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A retrospective on care and denial of children with disabilities in Russia

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Abstract In tsarist Russia, disability care was little developed, yet showed certain similarities with other European countries. Disabled children received support through charities and private philanthropy. The October revolution of 1917 proclaimed a better future for all the country's citizens. *Issues*: How did the disability policy discussion change after the Russian revolution? Who took care of the so-called feeble-minded? What did this care consist of? *Methodology*: Study of political and scientific documentation of the period from the end of the 1800s to 1936, along with reflections on the ongoing situation found in the diaries of the head of one child institution, Ekaterina Gracheva. *Outcomes*: 'Educable' children received schooling, while 'non-educable' children were placed in separate institutions. This marginalisation was reinforced by the focus on the productive worker. Soviet Russia developed defectology as a science and increased the use of institutional solutions.

Keywords: child disability policy; feeble-minded; pedology; defectology; institutions; Stalin's constitution

Introduction

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a growing number of studies of Russian social history has appeared. In recent years, this interest has also included children at risk and particularly children in institutional care (e.g. Astoyants 2006; Shmidt 2009; Holm-Hansen 2005). New studies have also been carried out on social welfare, social work and social policy during different phases of Russian history (Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov 2009; Firsov 1999, 2005; Hoffmann 2000; Tevlina 2008), which among other things show the need for better understanding of the development of care for children with disabilities (Malofeev 1998, 2003; Nazarova 2012).

'Glasnost' and the reform period at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s meant that the newly independent Russian Federation became more open and transparent, and willing to participate in the international community and share information about social issues, such as disability care. UNICEF statistics (Innocenti Research Centre, Economic and Social Policy Research Programme 2004, 86) showed that many children were placed in institutions. Some of them were genuinely orphans, but more were so-called social orphans; that is, children not living with their parents, either separated from them due to their disabilities or abandoned. So at a time when most (Western) countries

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were trying to reduce the number of placements in institutional care (Beirne-Smith, Patton, and Kim 2006; Beadle-Brown, Mansell, and Kozma 2007) Russia was expanding the use of institutions. This 'excessive' use of institutions was a consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Russian Federation's economy. Institutional care was a state response intended to remedy the fact of the increasing numbers of children at risk. Recent studies on disability care indicate that in order to understand the present situation in Russia it is important to analyse social developments in a historical perspective (Gaines 2004; Mosin 2010; Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov 2009; Phillips 2009), as it seems that the use of institutional care after the crisis years of the 1990s was also a heritage from the earlier Soviet regime, a recurring response to re-emerging difficulties. This study therefore scrutinizes some aspects of disability policy and its connections to domestic policy from the late tsarist years mainly up to 1936, along with advances in science in early Soviet Russia.

After the October revolution in 1917, the First World War and the Russian civil war left the society with millions of homeless – abandoned or orphaned – children (Statja MSE 1931; Rozhkova 2000). From 1921 to 1923, according to two revolutionary 'profiles', Anatoly Lunacharsky (1921) and Nadeschda Krupskaya (1922), the estimated number of such children was 7 to 9 million. However, these figures are only a rough approximation since many people without permanent residence were not included in the census. All these children – including many with disabilities – had to be cared for. Raising children in institutions was also considered a good opportunity to instill socialist principles (Hoffman, cited in Iarskaia-Smirnova 2011, 37). The key issues in this article are the following: how were children with disabilities cared for during the late tsarist monarchy and what happened to them after the October revolution? What happened to those with mental retardation who were difficult to nurture according to revolutionary principles? Early Soviet Russia promised to introduce a new stage in the development of mankind – 'Homo Sovieticus' – but did this utopia also include the so-called feeble-minded?

Aim of the study

The overall objective of the study is to examine disability policy in Russia from the late 1800s up to 1936, paying special attention to children with intellectual disabilities. *Issues*:

- What was disability policy before and how did the discussion in politics and science change after the Russian October revolution?
- Who took care of the feeble-minded children (before and after)?
- What did that care consist of?

Methodology

The history of Russia since the 1880s can be subdivided into three main segments: the tsarist period, the Soviet period (1917–1991) and the contemporary period of the Russian Federation (Sirotkina and Smith 2012; Firsov 1999; Tevlina 2008).[1] The main focus of this article is on the changeover from the tsarist to the post-revolutionary phase, which represents strong discontinuity and in its direction a major contrast to the developments experienced in West European countries.

The study was mainly carried out through perusal of Russian documents relating to child disability policy within the relevant political and scientific framework. Available sources, besides historical documents for the whole period, were historical government

documents (chronological collection of laws; decrees and government regulations of the Soviet State 1917–1936), personal diaries of a famous pioneer involved in charity work for mentally retarded children, Ekaterina Gracheva; personal diaries of responsible leaders of the state; scientific articles and monographs. In order to select among this overwhelming material we elected to limit ourselves to using documentation from a few prominent 'revolutionaries' to represent the political sphere: Anatoly Lunacharsky (the first Soviet People's Commissar of Enlightenment responsible for culture and education), Aleksandra Kollontay (People's Commissar for Social Welfare in the first Soviet government) and Nadezhda Krupskaya (instrumental in foundation of the KOMSOMOL [Communist Youth League], deeply involved in education). Among scientific works on disability we used authoritative monographs such as Troshin, Vygotsky, Basova, Kashchenko and Zamsky besides articles from the Soviet epoch, for example *Pedologiya* and *Voprosi Defectologii (later 'Defectology')*.

Concerning the scientific discourse, we reduced our search to pedology and defectology as the most relevant disciplines, since they include both research and clinical work with children who did not primarily have medical disabilities. This limitation means that we do not examine the strongly behaviouristic Pavlovian tradition; but we have tried to understand how the 'disability problem' was understood at the time and how political and scientific spokespersons discussed contemporary economic and social contributions, which is much in line with the characteristics of understanding disability policy in general as noted by Roustone and Prideaux (2012). For example, Roustone & Prideaux present a chronological perspective including the (English) Poor Law, early medical constructions (idiot, imbecile, feeble minded and morally defective), the use of intelligence quotient (IQ) tests to categorize children, the use of institutions, paternalistic views and, later on, a broader social policy including disability policy, special education and the disability rights movement. But since we are still stumbling somewhat due to the diversity of the materials and the difficulties of finding strict disability categories, the study is tentative. For example, the terminology describing children with developmental disabilities is changing from time to time. Before the revolution in 1917, these children could be referred to as crippled, feeble-minded, paralytics, idiots, (*idiotiki*), epileptics, unhappiest, mad, debiles (*dibiliki*) and abnormal. Soon after the revolution these children were lumped together with so called 'morally defective' children. Then the word 'defective children' became a broader term for children with different disabilities, including children with 'mental retardation' (Defectologicheskii slovar 1964).

We have tried to translate and apply the terms as they appear in the documents, hoping to keep the sense of the original. Just as the archaeologist is able to reconstruct important markers of the past from scattered remains – a clay fragment, a lock of hair or valuable grave findings – the ambition of this study is to present from the fragments found a reasonable picture of the early disability discussion in Russia and thus to open up for further research.

Besides research articles, we searched only for documents available at libraries in Russia and Sweden and did not ask for permission to search the Russian archives, but most of the documents are in Russian. Some references to other countries are provided in order to show what distinguishes the Russian process from that of Western Europe. However, as shown in a disability study carried out in France, the social situation of disabled persons 'can only be properly understood by putting them in the context of each country's individual history' (Winance, Ville, and Jean-François Ravaud 2007, 139). Or in Roustone & Prideaux's words: 'Disability policy is neither linear, inherently

progressive nor equitable, and suffers from the vagaries of time, place and ideological change' (Roustone and Prideaux 2012, xvii).

The findings are summarized in a scheme with time periods and actors (Table 1), and ends in 1936 with the introduction of Stalin's Constitution[2] of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which codified the ongoing process of concentrating resources and jurisdiction under state control, leading in the long run to the mainstreaming of social services including disability care.

Table 1 Social care institutions for feeble-minded children in Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Types of social care institutions	Functions of the institutions	Year of foundation
Privately funded institutions		
A medical-educational institution established by Dr. I.V.Malyarevskii in St. Petersburg	The improvement of children's medical health; education and upbringing with the aim of developing the interest and skills for a hard-working life	1882
A boarding school for mentally retarded children established by Professor Grigorii Troshin in Saint-Petersburg	Education, upbringing, training for a life of labour, but also the development of psychological understanding of the children	1906
A school–sanatorium for defective children established by Professor Vsevolod Kashchenko in Moscow	To give medical-pedagogical care, education, encourage the development of manual skills, research investigation of pupils, methodological development	1908
Public-philanthropic institutions		
The Asylum of St. Maria for mentally retarded children and the terminally ill established in Moscow	Everyday childcare, familiarization with the church service in the chapel, teaching by special program	1873
Shelters of the charity organization 'Brotherhood of the Queen of Heaven': E. Gracheva's shelter	Charity, medical treatment, teaching, training of children in literacy and productive labour, schooling for religious rites	
- in St. Petersburg		1894
- in the province of Kursk		1902
- in Moscow		1905
- in Vyatka		1907
The Evangelical Refuge of Saint Emanuel for children with epilepsy and/or feeble-minded established in St. Petersburg	Everyday childcare, schooling for religious rites in the chapel. Only for Lutheran children	1881
Philanthropic research institutions		
Psycho neurological Institute founded by M.Bechterev: Epileptic clinic;	Complex study of child' early stages development, early upbringing, training of teachers;	1907–1917
Institute of morally defective children; Special Institute of child development study	a clinical observation, a medical treatment, a labour therapy, training of child psychiatricians	1912–1917

(*Continued*)

Types of social care institutions	Functions of the institutions	Year of foundation
Public pedagogical societies:		
The Society of education and upbringing of abnormal children, chaired by professor	Scientific discussions of educational and upbringing methods for abnormal children; practical education and upbringing children	1909–1910
L.Blaumenau, S-Petersburg;		1909–1917
The Society of experimental pedagogy, founded by A.Nechaev, S-Petersburg;		1911–1917
The Moscow Teacher's house, Moscow		

In the first general population census of 1897, the total number of citizens in the Russian Empire (excluding Finland) was 129.1 million with the total number of children from new-borns up to age 19 about 61 million. Medical statistics show that there were about 200,000 children with severe disabilities from birth and with acquired psychosis (Zamsky 1980, 254). Despite scientific discussion and investigation of the clinical differences between mental retardation and acquired psychosis (Troshin 1915), the official statistical data offer no clarity. On the eve of the October Revolution, there were in all the institutions no more than 1000 children recorded as mentally retarded, which most likely was only a very small fraction of those in this group of children in need of social care. After the revolution, these institutions were nationalized and partially reorganized, and some were closed.Sources: Mikhailenko, Shamrej, and Ilinsky (2012), Troshin (1915), Kashchenko and Krukov (1913 [2005]), *Vedomstvo uchrezhdenii imperatritsi Marii: Kratkii istoricheskii ocherk* (1912), Petrogradskii evangelicheskii prijut vo imya Svyatogo Emmanuila dliya slaboumnih i epileptikov (2011–2012), *Pedogogicheskaya entsiklopediya* (1964), Kabanov, Shereshevskii, and Zhuravel (1977), Kadnevskii (2005), Zamsky (1980).

Disability history in Russia – a brief background

European disability policies in general all seem to follow a similar path where poverty rather than disability is recognized, so that problems often relate to deafness and blindness among the elderly. For example, in Germany, a forerunner in this field, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century with the introduction of Bismarck's social security system that financial insurance was given for sickness, accidents and invalidity; but with increasing exchange between countries, private philanthropy and later the more systematic scientific philanthropy[3] expanded available knowledge. Yet, more general discussion of disability only emerged after World War One, which left large numbers injured in the service of their country, so that the states involved had to take on responsibility for the care of their invalids. Russia also seems to have followed this general path.

Tsarist Russia

At the end of the nineteenth century, disability care in tsarist Russia showed much similarity with that of other countries in Europe such as Germany and Sweden. At that time it was customary to have close contact with other countries and to exchange information (Georgievsky 1894), but only small groups of disabled persons received education, training and different forms of support, mainly through charities. The state operated through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but mainly supported local initiatives for the development of closed institutions, where a large proportion of the mostly private funding was donated directly by the imperial families (Firsov 1999). Independent state initiatives were very modest.

Feeble-minded children and the social reforms of pre-revolutionary Russia

The social system of children's care institutions included orphanages and child shelters, institutions that were for all children, including those with disabilities. Basova (1965, 5), for example, states: '… among the inmates of "uppbringing homes" or internat (*vospitatelnii doma)* there were a significant number of physically handicapped children…'. Despite this, there was not a single institution for disabled children in the system of state social assistance until the end of the nineteenth century. The first setting up of such institutions was entirely by private initiatives. The following table provides a list of such institutions.

Institutions for the mentally disabled – an early example

The most famous of all the institutions for the care of mentally retarded children in pre-revolutionary Russia was Ekaterin? Gracheva's shelter (Gracheva 1995). As the first charitable institution, it influenced the shelters for children with disabilities that later emerged in other parts of Russia. Having personal experience of her own brother's epilepsy and being unable to get him into any institution because of the absence of such facilities, she became a member of the so-called Philanthropic Society and began with offering help to the poor. In the shelter's first year (1894), there were only two residents, but by 1902 several new departments had been established: a hospital for children incapable of taking care of themselves, a centre for children who were able to speak and play. In 1898 a primary school was founded, where in 1898 to 1907 134 pupils were registered.

In 1900, the shelter set up training for nurses and caregivers working with mentally retarded children and epileptics, and in 1903 opened a clinic for the free treatment of neurotic children. In a further development of the shelter a home, also completed in 1903, was built for young people with mental retardation. According to Gracheva, the shelter aimed for a holistic view of the children's needs, and their everyday care combined the efforts of several types of professionals. The following description from Gracheva's diary (1894–1932) gives a picture of these practices:

> It was about 2 o'clock when Shura was brought (to the shelter) (October 8th, 1894) – what a wretched creature! Her hands were broken; her legs shrivelled. She is blind, deaf and dumb. While the nurse filled the bath, I tried to feed Shura with milk, but it ran out of her mouth. Shura's mother took out a nipple of rather dirty cloth, chewed on some black bread, wrapped it in the cloth and put it in her mouth. We were advised to buy a horn—for a 7-year-old girl! While we bathed Shura, she moaned piteously, but when she was put into a warm bed and covered with a cotton blanket and a white coverlet and I gave her the horn with the warm milk, she soon fell asleep. Her mother bowed down to her feet, then sat down beside the bed and wept; the first time I saw true tears of joy. (Gracheva 1995, 357)[4]

From the philanthropic point of view, mentally retarded children were lumped together with a widely diverse group of other children in need of care and suffering all manner of conditions from multiple disabilities to 'total stupidity or idiocy'. In Gracheva's descriptions – generally she simply called them 'sick children' – these children did not develop the basic functional skills of daily life such as being able to feed or clothe themselves, to control their bodily needs or to execute and coordinate simple movements, etc.

Philanthropists were often attracted by the most clearly unhappy cases – e.g. the fool on a rope, the seriously epileptic, the undernourished, the exhausted, the shy, the girl with

Table 2 Main tendencies of the development of institutional practice for children with mental retardation during the period of 1917–1936.

People's commissariat of education	People's commissariat of health	People's commissariat of social affairs
1917 – 'School-sanitary Council' with the subdivision Combat Child Defectiveness	1917 – 'School-sanitary Council', with responsibility for organizing public catering and hygiene	1917–1918 – Private charity and philanthropic institutions are transformed into state institutions
October 1918 – Subdivision of social upbringing. Transference of all educational institutions from the Commissariat of Social Affairs to the Commissariat of Education	1918 – 'School-sanitary Council' with the subdivision Combat Child Defectiveness, whose function is to make recommendations for committing mentally retarded and morally defective children to institutions	1918 – Custody of the feeble-minded
1919 – The first special state schools (*vspomogatelnii shkoli*) are established for mentally retarded children.A medical-pedagogical consultation unit is attached to the 'Childcare Department' with its main function to give methodological support to educational institutions through specified literature, instructions, curricula, etc.		1919 – The Council of Child Protection is established with the function of providing children with food, clothes and accommodation
	1920 – Establishment of baby homes	1920 – Adults and children with learning disabilities (the feeble-minded, idiots) as well as the blind and the deaf are transferred to the jurisdiction of the People's Commissariat of Social Welfare
1921 – Department of Social and Legal Protection of Minors established		1921 – The Commission to Combat Hunger starts relocating children from territories suffering starvation to other territories

Some reform examples 1920 – 1931:1920 – By the Decree 'On coordination of functions between the People's Commissariats of Education and of Health': Those 'incapable of learning' – whether adult or children – are together with the deaf and the blind placed under the jurisdiction of the People's Commissariat of Social Affairs. Any treatment and teaching in these cases becomes secondary to the task of custody.

1926 – The first Acts passed on types of special institutions: children's homes for preschool children; schools with and without boarding facilities for school-age children; schools with professional-technical orientation for teens, with and without boarding; schools with and without

(*Continued*)

People's commissariat of education	People's commissariat of health	People's commissariat of social affairs
boarding for children of different ages; special groups (*vspomogatelnii gruppi*) for children and teens at ordinary schools.		
1926 – 'On the selection of children for placement in special institutions' (*vspomogatelnii uchrezhdenia*)		
1928 – Establishment of a five-year school for the mentally retarded (*vspomogatelnaia shkola*).		
1931 – General compulsory education for defective children; a special school for the mentally retarded (*vspomogatelnaya shkola*) becomes a seven-year factory school.		

Source: Compiled from Dobrova (1970); Hronologicheskoe sobranie zakonov, ukazov prezidiuma verhovnogo soveta i postanovlenii praviteljstva RSFSR (1917–1928), (1929–1939); Spravochnik po vspomogatelnoi shkolei po shkolam fizicheski deferctivnih detei (1929) [Guide for a special school and schools for physically handicapped children].

the horn (Shura), the crazy ones (Vania) – and asked the shelter to find 'the most unhappy children', for whom they were willing to become major benefactors. An oddity was that despite the fact that the shelter was focused on helping children with disabilities – 'idiots, epileptics and cripples' – it was run by the Society for Aid to Poor and Sick Children founded in 1882 in St-Petersburg (Zanozina and Adamenko 2000). However, at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century in Russia, in response to high public demand for the social care of children with mental disabilities, an institutional form of private philanthropic assistance was actually in the process of developing, with social practices more relevant to their needs in terms of medical care, education and upbringing. These mostly private initiatives were quite varied, not only in the nature of the aid, but also in terms of class connection and religious orientation (Table 2). The Russian monarchy of that period remained aloof from these social changes, however, and took very little public action to alleviate the plight of these children.

After the Bolshevik revolution: new principles for public care of 'defective' children

In the early twentieth century, developments in Russia were deeply influenced by a number of historical events: the 1905–1907 Russian Revolution, The First World War of 1914–1918, the October Revolution in 1917 and the following civil war in 1918–1922 (Goldin 2000, 2012; Ippolitov 2008). Everyday life was marked by social disasters and challenges. There was the mobilization of the entire population to the front, and the masses of refugees and internally displaced immigrants, famine, destruction, epidemics, rampant crime, etc. that followed in the wake of the world war and civil war. Several million children overflowed the streets of the towns and villages, adding to the multitudes of the poor and homeless (MSE 1931; Rozhkova 2000). Most of the charitable and private philanthropic societies caring for children, including children with mental retardation, were forced to shut down or absorbed by the state. At the first All-Russian Congress of activists against child defectiveness, homelessness and criminality, which took place in 1920, with the participation of Anatoly Lunacharsky and the author Maxim Gorky, the ideas of combining the efforts of state and society were in the fight against child defectiveness were proclaimed as a 'great work of national importance' (Pervii Vserossiiskii s'esd dejatelej 1922, 14). The new socio-cultural conditions appealed to the new political doctrine concerning the social care of children.

Quoting Krupskaya (1923, 35, 1958), the new doctrine declared that: 'Homeless, abandoned, sick kids are the family, the beloved children of the Soviet republic', and among this large group, though not acknowledged, were all the children with disabilities. Yet the process of a nation-building system of help to these children had begun, seen as '…a need for close interaction of all elements of the Russian society and a stage in the battle against defectiveness' (Lunacharsky 1959, 107). 'Child care', 'social motherhood', 'social hygiene', 'the battle against illiteracy' and 'the battle against hunger' were the first social projects in a nation-building system of child care in the early Soviet State. In the struggle against homelessness and defectiveness, the first implemented principles of the new doctrine of child care were public education in the spirit of collectivism; campaigns for the physical health of children with provision of free food and policies for the protection of children's rights and against the exploitation of child labour (Krupskaya 1959; Shkolno-sanitarnoje delo 1919).

Care for children with disabilities was established through the combined efforts of several people's commissioners and various ministries (education, social welfare, health and justice), the Children's Commission for the Russian Central Executive Committee, the Russian Extraordinary Commission and some others, and became a part of the overall activities of the state aimed at protecting children and at improving their material and health standards. Child mental retardation was recognized as an independent group within the larger group of defective children. From the beginning of the Soviet time, social policy in this field became identified with multiple bodies of state actors as new types of state institutions were established (Kollontay 1919, 1921; Lunacharsky 1918; Krupskaya 1957a).

The shift of administrative responsibilities (Table 3) may explain part of the thinking concerning disabilities. The main picture is that some groups of children with disabilities were recognized, such as the deaf and the blind, for whom special schools were established under the Ministry (or People's Commissariat) of Education. For those with illnesses such as tuberculosis or mental incapacitation, the Ministry of Health was responsible. For those with mental retardation and classed as incapable of learning – the feeble-minded/idiots – the Ministry responsible was Social Affairs (People's Commissariat of Social Affairs). Since the 1920s, the divide between children *capable of learning* and those *incapable of learning* had been growing. Mentally retarded children were recognized as capable of learning if they could follow the educational demands of the seven-year factory worker school.

A return to Ekaterina Gracheva's institution for the disabled

After the Bolshevik Revolution, the state sought solutions to the problems of child defectiveness and homelessness, and found one to fit all in the setting up of institutions. For example, in Gracheva's 'shelter for fools', idiots, epileptics and cripples were mixed indiscriminately with rebellious and angry street children. From 1922 to 1932, charitable shelters and children's homes were one by one transformed into state institutions and placed under the jurisdiction of the Commissariat of Social Affairs. This process was accompanied by the removal of mentally retarded children from the buildings created for them by philanthropic investment and their placement in worse accommodation, to give space to normal children. So that although the construct of a new ideology had become established, the system itself was only just beginning its development, and the practice of total ideological control and stereotyping of public consciousness totally suppressed diversity of social institutions.

Table 3 Summary of findings.

	Pre-revolutionary	1917–1936	1936 constitution
Events	1880–1917. Agrarian society but growing conflicts in urban areas. New social movements. Riots. World War I. October revolution	World War I ends. Civil war. Stalin's terror	The Stalinist system consolidated.The Constitution of Victorious Socialism
Type of state leadership	Tsarist monarchy	Different political voices, more and more eradicated by the Bolsheviks	Communist Party hegemony (Constitution 'Rukovodjashee jadro' [leading core])
Ideology	Idealist position heritage of powers (social position given by divine rights)	Experimental, dream of homo sovieticus	Dogmatic materialist (Marxism-leninism) The collective is important. Enforcement of a work ethic
Children and disability	Children with disabilities mostly kept at home but growing ideas of different upbringing and education from philanthropists	Thousands of homeless children. Socialist humanism, collective upbringing, extensive use of institutional care and/or camps/colonies	Among disabled children, educable children go to boarding schools, non-educable children to other institutions
Science related to disability	Pluralistic: psychology, pedology, defectologyStrong behaviouristic tradition from Pavlov	Strong pedagogic influence; Vygotsky	Science subordinated to politics; psychology more behaviouristic, pedology expelled, defectology increasingly important
Actors in disability care	Mostly philanthropic	Philanthropic and State	State control, basically through People's Commissariats
International contacts/ influences within disability care	Scientific exchanges with for example other European countries, such as Germany and France	Declining number of international scientific contacts	More isolated, less foreign influence

In order to scrutinize the then ongoing changes from within an institution for children with disabilities, let us return to Gracheva's diary and take some chronological excerpts from 1917 up to 1932. A well-known figure in the Russian pedagogical literature (Malofeev 2003; Orshanskaya 1964), she may be a somewhat biased source, but here for the time being we find her diary quite informative.

> 1917. Children are beginning to die, "up to two or three dead a day". "They have difficulty moving about, becoming weaker by the day. Children stand at the window, waiting for bread. This is the third day without bread. The children have eaten the glue they were given to work with during their manual labour class… and then the cold struck. The temperature dropped to

> 2 degrees… because of the lack of soap the struggle with parasites [lice, bedbugs, fleas] has begun; changes of underwear and bed linen are rare… All the trees in the garden have been cut down… And yet, in this difficult time we have formed a cultural and educational commission, which has been staging fascinating performances for children and adults in the shelter. More and more new types of children have arrived: bold, rebellious, angry." (p. 383)
>
> 1918. "Meetings with elected representatives and with recorded minutes have begun. Once such a curious thing happened - it was unanimously agreed that two boys who had been mobbing the weakest should be shot… there was a quarrel, and some discussion about what it means to execute someone, then everyone was angry with the ones who offered to do the shooting. Meetings have been arranged less and less, and often the meetings are disrupted. (p.385).'
>
> 1922–24. 'Tried to introduce self management into the children's collective… discussed the issue of children smoking… Locks do not exist for these children; every lock can easily be forced with a spoon… The meetings have become regular; but the question for discussion is almost always the same – how to organize our lives better.' (p.385)
>
> 1925. 'Many of children are placed under Sobe's authority (the Commissariat of Social Affairs – *sotsialnoe obespechenie*)' (p. 386)
>
> 1929–32. 'The shelter is subordinated to Sobe's authority. The big stone house was taken over to school ordinary children, while our children were moved to the three old buildings. I don't like to think of my kids being treated as just objects to be handled.' (p.386)

The dynamics of the new principles for public care: 'the principle of socialist humanism' and children with disabilities

From the very beginning, with the founding of the new socialist state, the 'principle of socialist humanism' in relation to children was formulated as a matter of national importance: 'All children are children of the state.' This principle elevated the state's interests over that of the children, and the state's interests lay in maximizing the use of growing individuals' physical and spiritual abilities for the benefit of the society. The dominant ideological debate on the 'principle of socialist humanism' was influenced by the idea of constructing a new mankind, expressed in the full development of personality, collectivist upbringing and the proper moulding of the perfect, productive worker. Thus, the 'principle of socialist humanism' with regard to children could be seen as the ambition of forming them to suit the needs of the emerging socialist society; or, in Krupskaya's words, 'educating people to fit the system' (Krupskaya 1957b, (1918–1920), p.17). This sentence also incorporates the idea that people can be 'corrected', so that with the right thinking, the right pedagogy and the right methods, everyone can be made to fit in.

The slogans of the young Soviet republic show the hope that was entertained that children with developmental disabilities could become full members of the new society. In his historical investigation of the Soviet special education program for mentally retarded children Zamsky writes: '… to help a child to stand on his/her feet and to return to the society as a useful worker is the business of the state. This is a moral thing, and besides, it's good business for the state', '… to make out of these children productive members of the society is a honourable, deeply human target' (Zamsky 1980, 325–326). Following the principle of socialist humanism, the Soviet state provided the task '… to increase the degree of children's mental and moral development as much as possible and make of them useful citizens' (Zamsky 1980, 339).

Neither was the essence of humans' social value left unchanged. The basic principle of socialism, 'Who does not work shall not eat' hailed in the Stalinist constitution (The Constitution of Victorious Socialism) of 1936 was declared a transitional principle in the switchover from socialist to communist societal organization. Marx' words, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs' was basically transformed into 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his work', and as the so-called feeble-minded were difficult to correct and not the most productive of workers, this principle pushed these children out into the margins of the society and branded them useless citizens, a burden on the state.

Scientific developments and the emergence of pedology and defectology

Let us now view the so-called feeble-minded children with the eyes of contemporaneous science. The first decade of Soviet state development preserved some features of a continuing international exchange with scientists and professionals dealing with children with developmental disabilities in countries such as England, Germany, Holland and France, which contributed to the scientific and practical understanding of the ideologies and activities of social institutions for such children (Vygotskaya 1996).

The young Soviet republic had a strong belief in science and great expectations of what science could do to change (conditions for) mankind. Already in tsarist Russia, social scientists had established exchanges with other European countries. At the first International Psychological Congress held in Paris in 1889 the Russian delegation was the second largest after the French one (Sirotkina and Smith 2012). Inspiration in science also came from German-speaking areas. In the period studied, there were two significant scientific disciplines in Soviet Russia, namely, *pedology* and *defectology*.

Pedology is the name of a science of child development and upbringing – originally founded in the USA by G. Stanley Hall at the end of nineteenth to the early twentieth century (Vygotsky 1931b; Fradkin 1991) – that was influential in Russia up to 1936, where in the 1920s its scientific platform was further developed by Bechterev (see Table 2. Bechterev's Psycho-neurological Institute is documented by for example Kabanov, Shereshevskii, and Zhuravel (1977) and Munipov (1969)), Zalkind, Blonskiy, Vygotsky and others. Pedology offered a holistic view of the child related to the interaction/interrelationship of mental and physical manifestations under the influence of biological and social factors. Pedologists were interested in children's learning ability and associated problems, and developed instruments for child development evaluation, using the term 'difficult child' for those with learning disabilities. Vygotsky, for example, is explicit that a child whose development is impeded by a defect is not simply a child less developed than his peers, but a child who has developed differently. Pedology came under ideological attack, however, accused of being pseudoscientific, and was officially banned in 1936 (Resolution of the CPSU [Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party] 'On pedological distortions in the People's Commissariats of Education'). One reason for this was teachers' protests against the pedologists' frequent testing of children on the grounds that testing could produce inaccurate results and that the main beneficiaries of testing were children of relatively advantaged background; so both this form of testing as well as applied research on early psychological development was abandoned for many years (Sirotkina and Smith 2012). But another reason may have been disappointment with pedology as a means of creating the 'new mankind'. 'It became clear that pedology failed to satisfy Party expectations for improving the situation of children. The number of children identified as retarded, as well as the number of special schools, grew – a result far from their wishful

thinking about transforming human nature' (Sirotkina and Smith 2012, 425). According to Etkind (1993), when Pedology was thrown out, special schools and kindergartens along with psycho-neurological dispensers where mentally retarded children were taken care of were closed. The use of IQ tests were becoming more and more common in much of Western Europe, but after the ban of pedology (in 1936) it was no longer popular using such tests in Soviet Russia (Grigorenko 1998). Thus the divide between educable/non-educable children was developed in defectology by the use of different psychological, pedagogical and medical methods.

Defectology now became the dominant discipline regarding children with disabilities. At its pre-revolutionary beginnings, doctors-teachers Kashchenko (see Table 2) and Rossolimo had practiced the idea of care, education and treatment of mentally retarded children in private institutions. Both of them knew well the European experience of curative education. The label defectology seems to have been imported from Germany in 1912 (Knox and Stevens 1993). Defectology then came to play a key role for the social care of mentally retarded children and resulted in the regulatory and legal institutionalization of this practice in the Soviet Union (McCagg 1989). However, the term 'defective child' was also extrapolated to the broad category of street children, who were also thought to be in need of more careful examination.

According to The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (1979), where even as late as 1979 the word 'defect' was still being used without quotation marks, defectology is concerned with the development of children with physical and mental defects, and the problems of their training and upbringing. The Experimental Defectological Institute (EDI) (based on a school-sanatorium founded by Kashchenko before the revolution) was established in 1929. From 1929 to the end of his life, Lev Vygotsky worked at this Institute, where he generalized the knowledge of 'defective children' developed by different scientists. The main innovative ideas of his theory were formulated within child developmental psychology, pedology and defectology, which also may explain why he was less known in the Western world until the middle of 1960s (Ironically, Vygotsky probably gained high status in the West before he was fully appreciated in today's Russia).

When pedology was thrown out and denied, all connected research material was confiscated, but Vygotsky's defectological ideas (as defectology was defined then) were creative and can be related to present day discussions of inclusion. He argued in favour of social compensation for 'defective' children: '… any physical defect – whether it be blindness, deafness, or congenital feeble-mindedness – doesn't only change the relationship of a man to the world, but primarily affects his relationships with other people.' In a 1931 paper he writes: 'The collective is a factor in the development of the handicapped child,' arguing that the combination of different ages and different developmental levels in collectives composed of children, as well as cooperation with normal children, create optimal conditions for the development of social and cognitive skills in defective children (Vygotsky 1931a). His research work in the field of defective childhood was denied some decades after his death, but defectology, which includes elements from special pedagogy, special psychology and clinical work, has in post-Soviet Russia regained the status of classic theory and become the basis of subsequent theoretical and practical development. The EDI was renamed the Research Institute of Defectology of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences and determined priorities with regard to the education and training of children with various developmental disorders in the former Soviet Union. Finally, it may be important to mention the continued use of the word 'defectology' in Russia as described by Grigorenko (1998, 194).

> 'Whereas the West became ashamed and embarrassed by the use of the word *defective* to describe individuals with disabilities, and replaced it with the word *handicapped* during the 1930's, there was no going back for Soviet defectology. The term had become too well established, too widely discussed, too politically loaded, and too "Soviet", as a result of the significant research and writing of Soviet psychologists and defectologists (e.g., Vygotsky), to be discarded.'

Discussion

The degree of humanization of a society is determined by the measure of its concern for those who have special needs (Nirje 2003) and reflects the varying perceptions of the disabled child. Sometimes these children are considered dangerous (Grunewald 2009), sometimes they are holy innocents, sometimes objects of pity and sometimes they are considered capable – just in their own way. Society both creates and responds to these different perceptions. Developments in pre-revolutionary and early Soviet Russia seem to have some commonalities with many other European countries. There was a growing scientific interest in helping people with disabilities, and special schools/institutions for disabled groups were started on a philanthropic basis. In Sweden, scientific philanthropy seems to have paved the way for an increasing trust in and dependency on experts, that is, more trust in experts than parents (Olsson 2010, Söder 1984) and possibly the situation was the same in Russia. Early Soviet Russia promised to introduce a new stage in the development of mankind, Homo Sovieticus. But did this utopian vision also include the so-called feeble-minded?

The first research question was: *how did the disability policy discussion in politics and science change after the Russian revolution?* From this examination it is not possible to compare whether children with disabilities in general, or the feeble-minded in particular, were treated better or worse in the early Soviet Union than in neighbouring European countries. There are all too many examples of different violations also in those countries, such as the forced sterilization programmes in Sweden and Norway or the Nazi eugenics in Germany that did violence to feeble-minded persons against their will or even killed them outright. It could be argued, however – on the basis of factual developments in early Soviet Russia with hardships related to the First World War, the Bolshevik revolution, the civil war, the famine and Stalin's terror – that life in general was difficult for many people and most likely therefore extremely tough for children with disabilities.

Before the revolution, the tsarist regime did very little for the disabled. After the October revolution, state responsibility grew. It was understood that disabled groups could also be productive and rather soon there emerged an emphasis on vocational schools. Gradually, the 'principle of socialist humanism' took the shape of 'usefulness.' Most likely this shift was reinforced by the Stalinist focus on the 'good' worker, and that those not in employment were more or less useless. This is the end-point of the study, as the system of disability care within the state system was basically established from now on. In subsequent years, social systems were depersonalized, equating them with unified faceless mechanisms, reproducing themselves without change, cutting and discounting, the time for childhood challenged by the Soviet government (Asmolov 1990). Thus, it seems that the idea of humans as a productive value for the society, and not vice versa, forced the children with developmental disabilities into isolation during the whole period of the Soviet era.

Both pedology and defectology were originally intended to pay attention to children according to their needs, and both these disciplines were reinforced after the Russian

revolution. For a period there was strong hope, supported by ideological belief, that these sciences would improve children's conditions. But pedology was banned and defectology developed from progressive to becoming more and more repressive, particularly for the feeble-minded children who were kept aside rather than integrated with the help of extra support. In defectology much emphasis was placed on the improvement of children using pedagogical methods (defectology was re-named correctional pedagogy in 1993), but since these were children with developmental disabilities they were hard to 'correct'. From a political perspective this science was therefore a failure.

Who took care of the mentally retarded children and what did that care consist of? For those not living at home the system of institutional solutions run by the state continued to grow. A number of experts such as hygienists and nutritionists developed guidance on how to raise the 'good' citizen (Iarskaia-Smirnova 2011). The Ministry of Education supported children with good learning skills; children with developmental disabilities who were considered to be uneducable were the province of the Ministry of Social Affairs; but from the start, that is, after the revolution and in subsequent years, the problem of homeless street children was vast. This meant that children both with and without disabilities or other difficulties were mostly all lumped together in the same institutions.

A social constructionist view of the changing Russian society may well be relevant for further research in this field, as the social constructionism refers to how individuals perceive common sense knowledge of what constitutes everyday life for the ordinary citizen (Berger and Luckmann 1966[1991]). In this construct, language is important. What seems to be true will be based on belief structures that could change over time. After the October revolution there was a deliberate de-construction of tsarist society. The new government wanted to democratize, educate and politicize Russian society. Propaganda was increasingly used by the Bolsheviks to emphasize the new ideology and to replace the old class structure. Lunacharsky, Krupskaya and Kollontay are three representatives of this vision, even though they did a lot more than wave the revolutionary flag. It was important to win the ideological war and to give legitimacy to the vulnerable new state, under threat from both imaginary and true enemies. 'Trustworthiness is a social construction and could be extended; manipulated. Perception warfare is not about damaging the truth, it is about creating the truth' (Friman 1999, 6).

This heritage might help to explain, on the one hand, the increasing number of children placed in institutional care, including children with disabilities. On the other hand, in spite of this development, there was a strong denial of the existence of citizens with disabilities until very recently. 'There are no invalids in the USSR' is a quote from the mid-1980s (Phillips 2009). From a social constructionist viewpoint there appears to be some cognitive dissonance – a clear gap between the myth and the reality. How is it possible to put so many children into institutions and at the same time deny their existence? One answer could be that disabled persons were placed in institutions to reduce visibility in the streets. Another reason might be that these people were an anomaly in relation to the Stalinist Constitution. The logic is simple: if (in theory) there is a strong Universalist society with rights granted to everybody, there is no need to create special legislative devices to guarantee rights relating to disabilities. Disability policy was thus a part of and reinforced marginalization. The tradition of defectology that was strong during the whole Soviet period, along with the reduced participation of Soviet scholars in the international social sciences community, could also partly help to explain why Soviet Russia and Post-Soviet Russia did not develop in the same direction as Europe, where institutions for children with disabilities were abolished far earlier. The re-emerging use

of institutional care after the dissolution of the Soviet Union can be understood as Soviet epoch path dependency.

Limitations

There are of course limitations in this study on account of the very complex material. Disability history from this period (1880–1936) is still relatively unknown. It is also difficult to distinguish the children with disabilities from all the other needy children in the period studied, which suffered constant social change entailing vast problems and where disability policy was not a priority issue among the political leaders. Also, many documents from the studied period are more ideological than scientific. There may also have been other voices, such as Pitrim Sorokin[5] who fled the country, but we strongly believe the presentation reflects the dominating views for the studied period in spite of a possible bias from the sources. We have put together the scattered pieces of documentation on children with disabilities up to Stalin's constitution, which we see as a marker of consolidation representing the start of a more foreseeable development.

Conclusions

After the October revolution, it was a necessity for the young Soviet republic to care for huge numbers of homeless children, which also included many with disabilities. From the start, all children were lumped together in the same institutions, but later those with disabilities were separated from the others depending on their needs and capabilities. 'Educable' children received schooling while the 'non-educable' with more severe disabilities were placed in separate institutions. Most likely this shift was reinforced by Stalin's focus on the 'productive worker'; to this can be added the development of defectology as a science, which was used to isolate children with reduced capabilities. Disability policy thus reinforced marginalization. The young Soviet state institutionalized childcare with positive intentions, which is seen in administrative reforms, but at the same time, children with developmental disabilities were often locked up in closely regimented institutions, something that continued during the Soviet years. A convincing narrative of child disability history in this period of Soviet Russia has not yet emerged; but as research in the field develops more nuances will be added to this compound picture.

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Notes

1. The late 1800s is known as 'tsarist', 'imperialistic' as well as 'pre-revolutionary' period.
2. When referring to Stalins's constitution, Stalins's regime, Stalins's terror etc. that includes the commissariats, the ministries, the leaders of the party and the USSR government under Stalin's leadership.
3. Scientific philanthropy – 'An approach to helping that involved the collection of empirical data concerning each person or family to be helped coupled with efforts to coordinate the help provided by different social agencies within the community. The idea that charities should become organized to more systematically approach the question of poverty. It emerged from ideals of reform and social progress which were increasingly influenced by science. This concept

believes in the scientific spirit, or being fact-minded and rational.' Definition from Social work glossary www.socialpolicy.ca.

4. The manuscript of the diary is kept in Zamsky's fund at the Archive of Peoples Education in Moscow. The first publication of the diary in Zamsky's book "was represented in original form without any corrections" – the quotation from the preface of the text of the diary.)
5. Many scientists had a hard time after the revolution, particularly if they were against the Bolsheviks, among them Pitrim Sorokin who emigrated in 1923 and continued his research as sociologist in the United States.

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