. That is, the active involvement of fathers, not only in the family and the care of the children, but also as participants in the daddy-schools is emphasized. To base the activities on the active participation of the participants and on their questions, knowledge and experiences in an atmosphere where the would-be teacher or expert in many contexts is mainly a moderator or facilitator who assists in structuring the discussion is argued to be something very unorthodox in Russia.

It is not just about making men more consciously aware of their role as a father but to involve the men so they actively participate in this [the activities of the daddy-schools; in their own learning]. Without the involvement of the men themselves, it will all turn into an organization arranging lectures for the general public. We have sufficiently competent experts who can, well, make people aware of the scientific point of view. But I would put the involvement of the men in first place and then everything else. Because that is the greatest difficulty – getting the men to become involved.<sup>59</sup>

As we can see here, the way forward, as perceived by this representative of a daddy-school, is to have the fathers manage themselves, which connects to Foucault's ideas of technologies of the self. Similar statements can be found which also relate to the notion of technologies of citizenship:

A forum of expectant and new fathers is an excellent means to inspire, involve and inform. Here one can hear what others did, share what he did and be reassured by other men in similar circumstances. Becoming a father is a conscious work [...]. As a future father you have options. You may join into the family life and be its full member who knows what is going on and how to act. This motivates and enriches you as a person. Or you may choose not to spend time, prefer to keep the distance and feel estranged. That will be depressing.<sup>60</sup>

The active involvement of the fathers in their own development is crucial. It is the father himself who should take conscious action in reflecting on his role as a father, while the downside of being marginalized in the private sphere of the family is stressed as a consequence if this managing of the self is not undertaken.

As has already been noted, the daddy-groups also make connections between this personal development of the father and greater social goals. By voluntarily engaging in the activi-

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<sup>58</sup> Berggren *et al.*, *Father School*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Interview, 121122, author's translation.

<sup>60</sup> Berggren *et al.*, *Father School*, 10.

ties of the daddy-schools the participants subject themselves to techniques of power through which they can also exercise power upon themselves.<sup>61</sup>

### *The Daddy-Schools and the State*

In previous sections of this article it has been shown how the discourse of the daddy-schools differs from the state discourse as well as other public discourses concerning fatherhood and what a father should be like. In the state discourse, as illustrated by policy documents and presidential speeches, the father is virtually absent and when encountered in other public discourses, the ideal father is most similar to the father in the breadwinner model, where he is the provider of the family. In the discourse of the daddy-schools on the other hand, the father is an active, responsible and nurturing figure who shares equal responsibility with the mother when it comes to taking care of and raising the child(-ren). Thus, here there is a separation between state and civil society, a distinction reinforced by the more general trends of state—civil society relations in Russia. Hence, in this final empirical section, we will look more closely at the relations between the daddy-schools and the state, given the separation constructed through power relations and discourse.

First of all it is worth noting that many of the key actors, the founders of the daddy-school initiative, and those who are involved today as organizers and moderators, i.e. those managing the actual activities in the daddy-schools have, and have had, regular employment at social welfare offices and in other parts of the public sector in the field of social affairs. Thus, on the level of the individual actors who have been and are involved in the daddy-schools, there are connections to the public sphere and the state bureaucracy. This means that those who have become vital for the activities of the daddy-schools could also be considered cogs in the machine of the Russian state's governmentality and in its biopolitical actions and strategies. It is also through their regular jobs that these actors have come into contact with problems relating to family relations and parenthood (for instance concerning domestic violence, corporal punishment, absent fathers, etc.), issues that the state is also concerned with.

Those who became and become interested [in running a daddy-school] are usually those people who work with something in the field of social welfare and they work in different places that are connected to social issues.<sup>62</sup>

It was also through some of the key actors' employment that they came into contact with the idea of daddy-schools, by means of a conference they were sent to by the social welfare offices where they worked. At that conference, which was focused on domestic violence, they met people from Sweden who spoke of daddy-schools and the importance of educating fathers and getting them involved in parenting, partly as a way of reducing domestic violence.

As part of their regular employment within the state bureaucracy, individuals dealt with a series of problems in the field of family issues. They then identified a new method for approaching those issues, i.e. to promote active fatherhood, and, hence, they attempted to im-

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower*, 91.

<sup>62</sup> Interview, 120426, author's translation.



plement those methods as well. This was done through the use of voluntary work and civil society since these methods did not fit within the normal state machinery, and the discourse concerning active fatherhood is quite different from the state discourse, as has been demonstrated previously.

Thus, these actors have gathered around an idea of how to tackle these problems and that idea is different from the state governmentality. So the birth and development of the daddy-schools can be understood as a way for initiated and interested actors to complement the approach of the state, without necessarily challenging it. In Foucauldian terms, this would not really be counter-conduct but more a way of complementing the state.

At the same time, there is an underlying motif to turn the fathers into active citizens, through the activating methods used, which in turn can challenge the state and the system to secure the rights and freedoms of fathers.<sup>63</sup>

There are whole groups of men who do just this, they want to be closer to their children, they meet to achieve that. And they understand that it is not only right, but that you have to fight for this yourself.<sup>64</sup>

In this way, there are elements also in the daddy-schools, at least on the horizon, for more elements of potential counter-conduct than meets the eye at first glance. The activities not only concern pragmatic aspects of fatherhood but there is also an element of empowerment, which is described by Barbara Cruikshank as: "the will to empower is a strategy of government, one that seeks solutions to political problems in the governmentalization of the everyday lives of citizen-subjects."<sup>65</sup> Even though organizers are keen to present their good relations with the regional and local branches of the state, they have still challenged the state in the sense that they have aimed for, and actually accomplished, shifts in policy and even legislative changes, which we will discuss further below.

The daddy-schools, and those involved in organizing and managing the activities, have gained much attention from the media but also from the regional authorities. However, they have not taken an outspoken oppositional or political role. The relations to the regional and city authorities are described as good. As already mentioned, several of those involved in the daddy-schools also have ordinary employment inside the state structures, normally in the field of social welfare. One moderator also argues that this in itself is important since it is easier to change things and get access to those in charge when you are on the "inside,"<sup>66</sup> and in general they have attempted to create and maintain good relations with the state.

[...] we said from the start: we live in this city [Saint Petersburg], we work for its sake, and we left everything to the city's structure. If we arranged something exciting we always invited both the voluntary sector and the public power and said that it was Petersburg that ar-

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower*.

<sup>64</sup> Interview, 121122, author's translation.

<sup>65</sup> Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower*, 123.

<sup>66</sup> Interview, 120425.

ranged it. We never said it was us that did it. Then, in reality, there is not a single structure in the city that doesn't support us [...] That is to say, we are most known for working for the city and for people.<sup>67</sup>

The good relations with the authorities are also demonstrated by how actors involved with the daddy-schools have repeatedly been invited to participate in meetings with the state administration, including the city governor. Respondents state that they have managed to influence political and legislative developments. This is exemplified by how one of their initiatives—that it should be possible for fathers to be present during the delivery of their child, free-of-charge—is now a reality, even on the federal level (it has been customary in Russia for hospitals to charge a fee if the fathers wish to be present in the delivery room). In discussions of these efforts, we again find the ambition of activating the participants, not only within the small group of the daddy-school but also aiming for a spill-over effect into individual engagement in politics and on a societal level.

[...] since the changes in the legislation concerning fathers being present during delivery, free of charge, really was our initiative many ask the question: now that you have gotten it into the law that the father can be present for free during delivery, but most maternity wards charge for this, why don't you push forward? And my answer is not always appreciated by people: we assisted in changing the law, that was a civic initiative, but if you yourself need this service—go ask for it—you are of age, you have hands and feet, your head is in place, your tongue is too—then why should someone have to go in your place and demand on your behalf that which the law has already granted you?<sup>68</sup>

This could be seen as discouraging collective action but, I would argue, it mainly concerns empowering individuals to claim their rights and, once the rights are formally constituted, the individual should start by claiming them himself.

Furthermore, since July 2012 the family policy of Saint Petersburg has stated that every city district should have a daddy-school. Even the concept of daddy-schools, initiated by the civic initiative here analyzed, has been included in this formal document. Thus, certain elements from an active fatherhood discourse have penetrated the state discourse—as discussed previously the father is perhaps most appropriately described as marginalized in the state discourse. Several of our respondents state this outcome with great pride as evidence for how their activities have influenced policy processes. This can be connected to notions of governmentalization. Previous work by Foucault as well as subsequent research has discussed both how the state has been governmentalized and the process through which civil society actors increasingly have become partners with the state, for instance in the production of welfare services. “Governmentalization of the government” refers to how governmental mechanisms also are increasingly scrutinized, a process in which civil society can be important—not only through counter-conduct but through various forms of partnership with the state, becoming involved in various stages of policy processes. In this, civil society can function as a “moral

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<sup>67</sup> Interview, 121122, author's translation.

<sup>68</sup> Interview, 121122, author's translation.

mirror” of the administration and the governing regime.<sup>69</sup> The way the daddy-schools have aimed for changes in policy and legislation, been invited to participate in such processes, and have had an impact, could all be understood as parts of such processes.

Thus, the new-found formal status coming from the inscription in the official family policy is a source of pride and also a future source of funding since it means that public resources will be made available for daddy-school activities. However, several respondents also worry about this development. Even though they are proud of the result, they see challenges and potential dangers following in the wake of, not least, public funding. The perceived risk is that with money available, new groups may arise, using different methods and not remaining true to the model or ideas developed since 2008.

Here we see a certain risk in that they will be called daddy-schools or daddy-groups but in reality they will not be as they should. Perhaps they will have a symbolic meeting, *call* it a daddy-group but [content-wise and method-wise doing something different] [...] and then the denigration of the idea begins.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, what is expressed is a fear that the ideas behind the currently existing daddy-schools will be co-opted by other forces and turned into something that violates the original ambition and practice. This could also be framed as a fear of co-optation of the ideological mission that is the foundation for the daddy-schools and a distortion of that which currently holds the daddy-schools together. In the same vein, actors in the daddy-schools are ambivalent about further developments within the state administration. Maternity care units have also started developing activities, courses and discussion groups for fathers-to-be. All in all, almost 70 maternity care units all around Saint Petersburg have done this and the most active of those had more than 600 fathers participating in 2012. Again, this could be a sign of how the daddy-school-initiative has influenced developments, but it could also be a way for the state to circumvent the potential power of civil society by hijacking concepts and activities to avoid challenges to the biopolitical strategies of the state.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The biopolitical concerns of the Russian state, dealing with a negative demographic development, have largely ignored fathers. As this article has demonstrated, civic initiatives have addressed the role of the fathers instead. However, those civil society actors that are organizing daddy-schools and activities for fathers-to-be in contemporary Northwestern Russia share a number of features with the state approach. For one, many of those volunteering as organizers and moderators in the daddy-schools have regular employment within the state administration, frequently in social welfare offices in Saint Petersburg. They also share many of the con-

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<sup>69</sup> Miikka Pyykkönen, “Governmentalisation of the Civil Society? Power, Governance and Civil Society in Gramsci’s and Foucault’s Analytics of Power,” in Matthias Freise, Miikka Pyykkönen and Eglé Vaidelytė (eds.) *A Panacea for all Seasons? Civil Society and Governance in Europe* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010), 37; Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage, 1999), 193.

<sup>70</sup> Interview, 121121, author’s translation.

cerns the state has, for instance, concerning the level of domestic violence, the low birth rate, etc. Those involved in the daddy-schools believe that more active fathers can contribute to a solution of such social problems.

Thus, it appears as if the civic initiative analyzed here, and those involved in it, share many of the overarching goals of the Russian state (such as attempting to reduce domestic violence and increase fertility), but, they differ in the view of what path will take society closer to those goals. However, this does not necessarily mean that the views are conflicting but rather that the civic initiative of the daddy-schools adds a complementary perspective and a complementary discourse, i.e. that of the importance of an active, involved and responsible father, and this is for the good of the father, the child, the mother, and society overall. So it is quite feasible that this civic initiative can aid the state in accomplishing the desired biopolitical changes. The willingness of the state to incorporate daddy-school-activities in their policies could be a sign of recognition of precisely this potential value. This could also, subsequently, alter the state discourse, making room for the more active, nurturing father figure.

The analysis of the Russian daddy-schools has, however, also demonstrated how the space available for civic initiatives in contemporary Russia can include empowering ambitions and activities. The way those involved in the daddy-schools portray both the aim of the activities and the methods used to accomplish the goals bear clear resemblances to what Foucault would describe as technologies of the self and the activities of the daddy-schools can be understood as a mode of governmentality. The ambition is to alter the way individual fathers perceive their role as a father and their role in the family, also *vis-à-vis* their partner. The way to do this is to provide assistance for fathers to make these changes in both attitudes and behaviors themselves, i.e. the daddy-schools aim to encourage fathers to work on themselves in order to become happier and “better” or more productive members of both the family and of society. The daddy-schools provide tools for fathers, to empower them and to help them work on their role in the family with the aim of solving social problems. Thus, the aims, strategies and activities of the daddy-schools can be considered to constitute technologies of citizenship.

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