

propriate Marxist commentary, but it was there.

To give a rough summary of the idea behind cybernetics: If one is to gain control of anything – from machines to spheres of collective life – one needs to design a control system that imitates those already designed by nature in plants and animals. “Cultural policy” is then one part of such a control system, the part that covers the domain of culture – the system’s “brain”, so to speak.

Applying Foucauldian “archeology”, Rindzeviciute attempted a reconstruction of the cultural policies in the years 1960–1990 from traces discernible in various inscribed discourses from the period and in interviews with living witnesses. She begins with a three-part sketch of the wider historical background. First comes an account of independent Lithuania’s brief history (1918–1940) and cultural policies, insofar as it had any such policies. This is followed by a description of the war years, which ends with Lithuania’s annexation by the Soviet Union. The second part is a history of cultural policies in the Soviet Union; the third is a historical account of how cybernetics was translated first into a Soviet and second into a Lithuanian context. These parts of the dissertation in themselves constitute a significant contribution to knowledge, as they bring to light little-known developments.

How can a general theory of control be applied to the domain of culture? By translating culture into a part of the economy, and more specifically, by defining it as part of the service sector. The projection of a materialist ideology onto cybernetics made it possible first to interpret “culture” as a response to certain “needs of the people”; second, to calculate both the needs and the costs of satisfying them; and third, to program these values into a planning and control system (rather than leaving them open to such dangerous phenomena as “supply” and “demand”).

What follows is an analysis of cultural policies in Lithuania as reflected in the public (not merely official) discourse over three decades. First, 1960–1970, when the “scientific-technical revolution” was gathering impetus in the entire Soviet Union; then 1970–1980, when this “revolution” ruled and, paradoxically, revealed its weaknesses; and, finally, 1980–1990, when doubts about “calculable culture” grew in strength.

In conclusion, Rindzeviciute stated that

cybernetics and systems theory “made culture governable” in the Lithuanian SSR by providing the conceptual tools to envision the cultural sector as complex and relational (connected to the economic as well as to the natural environment). Rooted in Einstein’s relativity theory, the system-cybernetic approach made it possible to formalize the development of culture, which was otherwise perceived as intrinsically uncertain. In the age of cybernetic control, one could govern culture by means of predictive calculations: predictions of the cultural sector’s future development could be made, based on statistical information about its past behavior. (p. 248)

RINDZEVICIUTE DISSERTATION offers far more food for thought than would a mere history of a selected time-period of a small European country. It tells the story of cybernetics’ rise and fall as a tool for controlling culture. This story has not yet come to an end, however. It continues, although some of the protagonists have changed. While the “calculability of culture” was repudiated and almost ridiculed in Lithuania, the idea seemed to have survived very well elsewhere. Also, the sacred divisions between “nature” and “culture” and between “culture”, “economy”, and “politics”, which the Soviet ideologues tried to abolish (justly, in my opinion), live on and thrive. Furthermore, the assumption that everything is calculable (Power, 1997) has returned in full force under the label “transparency through accountability” – currently a scourge of the universities. Perhaps the dream of a universal control system is global and eternal, and the only thing that varies is the means by which it is to be achieved?

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An essay by Slava Gerovitch was published in *BW II*:1, “The cybernetics scare and the origins of the Internet”.

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Peasants in a socialist society. A tribute to Viktor Danilov

**Lennart Samuelson
(ed.)
Bönder och
bolsjeviker: Den ryska
landsbygdens historia
1902 – 1939**

[Peasants and Bolsheviks: The History of the Russian Countryside 1902 – 1939] The Economic Research Institute, Stockholm School of Economics (EFI) 2007. 271 pages.



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MOST OF US PROBABLY associate the social and economic aftermath of the great October Revolution primarily with the drive to industrialize and modernize Soviet society. But the majority of the Soviet population, both before and for some time after World War II, lived in the countryside and made its living in agriculture. For the socialist party machine and state administration, this part of the population proved very problematic. How might the peasants, who had, to be sure, suffered greatly under the old regime, be persuaded to accept the city-oriented social vision that the revolution represented; how could they be induced to feel solidarity with, or even become part of, the working class? At the same time, it was vital that the rural sector become a central concern if the pieces of the modernization puzzle were to fall into place. Without an agricultural sector to feed the working class, industry could not be developed, while intolerable conditions within the sector might lead to spontaneous urbanization and migration and thus threaten the whole project.

THIS DILEMMA PROVIDES the backbone of the anthology edited by Lennart Samuelson. The anthology’s thirteen academic essays, for the most part written by contemporary Russian researchers, discuss such themes as the Russian peasant revolts that predated the October Revolution, the preconditions for the long-term economic planning of the 1920s, the collectivization of agriculture and the elimination of the kulaks, the 1932–1933 famines in the Russian and Ukrainian countryside, and everyday life in southern Ural. Thus, there is space for approaches ranging from the organizational macro-perspective, a theme that often recurs in contemporary Russian research on the Stalin era, to descriptions of everyday life conditions. The anthology uses the series of archival sources on early Soviet history that have been released and published after the *glasnost* era. These include rich material on agrarian society at the time of collectivization. Russian research in this field is rarely noticed outside the country’s borders, however – except when it becomes the subject of political controversies. This book is a welcome resource for those who speak one of the Scandinavian languages but who have

Continued. Peasants in a socialist society

no Russian. Furthermore, it honors the work done by recently deceased Russian historian Viktor Danilov, who threw light on the darkest sides of Soviet and Russian contemporary history and played a major role in securing the publication of sources on the 1930s collectivization drive. The anthology's contents provide a good picture of the current state of Russian research.

IGOR NARSKIJ'S "Victors and Losers in Ural's Countryside 1917-1922" is among the anthology's outstanding contributions. The article discusses conditions in the countryside during the critical post-revolution years, describing how the peasantry was transformed from enthusiastic support troops rallying behind the revolution to a starving mass entirely focused on survival. Prior to the revolution, the Ural peasantry had been a relatively prosperous and egalitarian group of independent farmers, well able to exploit Russia's pre-revolutionary economic upturn and accustomed to handling its own affairs. During the Civil War, neither of the contending parties could manage without the peasantry's support. Nor, however, could they manage without arbitrary confiscations. At the same time, the war disrupted agricultural work, as seed corn was commandeered and fields flattened by cavalry. Neither of the warring parties took the peasants' problems seriously, nor saw the need for a long-term perspective on the agricultural question. The peasants' own survival strategy was spontaneously to redistribute land, according to their own norms; collectively to resist directives issued by the state or by either combatant; and to increase their own consumption. By 1922, the famine had reached such proportions that neither the peasants nor the state could cope with the situation without outside help. Starvation finally forced the peasants to abandon resistance and surrender unconditionally to the state. It is hardly surprising that the planning of agricultural policy and the program for peasant welfare both failed.

In her contribution to the anthology, Jelena Tiurina shows that not only was there a lack of tested instruments for long-term planning, but that the planners themselves were, often, treated with as much callousness as were the peasants. Narskij's and Tiurina's articles are important contributions. Both write on conditions within agricultural

society during the revolution and the first years of the Soviet era, a subject that has often taken second place to studies of the collectivizations of the 1930s. But as a clear picture of the early years emerges, so does a clear pattern of the state's often ruthless treatment of the peasantry. In an article based on economic documents and reports on conditions in the countryside, Tatiana Sorokina highlights the aimlessness and incompetence that characterized the collectivization drive. The peasants' ignorance and lack of genuine engagement resulted in the misuse and abuse of tools and communal property, as well as diminishing yields. The effects on livestock were most severe, as the peasants long fought to keep their animals separate from communal possessions. This led to an extensive slaughter of livestock and work-animals. Jevgenia Malysjeva's prize-winning article on everyday life in southern Ural during the 1920s and 1930s is a colorful contribution to the anthology. Her work is based on minutes from the Communist Party's purges and on eye-witness accounts – sources that, as it turns out, give an abundance of information on everyday life, crime, morals, and culture in the countryside.

ONE OF THE ANTHOLOGY'S MORE interesting essays is concerned with the Red Army's attitude to and participation in the collectivization drive of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Clearly the army had to be involved in processes taking place in the society around it. To a large extent, the army consisted of peasant youths whose attitudes were all-important to the army's morale and to the manner in which the army, as a social organization, was drawn into the transformation of the countryside. Accordingly, the army's military and ideological schooling became a means of spreading collectivization ideology, as well as for training soldiers for their future duties on the *kolkhozes*. The role played by this conscripted army in the education of Soviet citizens is not only interesting to Soviet historians, it is also a neglected aspect of the history of conscription. The Soviet social machinery monitored the personnel's attitudes from the lowest to the highest army levels, using reports based on soldiers' correspondence as well as the intelligence service's comprehensive interpretations of moods and events.

Finally, Viktor Kondrasjin's essay "The Famine in Russia and Ukraine 1932-1933" must be mentioned. This is an example of the often markedly political history writing that is characteristic of post-Soviet societies. Kondrasjin embraces the Russian interpretation *in toto*: the famine in Ukraine was not a matter of deliberate genocide, and it afflicted Russian and Ukrainian populations equally. No objection can be raised against his use of facts, however. He gives a step-by-step account of the Stalin regime's policy – and the ignorance that riddled it – and reaches the conclusion that these factors suffice to explain the famine.

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Turning peasants into citizens.

Piotr Wawrzeniuk (ed.)
Societal Change and
Ideological Formation
among the Rural Popu-
lation of the Baltic
Area 1880–1939

Studia Baltica II:2,
Södertörn University,
Stockholm 2008,
206 pages.



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SOME DECADES AGO, HISTORICAL sociologist Barrington Moore Jr. astonished his readers with the claim that peasants were integral in the making of the modern world.¹ This shattering of the old stereotypes of rural populations – that they by their very nature are always traditional, religious, and conservative – created new questions for research, and peasant studies started to flourish. If peasants or farmers – or people in the countryside in general – were not by their nature unvarying (and uninteresting), then their behavior and ideas could change in different historical situations in important ways.

In "Agrarian Change and Ideological Formation – Farmer's Cooperation and Citizenship in the Baltic Area 1880–1939", a project at Södertörn University led by professor Anu-Mai Köll, these questions about peasants in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and Poland (Galicia) are investigated by paying special attention to the role of cooperative movements in the countryside. These countries in Northern and Eastern Europe are different in interesting ways from the core regions of Europe – and also from one another – with respect to political culture, ethnic composition, and agricultural organization. Furthermore, in the Baltic Area, we need new work on original materials existing in the archives and libraries; the history of this region clearly cannot be investigated using secondary literature, an approach taken by Barrington Moore.

THE VOLUME EDITED BY Piotr Wawrzeniuk is produced with the cooperation of researchers interested in similar questions and is based on a symposium held in 2007 in Haapsalu, Estonia. Some of the key concepts of the essays included in the volume are citizenship, peasant ideology, ethnicity, and gender. Special attention is given to the cooperative movement and its role in introducing modern ideas into rural life. The cooperative movement spread knowledge based on scientific research into new forms of crop production and animal husbandry, helped raise the level of hygiene in milk handling, introduced new forms of enterprise, and provided possibilities of participation regardless of social standing. The cooperative movement and its publications were also a good platform for agrarian ideology and politics (agrarian populism).