



## Between the Tsar and People: Public Enlightenment Organizations in Prerevolutionary Russia

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### Abstract

The term Non-Profit Organization (*NPO*) has a negative connotation in modern Russia. This is primarily due to the 2012-law on foreign agent NPOs that may result in the ever-increasing hypertrophy of the state and atrophy of society. However, what can the history offer in such a situation? As a rule, historians refer to analogous cases in other historical periods in order to better understand what is happening in the society. Therefore, authors of the present research focused on this issue particularly the period of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. It also focused on social organizations (voluntary organizations) in the late 19th to the early 20th century in the Russian Empire and recognized them as NPOs. It is not decisive to study results of the historical experience of how non-profit organizations functioned in the Russian Empire in the late 19th to the early 20th century. At first glance, it may seem that authors are seeking to modernize the term “voluntary organizations” and violate principles of applying historical terminology (since the term NPO was not used in Russia at that time). Similarly, the fact that such organizations became widespread in late pre-revolutionary Russia and did not pursue profit-making or the distribution of profits among their members allowed us to define them as NPOs of the 19th century.

**Keywords:** Voluntary organizations; Prerevolutionary Russia; Non-Profit Organizations; Paternalism; Civil society; Social transformations.



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### 1. Introduction

The paternalism, which had underlain the relationship between society and the state in the Soviet Union, was rejected after its disintegration, and the society left the shadow of the state for the first time in many years. This was evident due to the emergence of many public organizations, and then the emergence, institutionalization and legitimization of non-profit organizations in the 1990s (hereinafter NPOs). Domestic and foreign historians often consider public organizations as the evidence of a sphere of vital activity that is beyond the state control as prerequisites for the formation of elements of civil society (Bradley, 2009). After a long break, there was a similar social transformation, which determined the relevance of the available historical experience and the relevance of scientific research on the proposed problem in modern Russia (Loghmani, 2018).

For modern Russia, there is a strong interest of society and the state in activities of NPOs as the most significant institutions of the civil society; and discussions are actively held on directions and the content of their activities, efficiency and benefits for the state and society. The social (first of all educational) organizations, which existed in Russia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, can be considered analogous to modern NPOs. (Chávez, 2017). The study on problems of their institutionalization makes it possible to form the historical context of the contemporary phenomenon and reveal the historical continuity of phenomena of the Russian social life. Furthermore, there are also other trends related to the revival of conservative values and paternalism in the modern social life of Russia seeking to build not only a civil, but also a solidary society (Villalobos Antúnez, 2001).

### 2. Materials and Methods

The present study was based on historical sources stored in Russian National Library (St. Petersburg, the Russian Federation), State Public Historical Library (Moscow, the Russian Federation) and the National Library of Finland (Helsinki, Finland). These historical sources contain information reflecting activities of educational organizations that emerged in such cities of pre-revolutionary Russia as Kursk, Voronezh and Tambov.

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Public organizations of Russia at the end of the XIX century are studied according to the theory of modernization. Despite the criticism of this theory in the contemporary historical literature, its use seems most appropriate for reconstructing the social modernization processes in a country with an agrarian-industrial economy as well as investigating the emergence of elements of civil society in imperial Russia. According to the civilizational approach, borrowing and further development of elements of the public education system from the European experience is an element of the process of Europeanization of Russian society. Authors of paper also used such special methods of historical research as a historical-genetic method that made it possible to reveal characteristics of public education system elements in pre-revolutionary Russia. They performed a comparative-historical method that made it possible to identify the general and particular development of non-profit educational organizations. It should be noted that the use of term NPOs for secular enlightenment organizations of pre-revolutionary Russia is formally an attempt to modernize this phenomenon. However, if we consider their emergence and formation as parts of a broader process like the formation of civil society elements in pre-revolutionary Russia and these organizations (as historical analogs of modern NPOs) like institutions of the emerging civil society operating based on principles of self-organization, self-financing and self-government, the use of the term NPO may be adequate and acceptable in this regard.

### 3. Discussion

In the domestic and foreign historical science, there is a steady interest in the investigation of problem of the civil society formation in Russia for a long time. This problem is currently more deeply researched by representatives of foreign humanitaristics. Along with the most significant philosophical studies, which were often by historians as a theoretical basis, there are studies by J. Habermas, who developed the concept of *Öffentlichkeit*, as well as studies that comprehend, supplement or revise the meaning of his ideas (there were many works criticizing and/or developing the concept of Habermas in the German-speaking humanities in the last decade) as well as studies by James Van Horn Melton, Stefan Ludwig-Hoffman et al. ([Calhoun, 1992; Eley, 1992; Habermas, 1989;1992;1996; Hoffman, 2003; Lavopa, 1992; Trentmann, 2000; Van Horn, 2001](#)). Many Western researchers studied the history of Russian public organizations in the field of the theory of Habermas. The first serious attempt to apply the theory of Habermas according to the definition of *Russian public* was undertaken by Douglas Smith in a study on activities of Freemasonry in Russia in the XVIII century (this research also specified voluntary public organizations in Russia). He drew the attention to the complexity of study on the Russian social organizations relating to the breadth of their social composition ([Smith, 1999](#)). A number of works are conducted by foreign researchers on problems of forming the civil society in Russia as well as roles of public associations in the process of their formation ([Bradley, 1991;2002;2009](#)). For the history of public organizations in Russia, it should be noted that it was studied sporadically before the 1990s. A number of works by A.D. Stepansky during the 1970s-1980s were the only exceptions ([Stepanskij, 1980;1982;1987](#)).

In the post-Soviet period, the history of Russian public organizations also did not become the subject of a separate study for Russian historians, it was mainly considered with other issues ([Koshman, 2008](#)).

It is especially necessary to note the complexity of ideas about the presence in the Russian Empire at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in the Russian historiography in the 1990s. ([Chernyh, 1994; Gridchin, 1993; Volodin, 2000](#)).

It is impossible ignoring the monograph of B.N. Mironov *Social History of Russia (XVIII-early XX centuries.)* (SPb., 2000) which, by right, can be considered as a frontier in understanding problems of forming the civil society in pre-revolutionary Russia opening a new period of study ([Mironov, 2000](#)). However, it is necessary to note a number of works by such modern researchers such as A.S. Tumanov and E.Yu. Kazakova-Apkarimova in investigating problems of forming elements of civil society in pre-revolutionary Russia ([Kazakova, 2005;2008;2010a;2010b;2010c;2011;2012;2014; Tumanova, 2003;2011;2013;2016](#)).

### 4. Results

The contradictory nature of the current stage in the development of Russia's public life, and the ambiguous attitude towards the civil society and its institutions such as NPOs indicate the need to investigate the historical experience of their formation at an earlier stage of their history at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. For this period of social life development in imperial Russia, a paternalistic model of interaction between society and the state was evident characterizing by a high level of social self-organization leading to the rapid growth of social organizations that were simultaneously prerequisites for the development of civil society elements and the result of this process.

At the end of the XIX century, the Russian Empire remained an absolute monarchy, and the state-bureaucratic apparatus still retained a monopoly on the initiation of public projects. The modernization processes, which affected the Russian Empire during this period, influenced not only its economic development, but also its social life. According to the modern German historian Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, the number of public organizations in Russia reached its maximum approximately by 1890 ([Hoffman, 2006](#)). By the beginning of the First World War, their number became maximal in the world ([Bradley, 2009](#)). In fact, if we turn to such mass historical sources of the late XIX - early XX century as "Obzori ..." of provinces, then changes, which occurred during this period in Russian public life, become apparent.

"Obzory ...", being an attachment to the Governor's Most Humbled Report addressed to the Emperor, contained information on various spheres of life in a particular province. By the end of the XIX century, the section *Public*

*Education and Enlightenment* underwent notable changes. Short and dry information on the number and condition of county and parochial schools was replaced by reports including the information on the number of educational courses, repeated classes, popular readings, public and national libraries, which were usually created as a result of the public initiative. An analysis of “Obzory...” in Kursk, Voronezh and Tambov provinces for the period from 1890 to 1913-14 showed that the process of active inclusion of society in the public education in the above-mentioned provinces began in the 90s of the XIX century. For example, in the “Obzory Kurskoj Gubernii...” for 1890 - 1899 gg, and “Obzory voronezhskoj gubernii...” for 1890 - 1892 gg do not contain the information about the public activity in this sphere ([Obzor Kurskoj, 1891;1892;1893;1896;1897;1898;1899;1900; Obzor Voronezhskoj, 1891;1892;1893](#)) It should be noted that the information concerning Voronezh did not fully reflect the real situation. The fact is that Voronezh public library was opened in the provincial center as early as 1864. It is noteworthy that the publication titled *The Twentieth Century of the Voronezh Public Library 1864-1889* reported the opening of a library in Voronezh in the 1930s.

In the first third of the nineteenth century, the goal set in the statute (The public library ... is founded on purpose so that, when applied to the charitable purposes of the government caring for the education of people, disseminate information useful to the people) ([Dvadcatipjatiletie, 1889](#)) was not achieved, “and among Voronezh public, its memory was so extinct, and when the library question was raised in 1862, nobody remembered it ...” ([Dvadcatipjatiletie, 1889](#)). According to authors of the present paper, such a fate of the newly opened library can be considered as “a very instructive fact, which is once again proved that no good thing can develop without the interest and support of society.” The reason for failures of the beginning of the 1930s was as follows: “The initiative of the library of the 1930s came from above, and the society of that time was too little aware of the need for such an institution and the importance of its educational significance, and thus, the newly opened library, as a public need, soon ceased its Existence”. The initiative to create (or, in this case, to recreate) a library in Voronezh in the 1960s was “entirely based on the part of Voronezh intelligentsia of that time, on the part of the society itself” ([Dvadcatipjatiletie, 1889](#)).

“Obzory...” of the same Kursk and Voronezh provinces for a later period as well as “Obzory ...” of Tambov Gubernia since 1890 contain information about the formation and further development of public initiative in the matter of public education, ([Obzor Kurskoj, 1901](#)) ([Obzor Tambovskoj, 1893;1894;1896;1899;1900;1901;1902;1904;1905](#)).

In “Obzory ...” Kursk province was an exception according to which the first mention of the activity of public organizations in the field of the public education appeared only in 1900, while in Voronezh and Tambov provinces, this process began a few years earlier. In the future, the information in the “Obzory ...” about public initiative in the field of public education became more detailed and detailed (for example, indicating the number of books issued in public libraries, the number of books in the library collections, the number of people's readings during the reporting period with the number of visitors, etc.). In general, these historical sources allow us to say that the public initiative to disseminate and preserve the already existing basic knowledge of the public was in demand and found its audience. In this regard, compilers of the “Obzor Tambovskoy Gubernii za 1899” even wrote that: The Society for the Establishment of People's Readings in Tambov Gubernia, open in Tambov, is the most powerful factor in educating adults in the province ...” ([Obzor Tambovskoj, 1900](#)).

Despite this, the autocracy was a main obstacle to the development of social life independent of the state in Russia (and the subsequent development of civil society). It continued to actively intervene in the public life and tried to control it. Serfdom was another constraining factor in the development of public life; and the consequences of reform carried out in 1861. Serfdom had a negative impact not only on the economic development of the Russian Empire, but also on the legal status of the whole population. Even at the end of the nineteenth century, such values as private property and freedom of expression cannot be widespread in Russia. Moreover, it negatively influenced collective attitudes of the main part of population of the Russian empire—the peasants: humility, submission, lack of initiative, and religious perception of the surrounding world were characteristics of their mentality and traditionalism as a feature of everyday life. It can be argued that a combination of these factors led to the emergence of an extreme version of the Eastern European model of state in Russia: The social initiative belonged not to private associations, but to the bureaucratic apparatus. In such a situation, all needs of the common human had to be satisfied by the help of such traditional institutions as the family, the church, and the peasant community. Even after Great Reforms in the Russian Empire, the space between the state and individuals, which would have been filled by public organizations, did not develop as a result of social initiative. Moreover, the appearance of the first public organizations in the Russian Empire of the second half of the XIX century occurred on the initiative of the state. The most famous and studied cases were the Russian Geographical Society (which exists), the Russian Technical Society, and the Russian Entomological Society. These societies contributed to the modernization of the Russian economy to overcome the gap of countries of Europe accumulating the scientific knowledge.

The present paper proposed referring to the study on social organizations arisen in the late nineteenth century in the Russian province namely in provincial cities of the European part of Russia typical of the agrarian region such as Kursk, Tambov and Voronezh.

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, public organizations of various orientations began to appear in these cities: Commissions on folk readings, societies for the creation of folk libraries, singing societies, aeronautical societies, the society of Esperanto followers, medical societies, bee-keeping societies, etc. Due to the fact that one list of such organizations, which emerged in these provincial centers (and even the provinces themselves) in the studied period occupy several pages, the present paper paid special attention to the study on the history of public organizations that were engaged in the educational work because they did not only unite people by

interests, but also because the ultimate goal of their activities was to change the moral status of the population of the Russian province as qualitative changes in his way of life.

To identify the need for such organizations, it is necessary to turn to results of the First General Census of the Russian Empire in Kursk, Voronezh and Tambov provinces in 1897. Therfore, the population was 2,371,012 people in Kursk province, 2,531,253 people in Voronezh, and 2,684,030 people in Tambov, while the share of the urban population did not exceed 9.33% in Kursk province, 6.7% in Voronezh, and 8.4% in Tambov. The literacy rate was maximal and 32.76% in Voronezh province, and approximately the same (16.3% and 16.6% respectively) in Kursk and Tambov gubernia. Voronezh with 80599 people was the most populated provincial center, and then Kursk with 75507 people and Tambov with 48015 people. The number of illiterate residents was the maximum of 42686 people in Kursk. (56.4%); the situation in Tambov and Voronezh was approximately the same (22014 (45.85%) and 40054 (49.7%)) ([Pervaja Vseobshchaja, 1904](#)).

The low level of literacy, first of all, affected the image and quality of life of the population of these cities and provinces. For instance, the newspaper, ([Voronezhskij Telegraf, 1880](#)), reported about the appearance on the territory of the Voronezh province of the Hessian fly, which is a dangerous pest for cereals. The newspaper developed a discussion about necessary measures to combat the pest. However, the author of article came to the conclusion that it would be hardly possible to overcome the fly in the near future "firstly because the peasants generally do not like (any) innovations; secondly, because they do not believe in the harm caused by the fly and see in the flow of God, and which God deliver" ([Voronezhskij Telegraf, 1880](#)). The famine in the European Russia in 1880 was another wave of famine that was repeated in Russia at the end of the 19th century for every 6-7 years. The next wave of famine occurred in 1891-1892, but this was complicated by the epidemic of cholera resulting in the death of about 400 thousand people in the central part of Russia. One of the famous Kursk doctors, N.I. Dolgopolov, who later became a deputy of the Second State Duma, wrote about the causes of the epidemic spread in Kursk province. The liberal newspaper, Kurskiy Listok, contained excerpts from his interviews with the population about cholera and syphilis in 1894. N.I. Dolgopolov wrote that the population had no idea about infectious diseases and was in no way acquainted with the essence of cholera. He thus described the situation near Kursk in the following way: "Imagine an ordinary hut ... in which ... a birdhouse is built under the bunks, for chickens, geese, ducks, guinea fowls and peacocks. Stench and inconsequential din - unbearable for a fresh person ... Meanwhile, a whole family: a night watchman with his wife, a poultry house and three children from 3 to 12 years of age live on these bunks... ". A similar situation was described by initiators of the creation of an enlightenment society in Voronezh in the report of 1896: "... among people, there is almost always a most naive view of nature, superstitious attitude to many of its phenomena, various prejudices and ignorant fears leading often to the heaviest and sad consequences" ([Otchet o dejatel'nosti, 1898](#)).

In the end, the government's actions to combat hunger and cholera were critically perceived by the public opinion. According to contemporaries and historians, the famine served as the starting point in the development of the conflict between the autocracy and the public. Before the open conflict, it was still far away, but at the end of the 19th century, it became clear that the efforts of the state and the church were clearly not enough to bring about radical changes for the better in people's lives. Especially these efforts were not enough for the *modernization jerk* (Norman, 1998).

The incompleteness of the Great Reforms, the experience of joining groups of people, and the dissatisfaction with activities of the state-bureaucratic apparatus all led the Russian intelligentsia to the idea that the society should take upon itself the solution of those problems with which the state and the church could not cope. Accordingly, at the end of the 19th century, non-profit organizations began to massively appear throughout Russia, the purpose of which was "to promote primary education within a certain province" ([Ustav Obshhestva po ustrojstvu, 1893](#); [Ustav Obshhestva sodejstviya, 1898](#)). Such organizations appeared in Kursk (the Society for the Promotion of Primary Education in Kursk Gubernia in 1898), Tambov (Society for the Organization of Popular Readings in the Tambov Gubernia and Voronezh (Voronezh Commission of People's Readings) during this period. They intended to deal not so much with the elimination of illiteracy of the population, but rather with the spread of the cultural minimum, enlightening the masses of people.

Among the most well-known initiators of the creation of such organizations in the region, the following representatives of the liberal intelligentsia can be mentioned: In Voronezh: Konstantin Vasilyevich Fedyayevsky is a well-known ophthalmologist, initiator and organizer of a free hospital in Voronezh. Mikhail Alekseevich Venetitinov is Russian archeologist and historian, hereditary nobleman; Vasily Ivanovich Kolyubakin is a doctor, county and public figure. In Kursk: one of the main initiators of the creation of such a society was Vasily Dolzhenkov, a deputy of the First and Second State Duma, a well-known physician, the creator of a free hospital for the poor in Kursk, and important representative of the Kursk intelligentsia as an honorable world the judge of Stary Oskol, the chairman of the Starooskolskij District Council, the chairman of the Kursk Province Council, Nikolai Vladimirovich Raevsky, Alexander Apollonovich Anshelson was a Kursk lawyer, a sworn attorney, a candidate of law. However, there was an atypical situation in Tambov. The initiator of the enlightenment organization was the Chief Chamber Commander, a large landowner, a representative of the old noble family Emmanuil Naryshkin.

The procedure for creating societies was quite laborious. In general, it amounted to the fact that initiators of their creation had to assemble a team of like-minded people to work out the charter of society to resolve the issue of logistics and finally wait for the approval of charter by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. At the end of the XIX century, all of that required exceptional efforts and time. For example, it took 3 years in Tambov and Kursk.

Such slowness was due to the fact that the state was extremely wary of any forms of social self-organization and interference in the sphere of activity in which it still played a leading role. Fears were caused not only by initiators of the creation of these societies, but also the most popular form of work of these organizations are public lectures, popular lectures or as they were called in the 19th century - people's readings, since they assumed direct contact with the population. Therefore, the *Rules of People's Readings* were approved in 1876, and published only in 1894.

The state, giving permission for the creation of educational organizations, at the same time perceived organizations themselves, and the educational work as a potential threat. Therefore, one of the fundamental grounds for autocracy was the principle of centralism, full concentration in the hands of the government of the entire cause of public education, and school and extracurricular. For instance, according to the text of the new *Rules on People's Readings* of 1901: "People's readings, being one of the means of primary public education, are subject to the general leadership of the Ministry of National Enlightenment", and in the localities their organization should be resolved by the director of public schools (*Ob Izdanii Novyh Pravil*, 1902).

The non-commercial character of such organizations was first of all evidenced by the statutory documents, usually containing the following wording: "All members of the society serve the society free of charge ...", or that all available financial resources of the Company should be used only to achieve the objectives of this Society, but not for personal purposes (*Ustav Obshhestva po ustrojstvu*, 1893). In other words, Russian intelligentsia of the late nineteenth century viewed public education as a civic duty, and not as an advantageous enterprise.

The structure and principles of functioning of created societies were approximately identical. Therefore, any person (regardless of social or gender identity) could become a member of society with the exception of students and minors. The General Meeting was consisted of all the members of the Society, from which the Company's Management Board was elected by secret ballot, which was supposed to dispose of the material and human resources available to the Company as effectively as possible to achieve its goal. Members of the General Meeting elected the Audit Commission that was to check the annual reports prepared by the Board.

Despite the high degree of independence in internal affairs and decisions, such societies, nevertheless, were under the direct control of the state, for example, the Minister of Public Education, or his deputy and other members of the Board, asserted (or did not approve) the candidacy of the chairman of the Board the curator of the educational district.

All educational societies adhered to the same principles of organization of internal work: the election and succession of people involved in management; transparency (all the Societies annually provided reports that included information about successes and difficulties in achieving the set goal as well as financial statements that included information on the income and expenditure. In form, these were reports of the Board before the General Meeting.

In addition, reports served as a kind of advertising for potential members of the Society, the Company's budget was replenished with the amount of their membership fees, collegiality in discussing current issues, majority with the arrival of new members - all decisions were made by "a simple majority"; secret (as already mentioned, election of officials passed by secret ballot) (*Otchet Obshhestva sodejstvija*, 1902;1903; *Ustav Obshhestva po ustrojstvu*, 1893).

The principle of self-financing was a basic principle of the functioning of these public organizations. Kursk and Voronezh societies could receive income from membership fees, donations as well as from fees for their lectures or other events not prohibited by law (e.g. performances, concerts, themed evenings) (*Ustav Obshhestva sodejstvija*, 1898), (*Otchet Voronezhskoj*, 1896;1898;1899). Tambov Society had an atypical situation, since Naryshkin, as a large landowner and statesman, allocated 210,000 (200,000 were allocated by Naryshkin himself, another 10,000 were donated by a benefactor who wished to remain anonymous) of rubles that were in the bank account and used by the company (*Ustav Obshhestva po ustrojstvu*, 1893); (*Otchet Obshhestva po ustrojstvu*, 1894;1895;1903).

Popular readings were main forms of work by such organizations and they were held during the period from September 1 to May 1. The main task of lecturers was to broaden horizons of listeners or provide the knowledge of practical content. In accordance with rules of popular readings, the lecturer could only voice the text of the lecture, but had no right to comment on it. Lecturers gave lectures on brochures, the content and list of which were approved by the Ministry of Public Education. The result of this commission at the end of the XIX century was the *Catalog of Works*, which, according to contemporaries suffered remarkable poverty both quantitatively and qualitatively (*Narodnye Chtenija*, 1897).

The schedule of lectures should be approved by an authorized person who represented the Ministry of Education. This person also had to follow the observance of *Rules for Conducting Popular Readings*. In the event, when this person detected any violations, readings immediately ceased. Lecturers could be teachers of local schools, clergymen as well as any other persons capable of reading. However, the main condition was the political security of this person. The candidatures of lecturers were approved by both the observer of the Ministry of Education and the governor.

In order to find out whether there really was a need for such petty regulation by the state and whether there was a real threat to the state from these NPOs, their activities should be considered in more detail.

In the choice of lecture topics, lecturers were limited only to the catalog of approved brochures, which did not address political issues. The list of brochures allowed for reading was quite diverse on the subject: "Kind of Land and How Great It Is", "On the Volga River", "Suvorov's Life", "The Life of Our Lady", "The Arkhangelsk Region", "About France", "On China", "Christopher Columbus", "Little Russia and Little Russians", "What is Coal and How It Is Mined," "About the Thunderstorm", "On Heat and Air", "On Migratory Birds", etc. (*Otchet Voronezhskoj*, 1896;1898;1899), (*Otchet Obshhestva po ustrojstvu*, 1894;1895; *Otchet Obshhestva ustrojstva*, 1899;1902;1903;1912); (*Otchet Obshhestva sodejstvija*, 1904;1906),

Apparently, readings were supposed to form elementary ideas about the surrounding world, about Russian culture, national and the universal history.

The Board of Communities decided which brochures in what order should be read. Despite the fact that the list of allowed pamphlets for reading was small, it made it possible to systematize them. For example, Voronezh Society devoted most of readings to the study of Russian history in 1896 - 1897 starting with a lecture on the baptism of Rus and ending with the eighteenth century and the reign of Catherine the Great (*Otchet o dejatel'nosti, 1898*).

Readings of fictional content were the most popular, but the natural science lectures were the least popular since they demanded more attention, were not so fascinating, and required the presence of even elementary scientific ideas about the world around them (*Otchet o dejatel'nosti, 1898*).

Reading of brochures was accompanied by a demonstration of *shadow paintings* by the help of *a magic lantern*. First, the popularity of public readings was provided, often, by the presence of this apparatus. For the first time, it was faced with the projection of image, and listeners often got up from their seats and touched the image with their hands, as they could not believe that there was an image, but there was no physically tangible picture on the wall: "Look! On the wall! All eyes rushed there and for a while there was silence ... and who was closer, rushed to the wall and touched their hands [in the text] to the picture" (*Otchet o dejatel'nosti, 1898*).

The availability of lectures for the target audience is indicated by the fact that some of visitors could come to readings for a nominal fee, while others could visit them for free. For a period of its existence in Kursk from 1899 to 1903, public lectures were attended by 64345 people. In Voronezh, public lectures were attended by 118570 people in a period from 1893 to 1898. In Tambov, the commission on popular readings lasted the longest period - from 1893 to 1914, and attracted more than 330000 listeners during this period. Obviously, such figures could be achieved on the condition that a certain part of audience began to perceive folk readings not as entertainment, but as a regular phenomenon in the cultural life of city and attended folk lectures regularly no longer with entertaining but cognitive purposes.

Tambov commission of the public readings lasted so long because unlike Kursk and Voronezh, it had no difficulty with the material and technical base. Imposed obstacles by the local administration, which prohibited the use of a room for needs of societies, were main reasons for the termination of work of commissions on popular readings in Voronezh and Kursk. A series of prohibitions resulted in disruptions in reading, disconnection from the target audience and material difficulties. Tambov commission, which had its own building and a considerable amount of money by Naryshkin, had no such difficulty and continued to function until the outbreak of the First World War.

## 5. Conclusion

It should be noted that the mission of these organizations was much broader than the obvious reason. In fact, the emergence of these organizations led to a transformation of ideas about the service. A new idea of service for the benefit of people and Russia appears to replace the official version of service to the state and the tsar. The part of this mission was the intention not only to give the basic knowledge to the broad part of urban population, but also to change the public way of life to put them apart from the traditional pastime like drunkenness to replace developed practices for centuries with new, more useful and adequate modern practices.

It should be noted that popular readings not only gave knowledge to people, they enabled the main part of population to know themselves, learn about their country and history, contributed to the construction of national identity. The public readings were considered by their organizers as the first and necessary step in the transformation of consciousness of the main part of population. The next steps were connected with the creation of folk libraries, folk theaters, and people's universities.

These NPOs did not carry a clearly expressed political threat to the state-bureaucratic apparatus, but they similarly became parts of a controversial political culture: On the one hand, they stimulated the development of partnership between the society and the state, and on the other hand, they became important elements in the effort to the liberation of society from a personified power and the arbitrariness of bureaucracy.

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