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

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Center of Studies on Politics and Society  
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*Oleg Yanitsky*

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



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

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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.

KEY WORDS: democracy, disasters, civil society mobilization, networks, social movements, Russia

## **1. Introduction**

Not only science, as many social scientists stated, but the very nature are the creators of new, emergent problems in human interaction with nature. On the other hand, the relationships between state and civil society rescuers shifted in favor of latter, especially if they learned to use internet and other IT devices.

It is often argued in political and academic circles both in domestic and abroad that Russian civil society is going to an end. It is not true. This society had existed even in totalitarian era, but in the overt and dispersed form. Nor it extinguished in 2000s. The article examines the changing role and structure of Russian social movements (SMs) under conditions of huge natural disaster. I mean summer fires of 2010 which embraced the territory of Russia comparable with that of the EU. It has been a challenge not only to environmental but to many other social movements and charity organizations and grassroots. The disaster revealed a true disposition of forces in relation to the disaster and showed the actual role played by civil society at large and social movements in particular in mitigation of this eco-catastrophe. Section 1 examines theoretical background for ‘disaster-civil society’ relationships. Section 2 analyses three main phases of an SM mobilization: usual, targeted and critical. In the next Section I consider the issue of framing the disaster by SMs and they changing structure and action repertoire accordingly. Section 4 counts the major positive effects of civil society mobilization, and in Conclusion some general outcomes of this mobilization as well as a set of methodological issues of analyzing it are considered.

## **2. Theoretical background**

The conceptual framework for our field research is based on a set types of sociological thought. Firstly, it was based on theorization of classical sociology (see Weber, 1995; Marx, 1967; Sorokin, 2003) on the state of emergency of a society as it is and in particular of the impact of natural and man-made disasters on human nature, human behavior and social order. I see the Sorokin’s idea of negative selection is central here (Sorokin, 2003). Second-

ly, my conceptual framework based on the concepts of civil societies and its social capital in modern risk society (Beck, 1992; Yanitsky, 2000). Distribution of ‘bads’ becomes as important for society as the distribution of goods’. “Beck contends that now the ‘latency phase of risk threats is coming to an end. The invisible hazards are becoming visible” (Beck, cite by: Murphy, 2010: 13).

It should be stressed that in my view, the Beck’s and others risk society concepts are insufficient in relation to Russian recent condition. But before, I must say that I fully agree with Murphy who argued ‘that sociology and a large part of social sciences had, however, ignored and abstracted out an important set of contextual influences on social and cultural life. It had, to use its own “bracketed”, and language, “put in parentheses,” and “suspended” the effects of the biophysical context. That was a mistake because humans are beings embedded in biophysical dynamics’ (Murphy, 2010: 342).

Therefore, I introduced the concept of all-embracing risk society (Yanitsky, 2000, 2010). The concept of ‘normality of catastrophe in modern society introduced by Ch. Perrow (1984) is of principled importance as well. As he argued, ‘we acted in terms of our own designs of a world that we expected to exist – but the world was different’...’Disaster research has found that there has often been a “failure of foresight” during “the incubation of disasters” which has led to man-made disasters. Thus researchers argue that disasters occur when there is a divergence between socially constructed expectations about nature’s energy and nature’s movements resulting from that energy’ (cit. by: Murphy, 2010: 27).

Thirdly, it has been important to analyze and use the concepts embraced by the notion of ‘complex emergences’ (Beck, 1992; Keen, 2008; Murphy, 2010; Yanitsky, 2000, 2010). Keen, defining the term ‘complex emergences’ stresses that they are “linked to internal or external conflict” such as civil wars, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Nevertheless, he wrote that “violent conflict and natural disaster may interact’... ‘Though we are distinguishing natural disasters from complex emergences on the ground of absence of large-scale conflict, there is always a politics to any disaster, and there will be elements of conflict and even out-right coercion in a natural disaster (Keen, 2008: 2-3). Nevertheless, the concept applicable to the cases of rather complicated biosociotechnical catastrophes with unavoidable ‘boomerang effect’ (Beck), that is a specific feed-back defined neither spatially nor sub-

stantially (the Chrenobyl accident is the best example). Whilst W. Catton and R. Dunlap in their *New Ecological Paradigm* stated that ‘Although the inventiveness of humans and power derived there from may seem for a while to extend carrying capacity limits, ecological laws cannot be repealed’ \*(Catton and Dunlap, 1980: 24). R. Murphy went much further stating that ‘biophysical events undermine assumptions of safety and mastery of nature’ (Murphy, 2010: 15). Of a no less important the Keen’s idea that ‘Humanitarian aid is habitually based on needs assessments and early warning systems that are themselves based on systems of counting – on measurement of thinnes, rainfall, production, number of displaced people and so on. Such number-based systems may miss most of the important things that are going on in a particular society. The danger is that they provide an apparently unobjectionable, technological screen behind which ethnic manipulation and economic exploitation can proceed unhindered. Many of this variables came to prominence (становятся очевидными) in relation to natural disasters (Keen, 2008: 161). My choice of these concepts (risk society, normal accident, complex emergences) which form the theoretical pillars of my study of the social consequences of the above fires is explained not only by my specific interest to depict the mobilization state of Russian civil society, but the general process of speedy growing instability of the Biosphere which manifests itself in growing number and scale of natural accidents (fires, floods, tornados, sharp oscillations of air temperature and/or atmospheric pressure) and, what is the most important, its social consequences each of them is needed a specific and long-term rehabilitation. As D. Smith argued, ‘today fear and anger reasserting themselves. We are moving into an era where greed will no longer be central force in our lives. The battle to get more will gradually be replaced by the fight to keep what you have, which will, in turn, unless things change, gradually become a more basic struggle for survival. This struggle is already central for the poor. Sooner or later, some of mid-dling rich may join them in the same boat’ (Smith, 2008: 347).

Finally, the character of discourse and rhetoric are critically important for our analysis because ‘they result in particular practices that are either benign or harmful in human interaction with biophysical dynamics. In particular, what the population and leaders define as safe or as risky determines the actions that will be taken... Discourse analysis focuses on ‘claims-making’ by complaining groups. The key question is “how are claims presented so as to persuade their audiences?”. For example, how are claims of risk of disaster or environmental degradation assembled, presented, and contested? What



does the claim come from, who manage it, what resources do they have, and what interests do they represent? Storylines create meaning and mobilize action... Consent of the population is internalized by *framing* the debate in a particular way and suppressing opposing *framings*, which both use and construct (Murphy, 2010: 21-22).

### **3. Three phases of a SM mobilization**

The first and the most world-wide phase I call a 'usual'. It depends on political and social opportunity structure (Tarrow, 1988, 2005). In Russia from early 1990s onwards, this structure gradually shrank, and finally became hostile to the majority of Russian SMs except so called pro-Kremlin SMs. Nowadays, these movements exist and used to practice in the hostile political context (Yanitsky, 1999, 2010). The second phase of a SM mobilization can be labeled as 'targeted' or planned when something extra-ordinary already happened in a particular place, be it a natural disaster or man-made accident. This phase is characterized by mobilization resources at hand plus, if necessary, by the attraction some sister movements or organizations (say, local grassroots or charity organizations). The third phase I call a 'critical' (extreme) case when all accessible resources should be mobilized.

Accordingly, the first case could be labeled as a limited mobilization because it presents a particular SM's response to usual and long-term hostile context pressure. A limited mobilization means that the SMOs leaders mobilizes resources *at hand*, that is, the mobilization of any extra-efforts are not needed. Their already accumulated knowledge and experience (action repertoire) is well enough for coping with the particular accident.

The second case may be depicted as targeted mobilization of a particular SM and his sister organization's resources for mitigation of a given disaster. And the third case presents all-embraced mobilization of a global civil society (or at least of its concerned majority) for coping with the large-scale natural or man-made catastrophe. Or as it happened quite recently, it presents the all-embracing civil society response to a new challenge such as global warming. In this latter case SMs of various kinds could united in an alter-global social movement.

It is quite natural that whilst in the first phase the process of resources mobilization presents a routine work (gathering information, mapping local re-

sources, attempts to widen its constituency, etc.), in the latter phase all possible resources, be it at hand or distanced should be find out and mobilized.

Besides, I would stress that in all above cases the resources of civil society organizations are usually not ‘stored’ and ready to use as in the case of governmental rescue organizations, but they should be find out or mainly produced by civic organizations themselves. These search for or self-production of resources means the critical change of their habitual way of life. First of all it related to established order of man—nature relations. That is why, U.Beck said: ‘The hardcore sociological question is: Where is the support for ecological changes supposed to come from, the support which in many cases would undermine their lifestyles, their consumption habits, their social status and life conditions in what are already truly very uncertain times?’(Beck, 2010: 2).

#### **4. Framing the issue and changing the sense and structure of a SM**

Though as I mentioned earlier, recently nearly all Russian SMs are in the first phase of mobilization, every disaster needs its own set of frames: master frame, motivation, mobilization, etc. To my mind, the master frame is the same that of worldview or general disposition. It should answer to the key question: why we, the SM and its activists and allies, should be mobilized? In our case (forest, steppe and peat fires) the master frame is ‘People and nature in calamity - they needs our aid!’, Motivation frame: ‘We are needed because nobody can help them but ourselves’, Mobilization frames: ‘They need help immediately!’ and ‘All who can do it, united!’ Literally speaking, the 2010 Summer mobilization can be called as the short-term ‘The International Alliance of Civil Rescuers’, which above all, activates the ‘sleeping’ resources and networks of the environmental, charity, local lore and other social movements and grassroots.

It is quite natural that the focal point of all activities of all SMs involved is a rescue operations of those who have been affected by a disaster. It was massive action, but of spot-like and not a protest character. The key limits of rescue activity were time and resistance of local residents who did not want to leave their long-occupied places. Hence, not a socio-ecological *conflict* become a focal point of a SM’s activity, but *a field* of required help. It means that a SM activity has not defensive of offensive (if not militant), bun *humanitarian* character. The hot summer of 2010 discrowns the myth cultivated

by official media that Russian SMs have predominantly radical character. Instead, they showed their constructive and charity potential.

As I mentioned above, a disaster use to determine character of a SMs activity. Since the fire (and consequently, the size and margins of the zone of emergency) depends of a speed and direction of wind which has been permanently changing, the aid network constructed by a SM to help should follow the these fluctuations as well. Thus, the first distinguishing feature of the structure SM-at-disaster is *high mobility* and *quick change of functions* of a SM. It SMOs began to function as a station, command post and distributor of resources.

Then, the organizational (logistic) function of a SMOs came fourth. The one thing is to organize mass protest campaign, and quire another to govern the process of rendering the assistance in right place and due time. This logistic function become more complicated since a SM's activists have to coordinate their actions with other actors -- of state rescue commands, on the one hand, and with local experts and lay people, on the other.

I should stress that in mitigation of a disaster consequences local activists were both outsiders and insiders that never happened in their struggle with state bodies in 'normal' cases of mobilization for nature protection defense. In the situation of natural disaster they were forced to be insiders, that is, direct participants of fire extinguishing and people rescuing. Otherwise, they would be not capable to 'follow the actor', i.e. fire's twists.

Obviously, the *networks* was its key function element. In structural terms, the system of aid presents a very disperse system of networks and their nodes which operate in regime of prompt decisions and permanent switching the channels of information and material flows. This case could be seem as antithesis to 'programming and switching' implemented by media attached to power structures (Arsenalt and Castells, 2008: 489-90). And with constant feed-back. Three main features of this network should be mentioned. First, it was spread far beyond the limits of the SMOs of a particular social movement. Second, the SMOs as such turned into multi-functional command centers whose main function was to gather, process and disseminate information concerning where, what and how urgent the particular aid is needed. Then, they organized delivering the asked (inquired) aid to the client's address, be it a person or settlement. So they worked as logistics centers. Thirdly, the overall country far beyond the fire areas was dotted with numerous ad hoc

civil groups aimed at the giving help to victims of fires. Sometimes these groups collaborated with SMOs, sometimes acted independently. The latter case is indicative because it is a clear evidence that Russian civil society do exist and capable to act independently both from its other units as well as from state organizations. Their power was in their capability to be in right place and in right time and above all with particular help needed right now.

Let us turn to *resources as such*. If disaster actually happened, which resources the SMs can actually mobilize for coping with a catastrophe? Again, resources for nature protection repertoire are different from those needed in disaster. Apart from their professional knowledge, their major resource was their experience of communication with various organizations of our society: power and business structures, other movements, expert groups, sister groups abroad, local people, etc. Of course, the rationalism and rational resource supply are needed in both cases. Nevertheless, in the protest campaigns activists are first of all *fighters* armed with knowledge of weak and sensitive points of their adversaries. In the case of disasters the major roles of activists are *helpers, assistants* who brings to those who suffered the empathy, human sympathy, and the feeling that they are not ‘throwaway people’. Above all, local civic rescuers be acquainted with local situation and culture were capable to do much more than the state rescuers.

As events of hot Summer 2010 showed, the Russian eco-activists fulfill a lot of functions. The were creators of particular resource mobilization networks, local knowledge finders, it processors and carriers as well as local resource mobilizers, managers (distributors), guides, rescuers, volunteers and so on. The last but not least. Activists-turned-rescuers mobilized now-how of local residents and stimulate their creativity.

## **5. The role of Internet**

It is now trivial that if someone use an IT networks, he/she is usually capable to attract more attention, resources and peoples and make a society more concerned. More important that civil self-organized forums and other internet communities worked against the dizorganized force of central media whose favorite tactics is to pile one sensation over the other resulted in collage-like perception of the life process by ordinary people. Now, they felt that they were not alone, they experienced the feeling of fellowship and received the guide what has to be done first. Besides, at the civil self-organized

forums an information overloading what are peculiar to official media is impossible by definition: Only the necessary information gathered, processed and distributed. At such forums any irrelevant information is immediately cut out. An it is quite natural: The aim of information produced by forum organizers is to convert passive local residents into active citizens within a given community.

As everywhere, a civil society is much more network structured than the state organizations. From 1970s onwards, former the USSR's Greens were the first who became network structured and began to use networks for their everyday activity, including protest mobilization. During 2000s the state bodies by means of tough legislation, propagation of concurrence, consumerism and individualism suppressed or forced to dissolve thousands of grassroots and civic initiatives. The disaster stimulates the re-emergence many of them and creates a lot of new ones on the basis of internet communication. Today the internet serves as a great pool of potential resources which could be convert into actual ones and mobilized by civil activists independently of the state plans or intentions.

During 20 years previous the issue in question, Russian SMs accumulated a great experience in the use of networks for various needs, and first of all for accumulating social capital and social technologies (action repertoire). Therefore, when fires began, not the official media, but that of the SMOs became the building of network structures to gather information about the situation in various parts of the country, to mobilize material and human resources and distributed them in a targeted way. In some degree in this state of emergency the SMOs took in their hands the function of 'programmers and switchers' which usually is a prerogative of an official media.

The emerged network structure enrich both concerned parts: scientists and experts, on the one hand, and local expert-citizens and lay people, on the other hand. May be for the first time, activists and scientists from various social groups and value preferences got together to reflect on the issue and developed recommendation which were disseminated by the network channels. It is indicative, that this reflection was more politically and socially oriented than purely ecological. The very fact of network mobilization was a political phenomenon called U. Beck as 'sub-politics'. It meant that civil rescuers actually took decisions not pretending to get power. Besides, the internet communication allowed them to evaluate the size of territory af-

ected by disaster, estimate material and human losses and compare their estimations with that given by officials and its media.

The civil rescuers revealed which IT instruments more applicable for a particular cases. For example, internet-forums turned out the most multi-functional device, especially efficient for rendering targeted aid and information exchange between victims and their relatives and friends outside the zone of disaster. Whilst twitter has been used for urgent dissemination information about new hotbeds of defeat. But there is a problem: New information is usually embedded in habitual frames. ‘Humans have a strong tendency to make new information conform to *existing* views’ (Keen, 2008: 150). For example, if we believe that a fire is always a bad thing, it means that we are psychologically predisposed to estimate all its consequences as ‘bad’. Language is encourages this one-sided estimations, because it tend to direct our comprehension of fires in particular direction. That is, humans tend to embed this information into their habitual *frames* (worldviews).

More general conclusion is that in the future the civil society organizations including effective assistance of local administration, being armed with IT and having relevant resources, will be capable to cope with a disaster much faster and with less losses than the State emergency organizations did it. The explanation of this fact is rather simple: the former used networks for multi-sided contacts to mobilize all possible resources across the country, whereas the latter – first of all for their own needs. In other words, there are two kinds of mobilization: *by free will* and *ex officio*.

Finally, the internet helps to promote what is usually labeled as alternative public sphere that offer a new, empowering sense to lay people of what does it means to be a civil activist.

## **6. Revitalization of civil society (positive effects)**

Since our project targeted to embrace all social phases of the fire disaster (from its predicting to final rehabilitation of affected zones) I would like to present here preliminary the most obvious positive results and effects of the civil mobilization under consideration.

(1) the map of disposition of forces and timing of the run of catastrophe has been revealed and fixed;

(2) consolidation, self-organization of a large part of Russian civil society under the above critical conditions, more tight ties between local communities and gaining new local knowledge by them. Local programmers and switchers of information flows are emerged;

(3) better mutual understanding and coordination of actions between rescuers and local residents has been reached. We observed the rise of self-esteem of all involved in the fire extinguishing, because they realized that they saved forest and people who lived in or nearby as well;

(4) all involved acquired new experience. More than that, their participation in this dangerous and multisided enterprise was actually a new step in their socialization. All involved, including the scholars and scientists, acquired better understanding of interrelationships between social order (habit of everyday life) and nature's dynamics;

(5) activists became not only more armed with models of decision-making under critical conditions, but more socially and culturally sophisticated as well;

(6) the catastrophe initiated the mobilization of social capital of many people far beyond the zone of fires. The constituency of civil rescuers is no doubt had expanded. In particular, social capital of professional ecologists and local residents has been activated, because they felt that their knowledge and practical experience had been claimed;

(7) new civil centers of resource mobilization and complex analyses of social consequences of the disaster both within and beyond the SMOs had been emerged. For Russia the emergence new initiative groups using IT in remote provinces is critically important. A social memory of local residents (aboriginals) being mobilized became an additional resource because aboriginals knew how local people fought against the same disasters in the past.

(8) The disaster raised the sensitivity to risk of local population again because the recent permanent state of 'usual' emergency make people get accustomed to it. As Murphy put it: 'When extreme weather triggers a disaster...the population and *key leaders* attempt to make sense of the new situation'. It is needed because 'there is a decay curve of sensitivity to risks and hazards by which the increasing time after normality has returned tends to lead to the fading away of the acknowledged risk. A major challenge of lea-

dership consist of preventing this decline from occurring' (Murphy, 2010: 243).

(9) The disaster favored various forms of self-organization. Activists were forced to act regardless official instructions, sometimes coming into collision with strict instructions of federal forces, that is, of the state rescuers and local administration.

(10) it is indicative that during the struggle with fire and then rendering assistance to injured or psychologically depressed there were no one conflict between people of different nationalities. All involved, be it volunteers or local residents, worked (and suffered) equally.

(11) their motivation and at the same time mobilizing frame was 'we are needed!', that is, their activity was claiming and necessary for others. In other words, their collective efforts aimed at the protection of a common good were again claimed by the society.

(12) the most important result of this hot Russian summer was the exposition of absolutely useless of the new Forestry Code adopted in 2005 and some other laws related to forestry and forestry business in particular.

(13) looking more widely, we agree with our western partners that 'the internet is an efficient tool in terms of the diffusion of protest (Della Porta et al., 1999) and the consistency of protest, in order to achieve a 'consensual mobilization' (Olitrault, 2001: 124, quotation from: Win de Donk et al., 2004: 171).

## **7. Political and scientific and institutions**

Surprisingly, but the critical situation under review had for a long time no any response from the part of central, regional and local authorities. Fires quickly expanded, smog covered Moscow, its residents suffocated, but it seemed that politicians of all levels and ranks have heard nothing about all this including the President's administration and former Moscow mayor. No measures were taken in order to alleviate the sufferings of sick and old. The situation were worse than in New Orleans. Nevertheless, official media reported that 'All under control'. There are some explanations of this alienation, but the key of them meant that it was one more confirmation that power encapsulated and did not want to show its interest to lay people's fatigue



even in critical circumstances. All warnings made in advance by research institutes and monitoring organizations were disregarded. Besides alienation mentioned above, there is one more explanation of weakness of power. ‘Organizations that had been rational and efficient under normal dynamics of nature were now having great difficulty coping with its extreme movements. The severe weather exposed modern society as fragile. Previously, nature has seemed reduced to benign recreation, but now it appeared threatening and filled with danger’. (Murphy, 2010: 88-89). Only some kind of businesses celebrated because the prices for all could make cool – ventilators, conditioners, sun-screens and the like – jumping up every day.

As to academics, they divided in two parts. A majority of professors and instructors of high schools (with their children and relatives) simply run away from zones of fire and smog, and calmly continued their relaxation abroad. Only by the command from the top some of them as well as regional and local executives were forced to return to suffering cities and towns. On the contrary, the minority of academics, mainly involved in nature protection, took part in aid and rescue operations at once. They worked not only as consultants or experts, but did any rescue work which was needed in a particular place. As I confirmed empirically, the old tradition of Russian scientists *khozdenie v narod* (going to people) had been revitalized (Yanitsky, 2005). But there is another explanation of their activity: many of them had bought dachas (shale) in devastated rural villages, and therefore they defended from fires not only a common good but their private property.

## **8. On shortcomings of rescue operations**

Since we, sociologists, had been insiders and practiced bottom—up view, some deficits and mistakes of official organizations responsible for rescue became clearly seen. Firstly, the impact on political and economic processes underline a disaster had been not investigated (for example, a local administration functions or building materials). Rescue organizers first looking at the aid operation itself. Then, the rescuers has no a rehabilitation program. Their operations were restricted by prevention fire of houses of local inhabitants, only. There were no programs of their further security, food supply, etc. They did not know the state of art of targeted population *before* the beginning of disaster and aid intervention. Neither municipal authorities nor rescuers did not know how many people were actually needed in aid and medi-

cal help, because some of residents left their homes before fire. It may be said that the state bodies have no models and the least idea on the forthcoming disaster, its scope, timing, pace, probable character of damages as well as on how to cope with it.

Furthermore, the authorities has no idea what must be done (secured) first of all and what can wait till Spring (Summer, etc). Then it is a problem of neglecting long-term effect of disaster. Rescues returned to their barracks and who will plan and implement of people, settlement and nature rehabilitation?

I share the view of Keen that not consulting of end-user is a serious problem. The voice of victims only rare comes through the evaluations made by officials. Calling victims or end-users 'beneficiaries' tends to pre-empt the crucial question or whether they have indeed benefited.

The next common failing in evaluations of a disaster consequences is that the sociologists and rescuers, being outsiders, not asking relevant questions to victims of disaster. For example, they were usually never asked about plans on their immediate and more distant future. As our investigation showed the situation is 50: 50. One half has no plan to resettle, the other dreams to leave their settlement for ever.

I agree with Keen that problems of timing is very acute. Insofar as evaluations are carried out at the end of the project (whether this is development or relief), there will be few opportunities for putting right problems as they arise. The temptation is for donors to take minimal responsibility for implementation a complicated set of rehabilitation measures. Donors prefer simply to decide at the end of a rescue operation 'whether the implementing partners performed well or badly. And the final related problem centers on *who is evaluating whom*. Some aid workers have stressed that a proper evaluation should be a "two-way street": there should be opportunities for recipients to evaluate donors as well as the other way round.' (Keen, 2008: 158-9). Donors and rescue organization welcomed to use resources of local people, but never involved them in planning of rescue operations and their evaluations.

## 9. Conclusions

Biophysical 'events undermine assumptions of safety and mastery of nature' (Murphy, 2010: 15). Nature defined the rescue structure of civil rescuers activities and stimulates the emergence of multiple 'spots' of activity far

beyond the SM's networks. At the same time, the catastrophe have made selection within the environmental and other SMs (active participants, wishful participants and by-standers).

The catastrophe stimulated the dialogue between scientists and local people as well as inside the scientific community. There is no doubt that after the above events they are both became more politically oriented. It appears that discourse and rhetoric are critically important because they result in particular practices that are either pro-ecological or harmful in human interaction with biophysical dynamics. In particular, how the local population and leaders of rescue teams define particular situation as safe or as risky determines the actions that will be taken by civil society activists. Discourse is another key component in shaping practices, because winning wrong rhetoric leads to disastrous consequences. Discourse analysis focuses on 'claims-making' by complaining groups.

The overall cumulative social effect of this Summer catastrophe ha been the recognition that the social order in the country, and of the New Forestry code (2005) in particular are harmful both for Russian society and its nature. Besides, the actual behavior of the state organizations responsible for preventing such catastrophe gave raise to protest and mobilization moods (claims).

In activation of Russian civil society the IT had played the key role. SM's activists and associated volunteers rendered the assistance in mitigation of disaster by the creation of the internet-forums which carried out a multiple functions: social (creation of groups which were capable to render material and medical help), material, psychological aid, logistics, etc, but science is just one of many competing forces in the public arena;

It should be stressed that though for the first time the evidences of local eye-witnesses were collected, processed and submitted to the federal government, unfortunately with no constructive response up to now, their self-organization had emerged and extinguish so speedy that sociologists could not follow them to fix their activity accurately and in full. Nevertheless, these internet-forums allowed to local people to compare information about the catastrophe given by the state media with what they have seen as eye-witnesses. This comparison declined the trust in these media and raise the trust to the civil society forums, accounts, reports, etc.

The participants of the mitigation of the consequences of the catastrophe were clearly divided in two parts: those who work in epicenter of it, and

those who act in a distance. But they were not by-standers and did not avoid the participation in rescue operations. On the contrary, they had played the important role as the core organizers joining people by means of internet-forums and blogs, searching various specialists urgently needed in a situ and distributing the material aid, garments, medicine, etc. gathered by volunteers and ordinary people; Internet and other IT devices became for grassroots a powerful means for self-organization. It turned out that internet plus mobile phone-set are powerful means for information and self-organization, irrespectively to the state command and its intricate and often contradictory instructions. Direct communication between civil rescuers and suffering local people have begun to rehabilitate the *trust* between scientists and local people, between residents of capital cities and of small towns in province. There were a third very small group who consider their participation in disaster mitigation as a kind of extreme tourism or a means of getting an additional portion of adrenaline.

All in all, I call this particular mobilization as *ecological* because of its integrative and multifunctional character with not definite margins, whereas the aid rendered by state's emergency rescuers has operated in instructive, one-sided and time-limited way. State rescuers has a definite set of responsibilities and zones defined by their instructions, whereas civil activists felt themselves responsible for all related to fire and its victims.

Summer fires in provinces and Autumn street disturbances of football-fans in Moscow finally defined the preferences of power bodies: they like fans and dislike environmentalists and defenders of human rights. It is indicative that some fun organization called themselves '*Opora*', that means the support of existing regime. It turned out that not all dwellers of small towns and large cities were infected by individualism and consumerism. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to say that civil society organizations are 'always better' in coping with the disasters than the state ones. 'For NGOs, accountability is often upwards to donors than downwards to beneficiaries. In large part because of a concern to attract future funding. NGOs and UN agencies typically put a positive gloss on the impact of their own operations' (Keen, 2008: 157).

In the final analysis, the set of natural disasters in Summer 2010 mobilized Russian civil society, made it more stronger and well organized, attracted to them more resources as well as backers and sympathizers, and showed to the

state officials that in some cases civil organizations were more efficient than the state's rescuers.

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