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Zemstvos of Ukrainian provinces in the late 19th – early 20th centuries in the context of the formation of civil society in Ukraine

Abstract. Today, various aspects of the emergence and functioning of civil society have become the subject of detailed study. The relevance of this issue is underscored by the fact that many states, including Ukraine, are undergoing a political transformation from authoritarian to democratic political systems. Local self-government bodies occupy a special place among the institutions that constitute civil society. As a micro-model of civil society, local self-government makes it possible to understand the patterns and contradictions in its development. The involvement of broad population segments in addressing regional issues contributes to individuals' awareness of civic responsibility, tolerance, and an active civic stance. A society that has mastered the practice of self-governance can develop mechanisms for public oversight of power, realizing the idea of social justice, and ensuring social protection. The level of development of local self-government bodies serves as an indicator of the extent of civil initiatives and the maturity of society. Ukraine has considerable experience in the functioning of local self-government and its development through the advancement of civil society. These very aspects are the focus of this article.

Keywords: zemstvos, local government, civil society, historiography, city council

Local self-government as an institution of civil society began to form in liberal political thought in the first half of the 19th century due to liberal democratic reforms. In the middle of the 19th century, local self-government was called "local government" in the framework of the state theory of R. Gneist (Gneist, 1896: 41).

In the library of the Institute, as well as the University of Warsaw, the conceptual foundations of civil society were studied by Polish researchers. Thus, Juliusza Bardacha's work "Narod polityczny I jego przemiany (1439-1993)" noted that all citizens, regardless of origin, religion, and nationality, should be the subject of civil society. The only way to avoid the explosion of the cult of ethnicity (nationalism) is the persistent promotion of the principles of civil society.

In *Stanislaw Russocki's* work "Narodziny polskiego parlamentaryzmu w perspektywie porownawcz", it is noted that decision-making in civil society should be carried out only with all civil society members' full consent with the proposal (Russocki, 1995: 32-47).

Lech Kacprzak, in his study "Spoleczenstwo obywatelskie interdyscyplinarny wymiar problemu," drew attention to the fact that imbued with distrust of society, the authorities sought to narrow civil rights in the 1860s consciously. Moreover, attempts were made to neutralize civil activity (Matejczyk, 2004: 51). The author saw civil society as a model of moral, liberal democracy, in which individuals had the (constantly expanding) opportunity to fulfill their potential by participating in public life. A citizen is a person who can participate in public decision-making, participate in discussions, and take actions for the benefit of their society.

According to *Jerzy Drazkiewicz*, civil participation at the local level is an essential element of political processes, regional development, and management of the local system. Citizens' actions may include: control over power, participation in decision-making processes, taking on some tasks of local government, providing information to local authorities, supporting the opposition, etc. (Matejczyk, 2004: 11). Also, the researcher notes that one of the most important aspects of civic participation in public life is participation in voting (Tocqueville, 1992: 19).

Regarding the study of zemstvo activities in Ukraine in this context, it should be noted that there are currently few specialized studies devoted to this issue. Research is mainly conducted within the framework of general works on the history of various areas of zemstvo activity or issues of civil society in general. Essential materials can be found in the collection "Civic identity and the sphere of civic activity in the Russian Empire. The second half of the 19th – early 20th century", whose authors attempted to comprehensively examine various aspects of the development and functioning of civil society in the Russian Empire, including the role of zemstvos in these processes. Among general historical works, the two-volume study by B.N. Mironov, dedicated to the social history of Russia and touching on the genesis of civil society in this country, stands out. Based on the Kharkov Provincial Zemstvo's activities, some aspects of this issue are explored by the Ukrainian researcher E.A. Bakumenko.

There is no need to speak about the existence of a consolidated civil society of Ukrainian lands, which were part of the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th – early 20th century. The state was careful to ensure that the zemstvos did not go beyond their economic powers and severely limited any possibilities of their political activity. The authorities made every effort to ensure that representatives of the nobility prevailed in the self-government bodies. The limits of the powers of the zemstvos were constantly monitored and interpreted at the will of the authorities, which nullified many positive developments in the socio-economic sphere. The authoritarian regime of tsarist Russia allowed only those self-governing activities that did not threaten the regime's foundations and filled those areas of life where the state did not have time to restore order. This was, in particular, public education, medical care, etc.

If we proceed not from idealized notions of civil society but from the historical features of the development of Russia and Ukraine, then when defining the category of "civil society", it is necessary to focus on aspects such as public engagement, communication, self-governance, charity, the spirit of solidarity, and civic responsibility. A feature of Ukrainian reality was that institutions of self-governance were created "from above", that is, on the authorities' initiative rather than society itself. However, this did not prevent these institutions from going far beyond the limits set for them by the authorities. The main areas of zemstvo activity that achieved the most incredible public resonance were public education, medical services, statistical research, economic assistance to the population, and the dissemination of various types of information. Let us briefly consider one of these fields.

Public education became one of the zemstvo's leading and most well-known areas. Before the introduction of zemstvos, elementary public education was in a deplorable state. In the pre-reform period, schools in villages were practically non-existent. Meanwhile, education plays a massive role in forming a person's civic identity, making mass media accessible, and allowing individuals to create their opinions rationally. A person becomes a citizen when they understand their civil rights and responsibilities.

The preamble to the draft Charter of General Educational Institutions stated: “To enjoy human rights, it is necessary to cultivate among the masses an awareness of these rights, to inspire a love for rational labor, and to instill in each person respect for themselves and humanity in general.” Initially, in zemstvo circles, it was believed that education was not strictly a zemstvo concern, and the most they could do was provide limited material support to schools, while striving to economize in every possible way. This attitude toward public education reflected the general spirit of the government, which sought to limit public activity and the scope of zemstvo competence. However, over time, the situation changed. The formation of an industrial society dictated the need for literate people who could form the foundation for a professional class of skilled workers, soldiers, and peasants. That is why expanding public education became one of the most urgent and pressing issues, which zemstvos were also involved in addressing. Without delving into the history of zemstvo public education (to which many works are devoted), it should be noted that zemstvos employed various educational approaches. These included primary schools, public libraries, reading rooms, public readings with slide projectors, film screenings, museums, Sunday and evening courses for adults, community centers, traveling exhibitions, and more.

For example, in file 2130 (part 2) “Report of the Zmiev Zemstvo Administration to the County Zemstvo Assembly on the Participation of Zemstvos in Providing Education for Orphans of Soldiers Killed in the War with Japan” from fund 336 of the Central State Historical Archive (Kyiv) “Kharkov Provincial Gendarme Administration (1868 – 1917),” a general report by the special commission on education based on inspections of educational institutions across Ukrainian provinces was presented. The report emphasized that one of the most critical tasks of zemstvos was to raise the level of self-education among the population. It was noted that the most accessible way to gain knowledge independently was through libraries.

The report revealed a shortage of artistic and scientific literature for potential readers: “At present, good, wholesome, folk literature has grown significantly. Every day, new publications appear on the book market that give people access to the works of renowned authors who shed light on pressing contemporary issues. Even the largest bookstores cannot stock them in sufficient quantity. Cheap books sell out quickly; after 1 to 1.5 months, it is necessary to reorder new print editions. A real intellectual hunger has been revealed among the people, manifesting in a demand for quality books” (Veselovsky B., 1911: 301).

The resolution stated: “The time has passed when the people were indifferent or even hostile to literacy and education. Researchers and observers of public life throughout the 19th century unanimously noted the steady growth in the population’s educational needs and their desire for enlightenment. The reasons for this heightened thirst for knowledge were also outlined: firstly, society faced various needs and challenges that had become particularly acute. In seeking a way out of a crisis, people turned to the experience of previous generations, as reflected in scholarly works; secondly, events such as war demanded reforms in internal life and the state governance system.

Since the 1870s, zemstvos have also begun opening book depots and reading-room libraries. Thanks to them, book sales were organized in villages and small towns near schools,

zemstvo doctors' clinics, veterinarians' offices, fairs, and markets – wherever possible. All of this, of course, not only contributed to the growing demand for books and the enrichment of peasant knowledge but also helped steer peasants away from alcohol. For instance, the Slavyanoserbsk Zemstvo, justifying the need to open libraries, pointed out that "an unattractive home environment pushed the peasant to a quite natural desire to spend his leisure time among fellow villagers, drawing him to the tavern, the street, or evening gatherings. And to fight the darker sides of peasant life without offering anything positive in return is to fight with no hope of achieving any result". (Report of the Slavyanoserbsk, 1894: 9).

This led to several resolutions by zemstvo assemblies to open free public readings, public libraries, school libraries, repeat courses, Sunday classes, etc. Books were seen as a key weapon in combating a significant social ill, alcoholism.

The foundational principles of the zemstvo educational program included community self-initiative, universal accessibility, unrestricted access to all educational activities, and their regularity and systematic organization. Zemstvos created rural primary schools, which were supported by representatives of the so-called "third element" – teachers and female teachers, among whom were many true enthusiasts. Many courses and teachers' congresses organized by zemstvos – often against the authorities' wishes – reduced the number of educators with only basic or incomplete secondary education, while increasing the number of teachers with diplomas from pedagogical institutions. These professionals were equipped with the latest didactic developments in primary education. All of this dealt a blow to the state-church monopoly in education, gave the intelligentsia a chance to acquaint themselves with the real life of the people, and attempt to influence their worldview. This, although not wholly, allowed for progress toward nurturing a conscious individual – a citizen, freeing yesterday's serf from prejudice, dependency, and ignorance. Zemstvos made significant contributions in the struggle for universal primary education, which entailed principles of civil society, such as gender equality, equal social opportunities, initiative, etc.

Zemstvos introduced various mutual aid funds, pension funds, and other initiatives aimed at improving the material conditions of teachers. In the Yekaterinoslav province, four mutual aid funds operated – one for the entire province (established in 1898), the second in Mariupol district (1902), the third in Slavyanoserbsk district (1902).

The concern for improving the quality of teaching staff eventually began to bear fruit. In 1896, teachers with adequate training (graduates of higher and secondary educational institutions) made up 68% of the total; underqualified teachers (with only primary education) accounted for 32%. In 1904, the figures were 73.1% and 26.9% respectively, in 1911 59% and 41%, and 1914, 62.4% and 37.6%. (Belokonsky I., 1914).

It should be noted that the activities of teachers were constantly monitored. For example, by early 1901, zemstvo schoolteachers in the Slavyanoserbsk district were accused of holding anti-government and anti-religious views. In the fall of 1901, the school board and inspector dismissed teacher V. Smirnov. He was charged with openly criticizing Orthodox Church rituals and spreading views of Count L. Tolstoy among local peasants. As punishment, V. Smirnov was placed under surveillance by the gendarmerie.

Interestingly, on the threshold of 1917, through the efforts of local self-government, the empire, and together with it, the Naddnipryanshchyna came close to introducing general compulsory primary education and free medical care for the population. The fundamental principles of the zemstvo educational program included the initiative of the population, the general

availability and free of charge of all educational events, and their systematic and planned nature. The main principle of the Zemstvo medical system was free general access to it. In general, the system of zemstvo medicine included three main components: district medicine, inpatient treatment, and sanitary and epidemiological measures. Based on the information obtained during statistical research, the zemstvos initiated various petitions to the authorities, thereby performing one of the main functions of civil society – creating an information space, protecting group interests, and streamlining individuals' requirements and aspirations. Statistics became knowledge about culture and public opinion.

Local (primarily zemstvo) self-government became one of those institutions in the Ukrainian Provinces in the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries, which became the material and ideological basis for the emergence of the foundations of civil society.

A feature of Ukrainian reality was that the institutions of self-government were created “from above”, i.e., on the initiative of the authorities, not the society; however, this did not prevent these institutions from stepping far beyond the limits assigned to them by the authorities. The main areas of zemstvo activity, where the most incredible public resonance was achieved, were public education, medical care, statistical research, economic assistance to the population, and dissemination of various types of information.

Thus, in the Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire, where the political situation was always characterized by a high degree of centralized power, as in other countries with a dominant bureaucratic component, local self-governance became a leading factor in the formation of civil society and civic identity. Local self-governance became a unique sphere within society where people could exercise their civil rights in a non-rule-of-law state through self-initiated associations. A process of forming civic identity among citizens united by shared positive activity was underway, and it was particularly successful in the Ukrainian provinces.

The principles of inclusivity across social classes, self-initiative, group formation, and tolerance were realized mainly at the level of zemstvo self-government, which addressed a significant portion of socially essential issues related to ensuring an adequate standard of living for citizens and the sociocultural development of the regions. A mechanism for transmitting public opinion to government structures began to take shape. However, this process was never fully completed.

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