

A Mobilizing Role of Disaster: Social Movements, Networks and Democracy

Oleg Yanitsky

Institute of Sociology
Russian Academy of Sciences
Tel:
Email: oleg.yanitsky@yandex.ru

ABSTRACT: Nature disasters which embraced European subcontinent in the last two years had a mobilizing impact on civil society's organizations, and in particular on Russian social movements and its SMOs. Basing on the empirical research of forests and step fires as well as of the ice rains in some countries of the EU and the European part of Russia, the paper presents a detailed analysis of mobilizing effect of natural disasters on rescue operations implemented by civil activists, the framing of their activity by the SMOs' leaders, changing disposition of forces involved in these operations, and on the emergence of new initiative groups and building new networks. The growing potential of civil society organizations to play the role of 'programmers' and 'switchers' of the rescue networks is analyzed as well. Three phases of activity of civil society actors are investigated: The preparatory phase to a disaster; their activity during it; and their role in the phase of rehabilitation of nature ecosystems and human communities. A special attention will be given to the building of ad hoc virtual communities (sites, forums) by concerned people who lived far beyond the affected areas, to mobilization of transnational networks with sister organizations, and to the mobilization activity of the movement's leaders. The shift from nature protection movement toward the defense of basic human rights, from national to international networking, and by means of it the accumulation of social capital by individual activists and SMOs, the building of shared master frames of forthcoming climatic changes and mobilizing international support to cope with disasters and its consequences are of a no less importance. In conclusion, I'd analyze the dual social effect of a nature disaster. On the one hand, it activates national SMOs and other civil units, stimulates the process of refining their social and political technologies as well as gives the impetus to the reconstruction of public sphere. On the other hand, such disasters, engendering the state of emergency, narrows a political opportunity structure of civil actors.