

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

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FEATURES OF ONLINE ACTION IN RUSSIAN BLOGOSPHERE  
A Case Study Research of an *ad hoc* Movement in St. Petersburg

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

Master's Thesis

May 2010

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80 pages + 6 pages appendices

May 2010

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The goal of this study is to examine the special features of Russian blogging and to continue the academic discussion on Russian online action. Earlier research on Russian online communities has focused on studying the online action inside civil society organisations and established movements. With this study I wish to expand the discussion to cover the online action of spontaneous online communities acting outside the established civil society.

The methodology applied to this research is case study research. Since the research data consist of one LiveJournal community blog, the approach of the study is a single-case design. The purpose of a single-case study is to make generalizations based on the results of analysis conducted on one case only. In this research the aim is to identify the features of online action that are typical for *ad hoc* movements in Russia. The focus is on one LiveJournal blog, which was formed after the closure of the European University at St. Petersburg in 2008. Students of the university created the LiveJournal community blog in order to get publicity for the incident.

The data consist of the posts in the blog and are approached from three different perspectives. The first entity of analysis concentrates on studying the LiveJournal blog as a social medium and analyses the media features of the case study blog. The second approach studies the communal features of the blog. Herein, the analysis is combined with the theories on social organisation around media. The third entity concentrates on examining the features characteristics for blogging in Russia. The analysis is reflected to the theories of Russian civic action. The method used to analyse the research data is directed qualitative document analysis, together with features of quantitative content analysis.

The study confirmed some findings of previous researches, but also revealed new features of Russian online action. The LiveJournal community was more open and better connected with other actors in the internet than actors in established organisations in general. The bloggers were young, educated and urban, which illustrate the elitist nature of the Russian internet. The analysis also revealed how some of the Soviet forms of civic action are common for online action still in contemporary Russia. This finding affirms the idea that some Russians still rely on the informal networks in their social action, a feature common for Soviet society.

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## 1 Introduction

Throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people have opened their morning newspaper or switched on their favourite morning show in radio or in television to find out what other human beings in the world have done or plan to do or what the others have to say. Today notable share of people open their Facebook newsfeed, Twitter account or another favourite blog to skim through what their friends, acquaintances and others are doing and thinking.

This is a massive change in communication, which has an effect not only on personal lives of software users but also on society. The internet is a communication medium, which enables for the first time communication from many to many, on a global scale. This new possibility has shifted the world into a new information age that is as revolutionary for the modern society as was the industrialisation at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Castells 2001, 2.) The messages mediated in the internet cross international borders, they circulate through continents and even fight their way through state censorship. For example the internet-obsessed, constantly growing middle-class in China for surely demand more liberty beyond purely the economic, and the new social media may even turn out to be the tools for the next social revolution there (Economist 7.11.2009). Social media in the internet have already proved their power in some suppressed societies. In Iran, during the post-election demonstrations on the streets of Tehran in summer 2009, blog provider Twitter turned out to be the most reliable and most effective medium for the audience inside the country and abroad. Social media had similar significance in Moldova, likewise during the post-election demonstrations in 2009, when Twitter and other social media attracted masses into the streets. The demonstrations finally led to the renewal of the elections (Helsingin Sanomat 9.4.2009.)

These examples are just snapshots of the constantly growing significance of the internet-mediated social media. The significance of these new media can be even greater than we realise, why I feel it is important to focus the media studies more and more on the social media in the internet. In this research, I study the features of the Russian blogosphere and discuss, what kind of effects it may have on social change in Russia.

## 1.1 Defining the Research Problem

In recent years blogs have raised their popularity among the social science researchers. The academic interest around blogs has been multi- and interdisciplinary: blogs have been examined among others in computer science, media research, social science and philology (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002, 2). Social scientists have been particularly hopeful about the promise of democratization what the early new media research first introduces. After all, one of the most popular ways to define the online new media has been to highlight their interactivity, e.g. the absence of boundaries, convenient costs to receive and produce content, and speed of communication, that are also seen as vital characters for a democratic communication (Bentivegna 2002, 54-55). The new technology allows many-to-many communication instead of one-to-many communication (ibid. 54-55; Rheingold 1993). Blogs are even celebrated as extended public journaling, pure multimedia freedom of expression, which can be produced anywhere where there is an internet access (Russell 2009, 4).

However, the focus of blog research has concentrated mainly on the English blogosphere, partly due to language-barriers and partly because of the great volume of English blogs (Gorny 2006, 73). James Carrant and Myung-Jin Park even called the narrowness of blog research “transparently absurd” because so little research has been done world widely (Russell 2009, 1). At the same time the blogs written in Russian have received only little attention among the Western scholars, maybe because the Russian internet (later on, RuNet), is domestic in its nature and relatively isolated from the English internet (Lonkila 2008, 1130-31). Some of the Western research has focused on to study blogs and other social media around a specific political group, an organisation or a social phenomenon in Russia. For example the studies conducted by Fossato, Lloyd and Verkhovskiy (2008) or by Rohozinski (1999) concentrated on the blogs’ possibility to activate small political parties and other civic organisations in Russia. The results of these studies were rather pessimistic about the emerging online civil society in Russia. The conclusions argued that web has failed to strengthen and to establish the civil society in Russia.

In their multiple-case study research, Fossato, Lloyd and Verkhovskiy (2008, 51-52) found out that the level of online discussions was low, online groups were intolerant and closed, the mistrust was widespread and that the founders may be in some cases frightened or compromised. Due to these findings they argue that the researchers of the RuNet have seen the situation too sanguine, about how the internet could strengthen civil society and democracy. Rohozinski argues that one of the

main problems of the RuNet, is that it is still an elitist phenomenon, like the internet all around the world, and thus “it would be misleading to draw any direct relationship between democracy and the Net” (1999, 24). Nonetheless he believes that the internet still serves as a place, where individuals may meet and communicate freely, despite the state repression limiting the freedom of speech. Also Lonkila (2008, 1445) is suggesting not to be “overly optimistic” about the democratising potential of the RuNet, because majority of the users are urban young Russians, who mainly use the Net for searching information.

The goal of my thesis is to continue the conversation about the role of the internet in Russian civil society and the internet’s possibility to strengthen democracy on a horizontal, grass root level. The difference in my study compared to the ones mentioned above, is that the data of my research consist of a blog formed spontaneously by an *ad hoc*<sup>1</sup> movement, which organised spontaneously with an aim to solve only one problem - to get the university re-opened. The empirical part of my research consists of one blog, so it can be categorised as a case study research, more specifically a single-case research (Stake 1995, Yin 2009). Because the case of my study is a Russian LiveJournal blog, the context of my research consists of Russian publics, Russian virtual communities and special features of civic action in Russia. These perspectives are examined through media theories on social media, on communities organised around media and through theories on Russian civic action. The focus is on the features of social media, so the research comes under the umbrella of communication research.

The aim is to approach the blog research from a new angle and to expand the idea of civil society actors. The sphere of civil society in Russia range outside the registered organisations and political parties, i.e. the sphere of *informal* networks in society are crucial part of Russian civil society. Thus by studying the civil action online, outside the official institutions, my aim is to illustrate the social action in the Russian internet outside the official webpages of institutionalised organisations. In my view, civil society functions not only through organisations or through political parties, but also in the space of society where there are no state actors or civic organisations. This idea derives from the conception that the internet and online networks in Russia are based on the Soviet system of informal social networks, or *blat*, which pervaded the society and facilitated day-to-day decisions in the ossified system. The system of informal networks also formed the basis of Russian cyberspace (Rohozinski 1999). I see, that the online networks function as channels to exercise social power like

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<sup>1</sup> Ad hoc refers to spontaneous or semi-spontaneous movement formed in a purpose to fight one specific cause (more Howard 2003)

any other networks in society.

I argue that the deep mistrust on authorities and the reluctance to organise in the official civic action groups makes the informal part of civil society particularly important in Russia. Also the political control over national media has partly turned Russians to seek information outside institutionalised media, which together with “unofficial” civil society have upraised the cyberspace to be the new arena for free societal debate (more Lonkila 2008, 1126). My goal is not to compare Russian blogosphere with the press or television, but to study it as a social phenomena acting according to its own rules and practises.

The focus is on the LiveJournal blog server due to its special status in Russian society. Lonkila (2008, 1140) argues, that LiveJournal has become such an important part of the Russian-language internet that the socio-political importance of the RuNet can no longer be studied without LiveJournal blogs. Blogs are considered to be an important platform in contemporary Russia (Sakvina, 2009), where the main national media has failed to fulfil its duty as a place for public debate. Although the Russian LiveJournal community is a significant part of the global LiveJournal blogging community, it has received little academic attention and remains a blind spot in the blogging research (Gorny 2006, 73). According to Lonkila (2008, 1146-47) the Russian LiveJournal merits more academic attention due to its political and social significance. Also the leading politicians in Russia have understood the significance of the LiveJournal: the President of Russia, Dmitri Medvedev started his personal journal under LiveJournal server in 2009<sup>2</sup>.

The empirical part of my study concentrates on one LiveJournal blog created after the closure of the European university in St. Petersburg (later, the EUSP). The closure inspired people to create blogs and petitions of support and to debate the closure online. I became interested in the issue, because I spend two exchange semesters there and was impressed by the quality of the research and teaching university provides. For me it seemed obvious that there were political or economic reasons to close down the university, although the EUSP wanted to deny any possibility that closure was motivated by political causes. So the purpose of my study is partly personal but also general, because the goal is to study the trends of Russian blogosphere through this one case. I see that this case represents the situation of online action in contemporary Russia and is thus meaningful for understanding Russia today.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://community.livejournal.com/blog\\_medvedev/](http://community.livejournal.com/blog_medvedev/)



As being a blogger myself I wish to understand the special features of Russian blogosphere, because people favour different kinds social media in different countries. In order to understand the Russian internet, one has to know the functions of LiveJournal, the leading blog server in Russia. As a journalist, in the other hand, I wish to understand, where the social organisation and citizen activity takes place in contemporary Russia. Social media functioning online has become such a crucial force for a social change that the journalists of today cannot ignore what happens online (more Rheingold 2003). For example BBC has told its journalists to embrace the social media as a primary source<sup>3</sup>. Thus as a journalist specialising on Russia, it is crucially important to know how the most important social media function there and what kind of effects it has on society. Finally, as a student of media and Russian studies, I wish to find some answers, how the media theories on democracy and on social organisation can be applied in relation with the new media in contemporary Russia.

## 1.2 Research Questions

In this study, I examine the series of online action around the closure of the EUSP. Especially the LiveJournal blog created to support the university and to distribute information concerning the closure, interest me. I argue, that creators of the blog and other active users of the RuNet, are critical part of Russian public today. Thus, in my research I examine how these active people participated the interactive social media and in which way they communicated in one blog, which will be the focus of this case study. I am especially interested in studying the phenomenon around the closure, which is why I chose to study the case from three different theoretical perspectives.

Firstly, I begin the research report by discussing the concept of social media and the various definitions for a blog, by combining the theories with the empirical analysis on the case of my study. The goal of this analysis is to discover, what kind of social medium Russian LiveJournal really is: a platform for discussion or more like an alternative media. Secondly, I examine the development of online communities and the communal features of the blog with closer qualitative analysis. The concept of active online communities has been popular among scholars throughout the history of the internet (among others Rheingold 1993) and with the analysis of this chapter I study the features that made the researched blog a *community*. Thirdly, I discuss the special

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ejc.net/media\\_news/bbc\\_tells\\_news\\_staff\\_to\\_embrace\\_social\\_media/](http://www.ejc.net/media_news/bbc_tells_news_staff_to_embrace_social_media/)

characters of the Russian blogosphere, since according to Rohozinski (2000): “ In Russia, as in any other part of the world, it is necessary to adopt a socially and historically specific approach to cyberspace”. With these three theoretical perspectives I examine the main research question, which is:

*What were the features of online social action in the case of the closure of the EUSP?*

The question will be examined with following sub-questions:

*What kinds of topics were discussed in the LiveJournal blog?*

With this question I examine what kind of information the blog contains. By studying the themes and topics of the posts sent by bloggers, I examine what kind of information the bloggers considered to be valuable. The blog has been labelled as a *social medium* and with this question I study the *social* and the *media* features of the blog i.e. what makes the blog a social medium.

*What kind of communal features did the blog hold?*

According to some researchers (Castells 2001, Rheingold 2003), new *online communities* are the conductors of the next social revolution. With this sub-question I will study what kind of communal features the blog contained and how the bloggers built and strengthened their community online.

*Were there Russian peculiarities in the online action of the bloggers?*

When it comes to civic action and social organisation, I see that Russia is “more is different than most” (Kangaspuro 1999) due to its special history and traditions. With this question I examine, what were the peculiarities the bloggers pursued and can they be compared with the practises that are common for Russian civic action in general.

I link my study with the academic discussion about the civil society and special characteristics of social organisation in Russia. I am interested, how the public actors act in Russia, where institutional media is mainly under state control and where civil society is accused to be weak. It has been speculated that civil society has gone weaker especially under Vladimir Putin’s regime (see more White 2008; Lucas 2008; Shevtsova 2005; McFaul, Petrov & Ryabov 2004). I am curious to find out whether the civil society really did marginalise or did it just escape into cyberspace, out of the reach of the authorities.

### 1.3 The Closure of the EUSP

The empirical part of my study concentrates on the closure of the European university at St. Petersburg (the EUSP) that inspired people to create blogs and petitions of support and to debate the closure online. The whole closing procedure and events around it started at the beginning of February in 2008. On Feb 7th the university was closed by court order for 90 days due to fire safety violations. This decision followed a visit by city fire inspectors. The order to close the university was upheld, even though many of the fire hazards were removed.

The sudden closure of the European university alarmed many in the academic community in Russia and abroad. Some have suggested that economic or political motives may have influenced this decision. Explanations range from attempts to appropriate the university's building for other purposes (e.g. for business centre) to a politically motivated crackdown on academic freedom in Russia. In particular, some connected the closure with IRENA, a political science project focused on electoral monitoring, which had been publicly criticized by a member of the Duma in June 2007. The project was interrupted by decision of the university (under pressure, as some suggest) on Jan. 28th.<sup>4</sup>

Closing of the internationally known university evoked actions of support around the Western world and in Russia. Support letters and petitions were signed by people in Russia and abroad and sent to the city government of St. Petersburg. There was even a panel discussion about the closure in the parliament of Finland. Important channels for getting information about the closure were various online media and also blogs, which were created shortly after the closure of the EUSP. News about latest events around university was distributed in the internet-based media that were operated by supporters of the university. With the support of the web blogs, petitions and support letters the university got its license back and was re-opened on 21st of March 2008.<sup>5</sup> The detailed course of events is illustrated in table 1.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.saveeu.blogspot.com/>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.eu.spb.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=344&Itemid=407](http://www.eu.spb.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=344&Itemid=407)

Table 1. Course of Events

Feb 7th	The university is closed due to fire safety violations.
Feb 11th	University releases a press release denying that the closure was motivated politically.
Feb 13th	University denies political motives once again publically after the editorial in the New York Times concerning the closure was entitled "Putin Strengthens His Legacy".
Feb 18th	The Dzerzhinskii court left in force its prior decision on the suspension of the activity of the European University at Saint Petersburg.
Feb 19th	Press conference about the closure of the European University at St. Petersburg.
Feb 19th	Start of the community LiveJournal "Сохраним Европейский университет!!!"
Feb 22nd	The university signed a four-month lease allowing it to use the premises of the Economics and Finance Institute, on the outskirts of town, to proceed with teaching in the second semester. Members of St Petersburg's city legislature and government indicated that they endorse the decision. However, it later transpired that the EUSP's license was revoked on Feb. 21, and the Institute withdrew its agreement. Thus the university now found itself homeless again.
Feb 26th	The teaching licence of EUSP was cancelled.
Feb 29th	The first street activity, flash mob that lasted few minutes was held. The symbolic burial of the Russian science at the statue of Lomonosov, fire hose acting as a "wreath". Attacked lot of publicity in local media.
March 1st	Speculations that the university will be replaced in Finland, bloggers condemned this to be a rumour.
	Days of Closed Doors (parody from the Open Days held by many universities to attract new students)
March 5th	Press conference and photo exhibition on the EUSP
March 7th	Vaudeville road show on the shutdown
March 9th	Open-air university with public lectures City officials deny the permission of a street play which it sees "unnecessary" and "witless" "The Running University" is cancelled due to the denial of other similar activities. Concerns not to provoke the city administration.
March 12th	Against all the promises the city administration has not yet handled the new licence for the EUSP.
March 15th	Demonstration on Sakharov Square, cancelled later. A demonstration in support of the European University had been scheduled to be held on Sakharov Square on March 15th. It was banned by the authorities because the pro-Kremlin "Russian Youth Union" had allegedly declared its intention to hold a concert there on the same day. Not surprisingly, the square was completely empty on that day.
March 16th	Two supportive actions: second Street University and a lecture of support at the City

	Library.
March 17th	The university rector meets the governor of St. Petersburg, Valentina Matvienko. Positive comments that the problem may be solved.
March 19th	According to newspaper St. Petersburg Times, the governor has promised to re-open the university.
March 21st	The European University may resume its regular activities. Federal Judge Anzhelika Morozova, of the Dzerzhinsky Court, granted the university's request for an early lifting of the administrative suspension of its activities.

### 1.4 Research Process

What made my research problematic at the beginning of the process was the fact that my research questions were too general. With more detailed questions I could have reduced my work while doing the background research and while collecting information. My research questions were formed and focused during the research process, which, however, is typical for qualitative research (Alasuutari 1999, Stake 1995). I was trying to form the theoretical part of my research before moving on to the empirical part. Finally I realised that I do not need to study the case of my study, the LiveJournal blog, through theories but other way around: to study and evaluate the theories through the case. Structuring the research process became a lot easier, when I realised that the methodology of my research was a *case study model* for which is typical that the research process move on from one case to more general interpretations.

In the beginning of the research process, the only thing I knew was that I want to know more about online communities and social media in Russia and especially about the ones related to the case of the closure of the EUSP. What made the research process scattered and unfocused in the beginning, was my lack of information about the theories of social media and of online communities. So the first mission in the research process was to find out, what am I dealing with. First I started to think, why Russians are so eager to communicate online. Is this due to the state control over media that the civic actors need their own, alternative channel for communication? Or were the special characteristics of Russian social organisation and civic action behind the popularity of the web blogs? Hence I started to study the phenomenon from various perspectives, which eventually drove me into situation where I had information a bit about everything. For me it was somehow hard to leave any of the aspects I had studied outside the research, while in social science all the aspects of

the society affect on each other. However, with the case study research I was able to review the phenomenon from various perspectives. The research process has not been linear, on the contrary, the theory and analysis have been studied simultaneously.

Case study is a methodology used when researcher wants to study the phenomenon through one case by reflecting the findings of the case study to the theories (Peltola 2007, 111). Thus the methodology may be described as "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (Crotty 1998, 3). Theoretical perspective chosen by the researcher gives a range of methodologies among which researcher has to pick one that gives the right answers. Thus methodology is something between empiricism and theory, it helps us to "dig" the certain information out of the research data.

Methodology is like a bridge, which connects theory and empiricism and guides researcher from theoretical speculation to the empirical part of the work (ibid.). It is not given that research problem is always built from "top-down", i.e. first researcher defines epistemology of the research and then moves on to theoretical perspective, methodology and finally decides, which methods are being used. Sometimes it is possible only to use certain methods if the research data are already collected before the research really begins. This was the practise of my study, because I had decided to study the blog texts, even though at the beginning of the research I was not sure, which blog I would choose as the case of the study. When starting my thesis I knew that I wanted to study the closure of the European University at St. Petersburg and phenomenon around this case with content analysis, but the more specific method focused only later. The decision to study blog texts defined the methods and the decision to focus on one case defined the methodology. So only after this I built the epistemology and theoretical perspective of my research. I knew what kind of research data I would have, which limited the possible research questions and methods I could use.

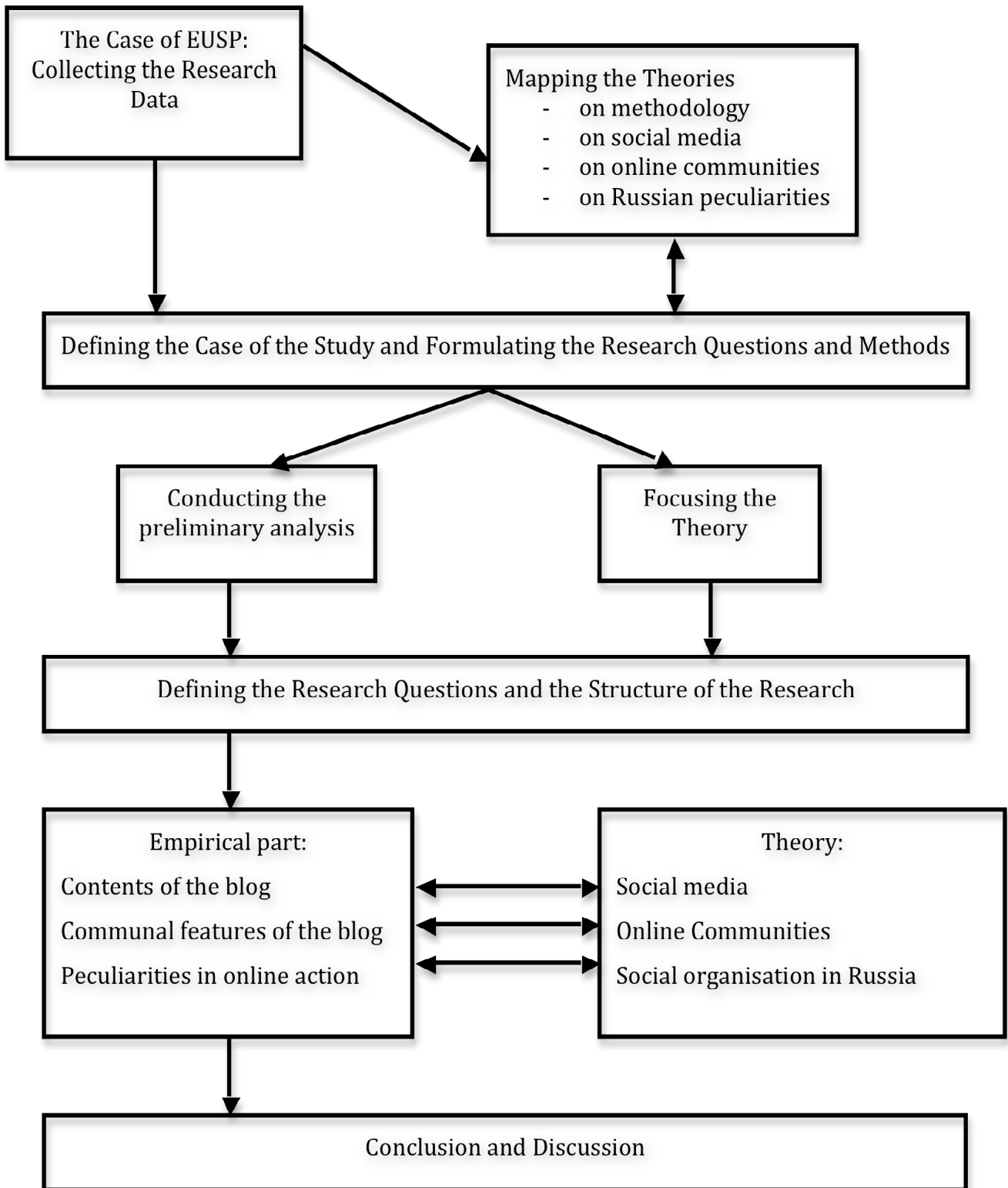


Figure 1. Research Process

Like majority of the students of media I see that nothing exist as such but everything is built by actions and by speech of individuals. Thus the research is constructed from a constructionist perspective. According to Crotty (1998, 9) constructionism see human knowledge as follows:

*”There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There’s no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed.”*

Constructionist perspective is essential when studying blog texts. In document analysis, the aim is to find out the actions of people within the text they produced. Hence, this research comes also under the branch of *cultural studies*, according which reality is socially constructed.

According to the idea of cultural studies, reality is constructed by the interpretations people make from their actions and by the rules how these actions should be interpreted. According to cultural studies, people act and interact according to norms, which are dictated by society and by social interaction (Alasuutari 1999, 60). For example, in my study when a blogger calls people to join a demonstration, he does not only do the obvious thing but also brings people together, practices democracy and freedom of speech. Analysing the content of the blog texts is not only observing the manifest meaning, but also interpreting what the communication and the words mean in the cultural context.

I start the research report by explaining the common features and practises of the case study research. Also the methods applied to the research are discussed in the next chapter. From the general overview of the case study research I move on to explain the case of my study and the consistence of the research data. In the second chapter I also demonstrate the different phases of the data collection and the analysis process. The third chapter focuses on explaining the content of the data, the blog, and social media in general. The idea of a blog may be defined in several ways and blogs also contain several aspects. I attach the discussion of the idea of a blog with the first research question, i.e. what kinds of topics were discussed in the blog. By combining the theory and the case study analysis my goal is to find out, what kind of medium the blog is, a discussion platform or more an information channel.

In the fourth chapter I explore the communal features of the blog. Like in the previous chapter, I combine the theory with the analysis and through the comparison I study the communal features of the blog. The theory part in this chapter discusses the changes in social organisation new media have conducted and the idea of online communities in more general way. The fifth chapter will



explain the Russian peculiarities of blogging and special features of social action in Russia. With the question *how* the bloggers communicated, I try find features in the case that can be described as somehow particularly Russian. In the sixth chapter I draw together the conclusion based on the results of the analysis and discuss them further.

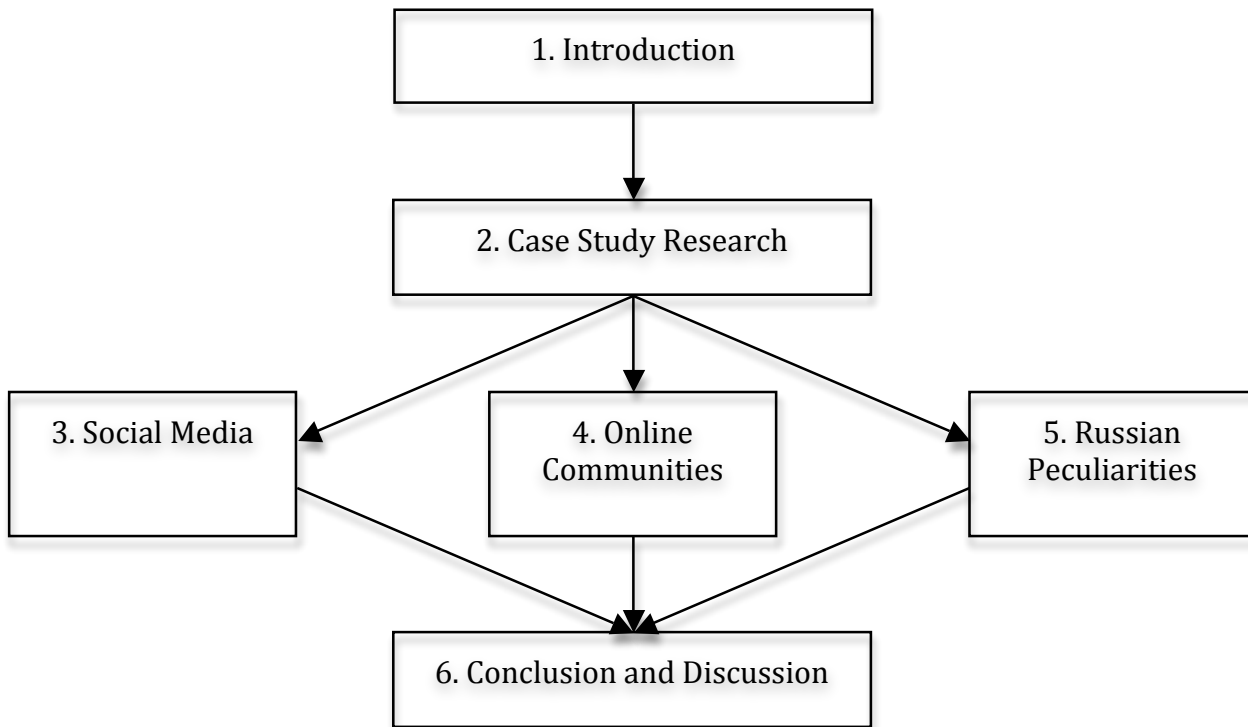


Figure 2. Structure of the research report

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Case Study

I chose to use *case study methodology* in my research, because the focus of the research is on one particular blog created after the closure of the EUSP. I believe that this *ad hoc* blog created by active citizens is suitable for studying the characteristics of Russian social action online. My research consists of one case, a blog, so it can be defined as a *single-case research*. According to Yin (2009, 47) a single-case design may be applied when the case is representative or typical case of a common phenomenon. The case of my study can hardly be described as unique while the *ad hoc* groups are one of the most common movements in the internet (Castells 2001) today. In contradiction, I chose to study only one case - instead of practising a multiple-case research - in my research, because I see that this one blog, and the phenomenon around, is a valid representation of the current online movements in contemporary Russia. Thus through the case of my study I may draw wider conclusions and assumptions about the social organisation in Russian blogosphere.

In social science the normal case of a case study is a smaller social and political unit (e.g. a region, a city, a village, a community, a social group or a family) or specific institution, like political party, interest group or business entity (Grotty 1998). The research data of my study consist of one blog, but the blog cannot be described as the case of my study. The case includes also the people writing in the blog, the community around it and the event that motivated people to start blogging. The case study focuses on the phenomenon around the blog and cannot be that explicitly defined. Context and the case assimilate into one and it is the duty of the researcher to make the distinction what is included to the process and what not. (Häikiö & Niemenmaa 2007, 49.) In my research the aim is to study the phenomenon and action in and around the blog by analysing the text written in it.

According to Stake (1995, 4) the key question in case study research is: “*What can we learn from the case?*” When doing case study research the researcher already knows something about the topic but is eager to find out more. Case study answers questions *why* and *how* and is particularly useful when the focus of the study is on contemporary events (Yin 2009, 8). The

goal is to study the context and case simultaneously in order to find out why the case became the way it is (Laine, Bamberg & Jokinen 2007, 10). With single-case research it is possible to test a theory and form new ideas about the topic. In addition, the case study can be a way to build new theories based on the results of the analysis (ibid.).

Case study approach is useful when a single unit or a small number of units are used in purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units. Different from large-N cross-case study, single-case study concentrates on examining one specific event, group or issue. Case study is a functional methodology when researcher wants to prove or demonstrate some causal argument instead of making general, broad-scale arguments. In a case study, the research data is collected in a short period of time and not randomly like in a large-N long-term research. When using a case study as a methodology it is possible to generate hypothesis, i.e. to find causal mechanisms instead of causal effects, make a deep analysis of one case instead of broad-scale research and to use concentrated data instead of dispersed one. (Gerring 2007, 37-48.)

In my research, the data were collected in the beginning of the process. However, a case cannot be studied only based on the data because then it would be only describing, not interpreting the phenomenon. Case has to be connected to the *context* (Häikiö & Niemenmaa 51, 2007), which in my study are the common features of Russian blogging and practises of civic action in Russia. The case has to be linked with the earlier studies and with the literature on the topic, to make it discuss with the theory and to ask critical questions from the chosen perspective(s). Case study may challenge already existing theories and to develop them (Yin 2009, 35-37). The goal of my research is to study the features of online action characteristic for Russians and compare the results with previous studies.

Although case study research can be applied to explain historical process in details, it cannot explain the historic chances in a long run. Instead, case study may be used to explain those social events, circumstances and tensions that made the change to happen in the first place (Laine & Peltonen 93, 2007). In my research the goal is to explain why the blog was used and how people were using it. The historical change is possible to describe only with comparison to the past events and traditions, which is why the theoretical framework is needed.

Peltola (2007, 111) argues that case study is a dialogue between the empirical part of the study and the theory. When doing case study, researcher has to constantly evaluate whether the

observations from the research data can be interpreted in a wider sense, i.e. can some observation explain something about the nature or about the meaning of the phenomenon. I try to practise this dialogue by comparing the results of my analysis with the wider trends of social organisation online and with the features typical for Russian blogosphere. That is why the analysis and theory are studied simultaneously in this research. Through evaluation and comparison to previous researches I may derive new theories or strengthen the earlier studies with the findings of my research.

## 2.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

Method is a set of practises and operations researcher uses for making observations. With a method the data can be employed further into the assorted form, from which the researcher may draw interpretations (Alasuutari 1999, 82). The research data in this study consist of one blog, or more specific, of the posts in the blog. Therefore, I study the case of my research by the means of document analysis. Although participant observation and interviews are more common practises in case study research (Simons 2009, 43), document analysis is often used when the goal is to analyse the *outcomes* of public or private actions (Yin 2003, xi). Therefore I use qualitative content analysis in analysing the blog posts. Qualitative content analysis perceives language primarily as a communication and the analysis is made with an attention to the content and to the contextual meaning of the text (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 1278). Thus qualitative content analysis means studying the intention of the communicator (Zito 1975 in Berger 2000, 174).

There are several ways to approach the research data, why the researcher has to make certain methodological choices prior to qualitative content analysis (Kyngäs and Vanhanen 1999, 3). The analysis may derive from the research data, when the only theory used is the one the researcher formulates from the results of the analysis. This kind of approach is called *an inductive* analysis and it proceeds from specific into general. The *deductive* approach, in the other hand, means that researcher chooses to move from general into specific in the analysis. In the deductive approach the analysis is based on theories and the research data are analysed through the theoretical framework the researcher chooses to use. The analysis method in my research is something between these two approaches. That is why I use the method that Hsieh and Shannon (2005, 1281-82) name as *directed content analysis*. The idea of directed content analysis is to validate or extend already existing theories but there is no specific theory that determinates the means of analysis (ibid.). The role of

theory in the directed content analysis is more to give guidelines than to dictate. The goal is not to have one predominant theory that dictates the analysis but to draw connections to the theory during the analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2003, 98-99).

The goal of qualitative analysis is to explain the chain of events or a phenomenon, not to prove something that would be statistically significant (Alasuutari 1999, 39). This is compatible with the idea of case study, because the goal in case study is to understand some wider entity through one case. In qualitative research the data are studied as an entity. Unlike in quantitative research, in qualitative analysis the data have to represent the results absolutely and thus conclusions have to explain all the observations and results (ibid. 38).

In my research, the context of the blog was studied extensively before forming the research questions or deciding the methods of analysis or the unit of analysis. Even though there is a theoretical framework in my mind, which guides me in the empirical part of my study, the theory does not dictate the analysis. For the case study research it is common that the theory is formed during the process by the researcher. Like Häikiö and Niemenmaa (2007, 51) argue, theory is not something that is already formed and waiting for the researcher to be applied in some study, but something to be formed in the research process. Thus, the theory is discussed in the analysis process, which I have divided into three entities. Firstly, I discuss the idea of a blog as a social medium and how the case of my study fulfils these expectations by analysing the content of the blog. Secondly, I discuss the theories claiming that the internet media have altered the idea of social organisation by enabling the formation of online communities. The analysis in this part focus on studying the communal features of the blog and on evaluating the theories about the social organisation online. The third entity of analysis studies the blog from Russian perspective, i.e. how the peculiarities in social organisation in Russia are visible in the social action online. What are typical for the directed content analysis is that the theory influences on the settings of the analysis and that the results are reflected to the theory throughout the analysis process.

The purpose of qualitative content analysis is to get an overview of the phenomenon in a compact, general form (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2003, 105). With content analysis the research data are classified and categorised into a smaller and smaller groups of analysis, which helps the researcher to dig out the core meanings of the data. This means that the research data need to be abstracted, in other words brought into categories (Kyngäs & Vanhanen 1999). When the text data are condensed, it doesn't mean that analysis is ready. According to Alasuutari (1999, 78-79) observations are not

interpretations, they are more like clues that are observed and studied from a chosen perspective. After the abstraction is done, the real interpretation starts.

### 2.3 Research Data

A typical problem for a case study research is defining the research data, which are representative enough but still compact (Yin 2009). When I became interested in the closure of the EUSP I had several different channels, where I could follow the course of events. There were support groups in social media V Kontakte (one of the most popular ones in Russia and Ukraine with more than 68 million users, equivalent to Facebook)<sup>6</sup>, several blogs and mailing lists for supporting the re-opening of the university. Blogs that focused mainly on gathering "official" information and links to the EUSP-related articles were [www.saveeu.blogspot.com](http://www.saveeu.blogspot.com) (in Russian) and [www.euspb.blogspot.com](http://www.euspb.blogspot.com) (in English). These blogs were updated only when there was a new twist in the closure. The main source for these blogs was the administration of the university. These two blogs attracted only little conversation or comments. Also some professors working in the EUSP had their own blogs, but these blogs<sup>7</sup> concentrated mainly on informing students about lessons, which were held elsewhere during the closure.

One of the blogs was clearly more active than the others. LiveJournal blog Сохраним Европейский университет!!! (Let's protect European university)<sup>8</sup> was created for a discussion and informing the students of EUSP about the closure and about the events supporting the re-opening. This community blog was open to everybody. However, the most active bloggers were members of the *initiative group* formed by the students after the closure of the EUSP. The blog was administrated by three persons who also moderated the conversation afterwards. Сохраним Европейский университет!!! blog had 225 members and 327 registered users have visited the site (in January 2010).

According to one of the creators of the blog, it was created to raise publicity to the cause and inform the audience also from the perspective of the students. I interviewed the founder of the blog in Saint Petersburg in May 2009, a bit over a year after the period of the closure. I use the interview as a

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<sup>6</sup> <http://vkontakte.ru/index.php>

<sup>7</sup> Among others [www.g-golosov.livejournal.com](http://www.g-golosov.livejournal.com) and [www.grey-dolphin.livejournal.com](http://www.grey-dolphin.livejournal.com)

<sup>8</sup> [www.community.livejournal/save\\_eu](http://www.community.livejournal/save_eu)

source for information but will exclude it from the actual analysis. The interviewee explained me the functions of the blogger group and motivation behind the blog.

*“The problem was that we wanted to express our opinion, our view of the situation and it was not similar what the media would say and what the administration of the university would say, so it was very, so it was kind of a voice of the initiative group, so we did as our own channel of communication.” (Female, 26)*

One reason for choosing the Сохраним Европейский университет!!! blog to be the case of my study was the fact that it was created by the initiative group. The initiative group consisted mainly of the students of the EUSP but there were also some other members. According to one member of the group there were 10-20 active members but their actions attracted even more participants. According to the interviewee the term “initiative group” is used widely in Russia when speaking about *ad hoc* movements.

*“We call it Initizitivnaja gruppа, so initiative group but it is usually served for all the movements, so like when people try to do something in the city they also call them initizivnaja gruppа.” (Female, 26)*

The idea of initiative groups in Russia comes close to the idea of active public (Dewey 2006): people who organise themselves when facing a problem in their sphere of life. In the previous studies on RuNet, the youth groups clearly play an important role among the social forces, partly due to their potential to use the internet technologies. In addition, Russian blogs are believed to reach the most dynamic members of the youth generation (Orttung (2007) in Fossato et al 2008, 7). Although the group was first formed offline, the community was still mainly formed online. According to the interviewee she “met” some of the members of the group first time online.

*“Because actually we didn’t know each other before. I mean with some people -- I didn’t know them. I knew their faces but not the names” (Female, 26)*

It is hard to define which one was first, the blog or the group, because both were altered and reformed during the process. Because I am especially attracted by the idea of interaction and communication of this so-called initiative group, I considered this blog to be most valid data for studying the questions of my research and thus to be the data of my research.

### 2.3.1 Data Collection

The constantly altering nature of the internet and the possibility to edit texts online throw a challenge to a blog research. The webpage I am analysing today may be totally different the next day<sup>9</sup>. That is why I decided to download the whole data, i.e. the blog, to my computer already in the beginning of my research process, in September 2008.

There are several download programmes available online for free. I chose to use a program called HTTrack Website Copier<sup>10</sup> because I got support from a computer scientist to use it. In HTTrack, it is possible to define how many “steps” you want to download, which offers the possibility to download not only the text on the blog but also links and links of the links. I delimited the steps into one, because already few steps may lead to that that you are downloading the whole World Wide Web into your computer. Limiting the download to the webpages, which were directly linked from the blog text was enough for the purposes of the research.

Even though the blog remained active after the re-opening of the university, I decided to limit the research data to the blog texts, which were sent between the closing and re-opening of the European university. The blog was created on the 19th of February 2008 and the university got its teaching licence back on 21st of March at the same year. In between this period there were 221 posts and hundreds of more comments (see appendix 1.). Due to practical reasons, I study only the posts, not the comments, in my research. For a qualitative text analysis a bit more than 200 texts is enough to get the image what was said and done within the blog. In qualitative text analysis – or in case study - the purpose is not to collect data that is statistically significant but to analyse the data from a chosen theoretical framework (Alasuutari 1999).

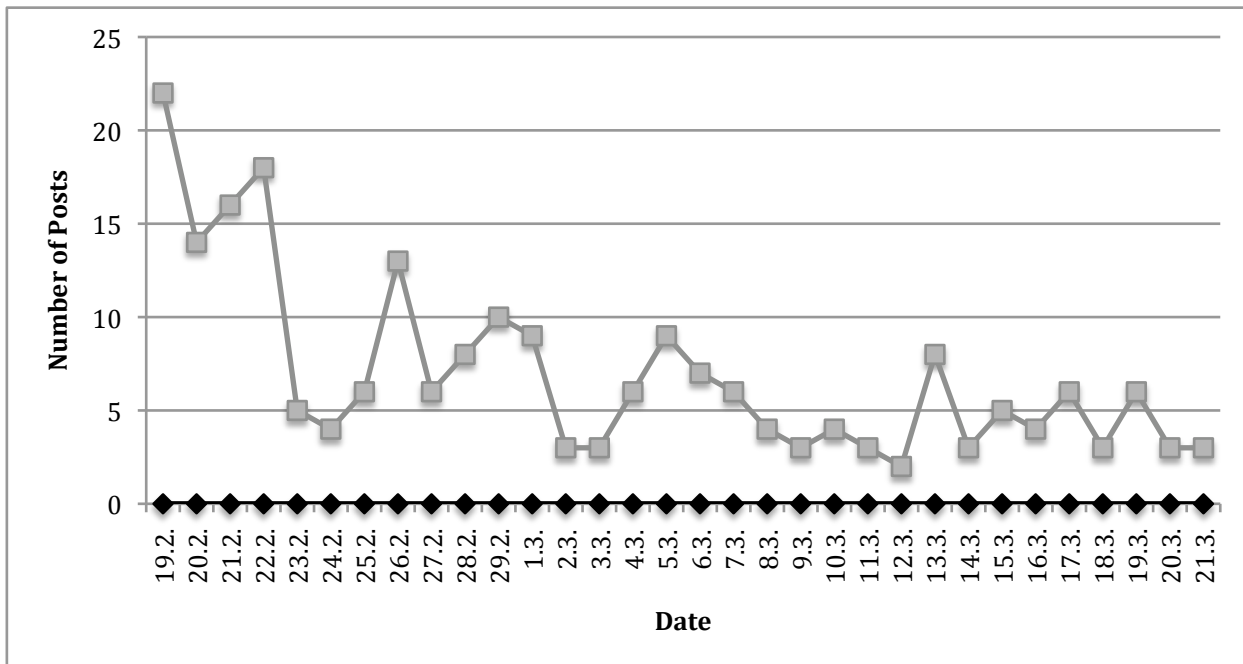
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<sup>9</sup> Gorny (2000) argues that the blog research can only offer a snapshot about the constantly altering online reality.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.httrack.com/>



Table 2. Distribution of the posts



### 2.3.2 Analysis Process

Like introduced above, I applied the method of *directed content analysis* to the empirical part of my study. In the analysis process I obeyed the instructions for qualitative analysis given by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2003, 110-115) and by Hsieh and Shannon (2005).

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2003), the analysis process may be divided into three phases. First, the data need to be *reduced*, which means excluding the irrelevant information from the analysis and collecting the relevant information into a compact form. When the data are reduced the next step in the analysis process is to *cluster* the data into smaller units. The unit for clustering may be an idea, theme or interpretation (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2003, 112-113). In my research the unit of analysis is one blog post. The third step in qualitative content analysis is to *abstract* the data further into smaller main categories.

There are various options how to study the blog, but in my research I follow instructions of Alasuutari, according to whom, that only the information that is relevant for the research questions need to be collected (Alasuutari 1999, 40). In the first phase of analysis I clustered the data with the

tools of *quantitative content analysis* in order to get a clear picture of the consistence of the blog. Adapting quantitative measures into qualitative research is rather established practise in social science although they are often seen as two separate methods (Alasuutari 1999, 32). Like Alasuutari suggests, the qualitative analysis may be a continuum for quantitative categorisation, because the quantitative analysis is often described as reliable but shallow where as qualitative analysis is deeper but harder to generalize. Thus the best results are found by combining parts from each method (ibid, 231).

I started the analysis process by organising the data in a classification table. The quantitative categorisation assisted me to get a clear picture of the data I am working on. As a model for the classification framework of the analysis I used the table originally developed for the use of Prime Ministers Office of Finland and it has been applied in the research of internet discussions in the 2002 tsunami disaster (Huhtala et al. 2005). The same model has also been used in the research of the internet discussion related to the Finnish school shootings in Jokela and Kauhajoki (Hakala 2009). I customized the classification table to match with my research interest although the categories of classification remained more or less the same. Variables were reconstructed for the purpose of my research. (Classification table, appendix 2.)

Already in the reducing process I decided to exclude the comments linked to the posts outside my analysis. Also the content of the links was excluded: I only marked down the *tone* of the link, whether the posting was positive/encouraging, negative, neutral, political or sarcastic. With hundreds of comments and links my research data would have expanded too wide for qualitative analysis, but also the information was not relevant for my study. The focus of my study was the communication between the bloggers, who were active enough to start a new post – not the discussion the post may have aroused.

So eventually the research data consisted of the posts the bloggers posted on the LiveJournal page of the community. The data was still fairly extensive so I decided to choose one posting as a *unit of analysis*. The common unit of analysis in social scientific research is a word, a sentence or an entity of ideas, which can include several sentences (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2000). One post in a blog comes close to the concept of entity of ideas while most of the blogs were quite short and contained usually only one clear main topic. With quantitative categorisation I found out the specific consistence content of the research data. In between the data collection period there were 221 posts, which can be divided roughly into three different main categories. More than half of the posts

started a new topic for discussion, a bit less than half were only forwarded links to different media outlets or copy-pasted letters of support written by some other than the blogger. I counted also copy-pasted letters of support and copy-pasted media text also into second group of “forwarded links”, while the content of those texts was not produced by the blogger who posted them. For my research it is only meaningful what the bloggers, members of the group, had to say. The third group, the banners with slogans, was the smallest, consisting only six of posts.

Table 3. Structure of the posts

<b>Structure of the post</b>	New topic for discussion	Link / forwarded message	Banner	<b>Total</b>
<b>N</b>	120	95	6	<b>221</b>
<b>%</b>	54	43	3	<b>100</b>

The classification table I used for reducing the data were also a basis for further analysis. The data were tabulated in a chronological order and the content of each post was summarised into one or two sentences. The table was built into an Excel file, which made it easy to add further conclusions and delete irrelevant information. By clustering the summarised information collected into the table, I managed to find different categories of *how* the bloggers spoke online. What is typical for directed content analysis, the keywords for analysis had a theoretical basis and they were defined partly beforehand, partly during the process (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 1286). One part of the abstraction is to compare the data with already existing theories, to draw conclusions of the data and finally illustrate the results.

In the next three chapters I will introduce the results of the analysis and compare the results with theories concerning my research problem. What is typical for case study research is that the theory and analysis are studied and compared simultaneously through the research report. Since, I study the case with the means of the directed content analysis, I start each analysis chapter by examine the theories i.e. what was said earlier about the topic. Thus, the theoretical framework directs my analysis and guides the interpretation of the results.

### 3 Social Media

In my research the focus is on blogs, or more specific, in one blog. Because this research belongs to the field of media studies, it is important to define if blog is a medium and if so, what kind of medium. The purpose of this chapter is to examine those features of a blog that make it a medium, or moreover, a social medium.

There are several definitions for a blog (among others Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, Bruns and Jacob 2007). One researcher sees blogs mainly as part of new media, other as a social medium and third as neither of these two definitions. Blogs can be also named simply as the internet-based media. What may explain the various definitions for a blog is that the research of the internet-based media has been rather multi- and interdisciplinary: they have been examined among others in computer science, media research, social science and philology (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002, 2).

I see that blog can be are all of the definitions above: social, new and clearly also, an internet-based medium. But the most intriguing question is: *what is new in the new media*? Like many others, Lievrouw and Livingstone see the following features as typical for defining new media (2002, 6). Firstly, users get the opportunity to modify and redistribute content online. Secondly, new media enable creation of a new kind of communication space that can lead to emancipation from the linear, hierarchal and rigid old forms of media.

One of the most popular ways to define new media is to highlight their interactivity, i.e. the absence of boundaries, convenient costs to receive and produce content and speed of communication. These characters are also seen vital for a democratic communication. (Bentivegna 2002, 54-55.) New technology allows many-to-many communication instead of one-to-many communication (see Bentivegna 2002, 54-55; Rheingold 1993). Possibility to distribute content, interactivity and interpersonal communication makes internet-based media not only new, but also social. In addition of building networks, the users of social media become *producers*, who not only consume but also produce most of the content (Lietsala and Sirkkunen 2008). These producers can be seen as a new kind of *public* actors (more Dewey 2006). The new active role of an audience has evoked great hopes for democracy. Participating in the communication process transforms the mass audience into active public. Thus the new feature of the new media is not the content of messages, but the way people can participate in communication.

Blogs hold several social features, since they enable users to produce content, to communicate by commenting and to create new communities online. In addition of being “new” and “social”, blogs can also be categorized as alternative media. Alternative media are not only alternative in relation to mainstream media. Blogs do not necessarily have to disagree with mainstream news or offer alternative ideas for audience. The main feature that makes blogs alternative media is that they enable people to communicate in a totally new way and thus enables them to become public instead of being a part of a passive audience. Blogs are channels for interactive communication and places where people with same interests can unite. Possibility for the citizenship politics and participating the public discussion helps people to become actors in their own societies that strengthen civil society and grass root level civic action.

The new media online has raised a lot of hopes for more democratic societies all over the world. According to Manuel Castells (2001, 137), the internet is becoming an essential tool for communication and social organisation, making it “a privileged tool for acting, informing, recruiting, organizing, dominating and counter-dominating”. Not only making it possible for traditional organisations (e.g. church, mass political parties) to organise and mobilise people in a new way, the internet also offers possibility for new type of social organisation. Castells (2001, 140) claims that the network society in the internet fills the gap that is left between the vertically integrated organisations. Loose coalitions, semi-spontaneous mobilisation and ad hoc movements are typical forms of social organisation in the internet. Thus, the internet becomes essential for mobilizing new members for organisations (Lonkila 2008) and for debating these kinds of manifestations.

Informal social media functioning online can be seen as part of civil society, separate from the state and the market. Being alternative, the internet media makes the expansion and deepening of democracy possible by increasing the level of participation. Democratization of media allows citizens to exercise their basic rights to communicate and to be active in a micro-sphere. Micro-sphere is considered important because it allows and activates participation in a macro-sphere. (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier 2008, 20 – 25).

Russia is no exception. The deficiency of freedom of speech and the state control over media has turned Russian activists into cyberspace where they can communicate and organise rather freely. The internet has raised hopes for stronger public sphere and for more democratic media. According

to Y. Zassoursky (2001, 183), the internet has attached Russia with the global public sphere because of the cyberspace's capability to cross national borders. He also sees the internet as a counterforce for Russian media that has alienated itself from the public due to the almost total professionalization of the public debate dominated by politicians, leading journalist and governmental spokespersons (ibid, 184). Elena Vartanova (2001) speaks even about "the internet fever" because of the constantly growing popularity and significance of the Russian internet.

### 3.1 Development of Social Media

Above I have discussed what is *new* in the new media in a more general perspective. But what are the features that make the case of this study, the LiveJournal blog, a medium? In this chapter I discuss the development of social media and the features, which make the blog a medium. Also the social features of the blog are studied in this chapter. LiveJournal is a server for weblogs, or blogs, which are usually conceptualized as a part of the social media; a definition usually linked with the new internet technologies. In order to understand the features and nature of the LiveJournal blog I study, I need to clarify the group of media it belongs to.

The term *social media* was born in the wave of Web 2.0 rhetoric, but even so one cannot label social media and Web 2.0 as synonyms. Social media form only part of the softwares under the umbrella of Web 2.0 technologies, which contains also various internet services and technologies without any media features or possibilities for social many-to-many or one-to-many interaction. For example Messenger and Skype are tools for communication but without any media features (Lietsala and Sirkkunen 2008, 29), which excludes them outside the group of social media. The definition of social media is ambiguous and it has raised lot of critic among media researchers. Some argue that paralleling the term *social* by only new social software in Web 2.0, contains a claim that the traditional media is somehow unsocial. (Lietsala and Sirkkunen 2008, 17.) I oppose this juxtaposition: when I define blogs as part of social media, this does not underestimate the value of press or other traditional media as social constructors. The difference is that the emphasis when speaking about the new media is on the new ways for communication the new social media offers.

Defining social media is a rather challenging task. The concept of social media is usually linked with social software that enables many-to-many communication instead of the one-to-many interaction typical for traditional media (e.g. press, broadcasting) and the concept usually refers to

weblogs, wikis and other social media where the users are both consumers and producers. The idea of Web 2.0 is usually linked with Tim O'Reilly who hosted the first Web 2.0 conference in 2004. O'Reilly outlined the definition of the web "as a platform" where users can share content and communicate without a specific leader.<sup>11</sup>

For Miller (2007) Web 2.0 means *sharing*: code, content and idea. He also emphasizes the communal features of Web 2.0, because Web 2.0 facilitates communities and has a participative nature. He does not exclude the possibility of making money, but the core of Web 2.0 is the trust between users, which make it "work for the user". Fry (2007) sees that Web 2.0 can rather be found in the idea of the reciprocity of the producer and the user. For him Web 2.0 is genuine interaction, simply because "everyone can as well download and upload" (in Naik and Shivalingaiah 2008).

According to Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008), the core idea of a social media is in the content produced by its users, not in the technology behind them. They highlight that social software does not make something medium social per se: the emphasis has to be in content, in interaction between users, who eventually make the social software a medium. Social media is created when people voluntarily share content – pictures, text, and videos – with each other using the existing social software as an arena for communication.

What make Web 2.0 revolutionary are its communal features. In my thesis the emphasis is on the content and the role of the social media for the users. Some even argue that the Russian LiveJournal is somehow more social media than for example Wordpress blogs in America, because of their

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<sup>11</sup> Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web\\_2.0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0) 19.11.2009. Critics argue that Web 2.0 is only a buzzword that exists only in the heads of its users. The creator of World Wide Web Tim Berners-Lee says Web 2.0 is "a piece jargon" and only a continuum for Web 1.0 that was from the beginning designed to be interactive. With this claim he criticises the idea core idea of Web 2.0 as a more social and interactive than the original Web 1.0. Usually the difference between the Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is explained by the definition of the role of the users. At the beginning of the history of World Wide Web there were small group of technically capable producers, who published their material online, and users who consumed the material. During the early years of the Web, the only way average web user could create content was to leave a note to the guestbook of his or hers favourite webpage. The cyberspace was divided between the ones who created content and the ones who consumed it. That was the time of Web 1.0, the first era of the WWW of the internet. However the technical development of WWW started to blur the division between users and producers: more and more people using the internet were also able to produce the content into cyberspace. The opportunity for users to become *producers* (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008) is called Web 2.0. Today there's no distinction between users and producers: everyone who's able to use the internet is also capable to create content.

communal nature that researchers claim to be characteristic particularly for Russian blogs (Gorny 2006).

### 3.2 Definition of a Blog

Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008, 29) divide social media into five categories: as creation and publishing tools, social network sites, content sharing sites, collaborative production sites, virtual worlds and add-ons. According to them blogs belong to the group of creation and publishing tools (together with wikis and pod casts) because of their “authorial voice”, “links and track backs”, because of the possibility to leave comments and to be subscribed. (Spannerworks 2007, in *ibid.* 29.)

Blogs are usually defined as “personal journals, which appear periodically” or as “frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence” (Jones & Alony 2008). People writing and commenting blogs are usually referred as *bloggers* and the whole ecosystem where blogs are produced, commented, tagged, linked etc. is called *blogosphere* (Bruns and Jacob 2007). In my research I will also use these terms when referring to the people who post messages and the sphere of action.

Blogs appear online, they can be written in almost any language, they can be read world widely and they can transmit information to the readers and to other bloggers. Blogs can be produced by anyone: by a CEO of a multinational corporation, by a celebrity, by an amateur or by a professional writer. Also the goals for blogging vary greatly: some produce personal diaries and some blog due to achieve some political goal. There are also communal blogs created by group of people (community blogs), microblogs (Twitter, Jaiku) and private blogs that are closed from everyone except the writer. Blogs have almost always an audience: some are read by around the world, some only by insiders of a small circle of friends. There are also fake blogs, so-called flogs, where advertisers pretend to be authentic users. The definition of a blog has expanded so much that even the ones we do not recognise as blogs, can still belong to the category. (Lietsala and Sirkkunen 2008, 32.) The broad understanding of blogging has in a way replaced the concept of online community, because blogs can easily attract audience, or a set of bloggers, to follow and comment discussion and to link back and forward each other’s writings (Chin and Chigenell 2006).



My focus is on a communal blog that can rather be defined as a platform for distributing information and for debates than as “a personal journal”. In communal blogs users can comment each other posts or start a new conversation under a new topic, unlike in personal journal where only one person can send new posts. The focus of my study is on the LiveJournal server, which is known for its communal features (Gorny 2005). In distinction to other blog servers, LiveJournal has concentrated on developing community features integrated to standard blogging tools in order to increase the possibility for online community building (Rayner-Goldie 2004). The introduction in LiveJournal webpage describes the server as “a blogging platform and online community built around personal journals”. Today it hosts millions blogs world widely and holds special status particularly in Russia.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.3 LiveJournal in Russia

Researchers studying blogs and social software in Russia have had a great interest particularly in LiveJournal (Lonkila 2008, Gorny 2006). The high user number and special status LiveJournal holds in Russia can explain the interested around LiveJournal.

Where as LiveJournal blogs are blogs among others in the Western countries, in Russia LiveJournal is *the* blog (Gorny 2006, 75). It is one of the largest aggregates in RuNet and the Russian name for LiveJournal Zhivoj Zhurnal (Zh Zh) is even used as a synonym for blogs in general (Alexanyan & Koltsova 2009, 65). The server was labelled by the Russian media as “the most fashionable address on the web” (Gorny 2004, 6). Today the server is hosting approximately 80 out of 100 blogs in Russia.<sup>13</sup> The share of blogs provided by LiveJournal is increasing constantly, because only three years earlier a research provided by Yandex (2006)<sup>14</sup>, the leading Russian search engine, showed that about 44 percent of Russian bloggers chose LiveJournal as their blog server. According to the prognosis made by Yandex, the amount of LiveJournal blogs would be more than 10 million in 2008 (Davydov 2008, 99), so today in 2010 the amount is even higher (although many of the blogs are not active).

The figure of active LiveJournal users is ambiguous and hard to define. According to the statistics

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.livejournalinc.com/aboutus.php>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.livejournalinc.com/aboutus.php>

<sup>14</sup> [http://company.yandex.ru/news/press\\_releases/2006/0926/index.xml](http://company.yandex.ru/news/press_releases/2006/0926/index.xml)

by LiveJournal, there are more than 1,2 million more or less active LiveJournal bloggers in Russia.<sup>15</sup> There again, the research conducted Alexanyan and Koltsova (2009, 66) argues that there are some half a million LiveJournal users in Russia. LiveJournal is more popular only in US where it has over 4 million users and after the top 2 in ranking, there are mainly English-speaking countries like Canada, Australia and UK. In the ranking list of LiveJournal countries, on the sixth place is Ukraine, which reflects the popularity of Russian-language LiveJournal also in the former Soviet countries. In addition to the Russian diasporas mainly living in Israel, US and Canada, the users of the Russian internet (RuNet) are located mainly in the former Soviet countries where Russian has remained as a widely spoken second language. Alexanyan and Koltsova (ibid.) emphasize that RuNet does not contain only the internet in Russia, i.e. websites within national (.ru or .su) domains but also the web pages operated by Russians living in diaspora and by the citizens of former Soviet nations. Taken in consideration the ones who speak Russian as their first or second language (mainly in the former Soviet countries) the amount of potential users of the Russian internet rises up to 270 million.<sup>16</sup>

The users of RuNet are relatively young and urban. The majority of the internet users in Russia consist of young university students living in big cities, in St. Petersburg or in Moscow, who have an internet access in their work places or in institutions (Bowles 2006). Average Russian blogger is a 21-year-old woman studying in a university, living in Moscow and interested in music, literature, psychology and sex (Davydov 2008, 99). So even though Russian blogosphere has argued to be more serious than the Western one (Lonkila 2008; Gorny 2006), still the most popular topic for the bloggers is sex (Davydov 2008).

### **3.4 Results of the Content Analysis**

The focus of my study, the LiveJournal is the most popular blogging arena in Russia and thus its significance for Russian socio-political reforms cannot be neglected (Lonkila 2008). LiveJournal is a social medium and a blog server and above I have clarified the special characteristics of the social media and the features of LiveJournal in more general context. In this chapter I analyse the content of the blog of my case study in order to find out what kind of medium the LiveJournal really was in the case of my research. By researching the topics and themes discussed online, it is possible to find

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.livejournal.com/stats.bml>. 2.11.2009

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.livejournal.com/stats.bml>.

out whether the hope for democratic interaction was fulfilled or did the blog act more like an alternative channel for information. I am also interested to know whether the users became active *producers* during the closure of EUSP.

The blog was created by an ad hoc movement and concentrated mainly on the closure of the European University of Saint Petersburg. But, nonetheless, I wanted to study more detailed what kind of themes the blog posts contained. I started the content analysis by identifying the *genres* and the *themes* of posts sent to the LiveJournal page. By specifying the genre of each post, I found out what was the purpose of the posts, whether the aim of the blogger was to inform, advice or something else. By specifying themes, on the other hand, I found out what was said in the blog i.e. the topic of the message. I conducted the analysis in two steps. First I read through the data as a whole and formed a classification table for the categorisation of the data. Then I went through the data again with marking down the characters of each posting, which helped me to identify the genres and themes of the posts.

### 3.4.1 Contents of the Blog: Genres

*"We tried to make it [the blog] as media, so an information source, not just a place where to discuss something which is not true." (Female, 26)*

Vast majority of the posts included information about the closure, which support the original purpose of the blog: to function as an information and discussion platform for the students, who tried to get their university re-opened, and for outsiders interested in the topic. I categorised six different genres from the data with the means of quantitative analysis. The first group, *informing* posts included mainly links to the webpages of news media and to other blogs, which were reporting about the events concerning the closure. Also the posts advertising the street activities were classified as informing posts. The *advising* and *instructing* posts included mainly information how to use the blog, fill out the letters of support or petitions and addresses where the petitions and letters of support should be directed. Posts within the genre *questions* were usually inquiries or requests for practical information concerning the support letters, street activities or events of closure. The posts I interpreted as *comments* (or *takings of an attitudes*) were posts, in which the blogger clearly expressed his or her opinion about the closure, about the actions of the online community or, for example, commenting some article, which the blogger had attached to the post. *Statements* were the posts, which included neither information, advice, question nor personal

opinion about the situation. These were only few and included for example thank you -notes for the ones who had signed the petitions. *Irrelevant messages* were posts were the ones with no or only little to do with the closure of the university. These were also rare, probably because the moderators practised some censorship and deleted the offensive and irrelevant posts afterwards.

Table 4. Genres of the posts. In some postings more than one genre could be found, hence the N=227. Percentages counted by amount of blogs (N=221). Thus for example 67 % of the blogs were informing but possibly, for example, with a question.)

<b>Genre</b>	Informing	Advice/ instructions	Question	Comment / taking of an attitude	Statement	Irrelevant message	<b>Total</b>
<b>N</b>	148	34	20	68	3	4	<b>277</b>
<b>%</b>	67	15	9	31	1	2	<b>(% per amount of posts N=221)</b>

There was only little scattering in how the different genres were placed in the time span of the blog. Informing messages continued to appear as most common type of posts throughout the blog even during the time of the backlashes, which set another shadow over the possibility to get the university re-opened. For example, the cancellation of the teaching licence of the university that hampered the plans to relocate the university lectures did not arouse any more outbursts of anger or frustration than usually. Only when the city authorities refused to give permission for a demonstration to support the EUSP, some frustrated bloggers send emotional comments in the blog slightly more than usually.

This trend demonstrates clearly that the blog was perceived in the first place as an *information channel*, and less as a *discussion platform* where the "real" motivation of the closure would be speculated, although roughly third of the posts contained a personal opinion of a blogger. However, by sending information that supported the opinion of the group, they could direct the opinion of the followers of the blog to support their actions concerning the closure. Thus the blog may be defined as somewhat alternative media while the links posted there described the situation also from perspectives, which the university administration did not want to portray. The idea that the users become *producers* in social media, or blogs, was also visible in the results of analysis. Although

many of the bloggers distributed information by sending links to news media, they disseminated information like any other journalist: by forwarding information about what other people said. However, the value of linking should not be underestimated. For example, in the research concerning informing people in the tsunami disaster (Huhtala & Hakala 2005) many respondents of the research said that one of the best sources for information was a webpage, which concentrated on forwarding links to local hospitals and other institutions. In fact, the possibility to send links is – according to some – the most important feature that makes the medium interactive (Silaeva 2008, 105).

### 3.4.2 Contents of the Blog: Themes

By studying the themes of the posts I wanted to find out what kinds of topics the bloggers considered to be meaningful to help their cause. By highlighting some theme over others, the bloggers would instruct the followers of the blog how to act or what they thought about the situation. I analysed the themes in the same way than the genres, this time only by classifying first the principal theme and then possible lateral theme of the posts. I classified the themes into five main categories.

Table 5. Themes of the posts (Majority of blogs had one clear theme while lateral theme could be found from 13 per cent of the texts.)

<b>Principal Theme</b>	Clarification of the events	New events	Letters of support / petitions	Demonstrations /other activities	Other	<b>Total</b>
<b>N</b>	36	62	72	24	26	<b>221</b>
<b>%</b>	16	28	33	11	12	<b>100</b>
<b>Lateral Theme</b>						
<b>N</b>	6	2	10	6	4	<b>28</b>
<b>%</b>	3	1	5	3	4	<b>13 (of the posts)</b>

The messages concerning *letters of support* and *petitions* were the most popular ones, but also informing about the *new events* was quite common in the blog. However, the posts *clarifying the events* were more rare than I assumed in prior to the analysis. The first post of the blog described the situation throughout, but after that the bloggers did only rarely clarify or report the events

concerning the closure. The bloggers often distributed information written in the newspapers by posting links to the media reports. This may be due to the lack of time or motivation to write long and informative articles in the blog, when the same information could be found elsewhere. The bloggers were more motivated to write themselves about the new events concerning the closure, for example when the licence was withheld or when the governor of St. Petersburg finally promised that the university would be re-opened. From time to time it was hard to distinguish whether a post included information about new events or if it was just telling the same events all over again.

Especially during the first fortnight of the blog, the most common posts were the ones concerning letters of support and petitions. This was also the period when the blogging was most active: during the first two weeks there were 137 posts sent to the LiveJournal page while during the two sequential weeks only 68 posts were sent. The posts classified to be related to the letters of support and to petitions, were the ones including information how and where to sign a petition, the addresses where the letters could be sent and links to the online petitions. It was also quite common that the letters of support, which were sent to politicians and to city administration, were also published online in the blog. The frequency of these posts indicates that the bloggers considered appealing to the authorities to be most crucial in order to get the university re-opened again. The fact that the letters were also sent to the leading politicians illustrates, how the bloggers may have interpreted the closure to be politically motivated and not only due to fire safety violations. Or at least they believed that the solution would be found within the decision makers, not for example through collecting money to fix the fire violations. Otherwise they would not have seen the point to request help from politicians.

The popularity of citizen letters indicates that the bloggers felt that pleading directly to the politicians would help the situation. What makes the emphasis on the letters of support interesting is that they can also be seen as a reflection from the past. During the Soviet time one of the most common (and one of the few possible) ways for civic action was writing a letter to the authorities (among others Fitzpatrick 1996). The letters addressed to the authorities back in the Soviet time were partly public (because they were addressed to institutions and not for family or friends) but they often contained personal issues, such as housing problems, loneliness or even problem with spouse. The letters then were addressed often to leading politicians, even to the General Secretaries of Communist party, like Joseph Stalin or Nikita Khrushchev. Most of the letters were signed, a minority (mainly the ones criticising Soviet state) were left unsigned. (Fitzpatrick 1996, 79.)

Why I am bringing up this old form of social action is that the same practise was revived during the closure of EUSP. The initiative group, which mainly consisted of university students belonging to the post-Soviet generation, were still practising this Soviet form of civic action. Although the vast majority of the letters of support were signed by group of academics, and did not contain personal message, the assumption that the highest politicians could be the ones who could influence on the issue<sup>17</sup>, are reflections from the past. Thus the citizen letters are not only part of Soviet citizen action but also a common practise in contemporary Russia. The considerable amount of posts concerning this form of civic action indicates that the bloggers wanted to active the followers of the blog to act offline.

If the first fortnight of the blog concentrated on information about the letters of support and petitions, the information about street activities started to emerge only after two weeks of blogging. This is probably due to the fact that with more time, the initiative group had a chance to discuss and plan the up-coming actions. The first action advertised online was a *flash mob*, which the students and other supporters were invited to join. The invitations reached also journalists, while the few minute lasting street activity was covered in the local media quite successfully, at least according to the links that were posted to the bog after the event. Messages with mention of *offline actions* also included invitation to the series of events called "Days of Closed Doors", which took place three weeks after the blog was first founded. Also Lonkila (2008) has suggested in his studies, that mobilizing people online to join actions offline is particularly common in Russia.

There were also various other themes that were discussed in the blog but cannot be clustered into clear groups. A few posts included request from journalist to disseminate information or to send video clips of the student life in the university. This demonstrates that the journalists in Russia do follow blogosphere in order to get information outside official channels. It is quite typical for Russian journalists to have their own LiveJournal webpage and that they use the information they get in the blog newsfeed in their articles (Sakvina 2009). This also indicates that Russian LiveJournal has an influence on the media offline and online (more Gorny 2006).

All in all, the interpretation of *what kinds of topics were discussed*, was that the posts included mainly information how to act and links to sources of information. This illustrates that the blog was

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<sup>17</sup> This may also derive from the vertical power structure of Russian, in which the leading politicians do have more power than in the Western democracies. The verticalisation of power has accelerated especially during Putin's presidency (see more Shevtsova 2009)

used more as an information channel than as a discussion forum although one has to keep in mind that the comments for the posts were excluded from the research data. What does this tell about usage of blogs in Russia in general?

One could interpret that the blog is perceived as something alternative to media because the group wanted to express its own interpretation of the events. However there were several links to those media, which had a reputation of being independent. This indicates that there was a public discussion about the situation in Russia, or moreover, in local media of St. Petersburg: a discussion in which the blog community participated. (The local nature of the discussion may be due to the fact that the national media under state control remained silent about the closure). Thus the blog could have been seen as an alternative source for getting information, which managed to influence on the wider discussion of the topic.

The next step of the research, after analysing *what* was said, I move on to study, *how* did the bloggers discuss and represented their messages. An important part of the credibility of the message is how things are said, not only what was said. In the next chapter I study what were the communal features of the blog.



## 4 Communal Features of the Blog

### 4.1 Theoretical Background

In this chapter I examine the different forms of social organisation and how media affects on the practises of social mobilisation. I study what kind of part media play in a modern society and how people organize around them. The focus is particularly on the change of social organisation, which emerged after the new media technologies enabled the new ways to communicate and to participate the communication process. The focus is on how the new social media online have changed the forms of social action.

#### 4.1.1 Social Organisation Offline

It is easy to argue that media have played, and still do, a crucial role in modern societies. Press and other media became necessity during the era of urbanisation, when the traditional *communities* were unravelled. In communities face-to-face contact was the main form of communication among the members. According to the classical theory of German philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies, communities were replaced by larger *societies*, when the vast volume of people forced members to seek new ways to communicate with each other. For Tönnies (2002 (1957), 33) community (*gemeinschaft*) is the real and organic way for social organisation where relations between people are real and voluntary. In society (*gesellschaft*), however, relations are imaginary and mechanical (ibid.). In societies human connections do no longer consists of face-to-face interaction, what makes mass media an essential part of the modern society. However, the interaction within and through mass media led to the idea of masses, which left people with the role of being passive receiver of the information the mass media mediated.

The concept of masses has dominated the media studies since the beginning of the history of mass media. The idea of masses was born in the industrial revolution that depraved people from their traditional forms of communication in which the relations were communal and organic in nature (Bennett 33, 1982). The social relationships based on face-to-face communication were torn apart when people started working outside homes, which altered the idea of communities and created

societies. Communities had grown too big for that social relationships could be handled in personal communication, which was the precondition for the media, or more specific for the mass media. Mass media are the glue that keeps the modern society together: perhaps it wouldn't even exist without modern mass communication (among others Pietiläinen 2002, 23).

However, the new forms of computer-mediated communication have altered the idea of societies and also the concepts of social organisation dramatically. The biggest change between the "old" and new media has been the de-massification of audiences (McQuail 2005, 158). Media messages are no longer produced exclusively for big audiences, but for more segmented publics as well. The interactive nature of new media has given the audience an opportunity to become a public in a totally new scale. Mass communication research has traditionally concentrated on publications with a large audience, produced by a small group of experts. Blogs, and particularly community blogs, in the other hand, serve as platforms for many-to-many communication. Hence, in my research I study the forms of social organisation, or more particularly, what is the role of new media in creating new forms of organisation. I am interested how the new social media can strengthen the publics and thus the society in general.

#### **4.1.2 Social Organisation Online: Social Media as Community Boosters**

*"It was pure grass root activity, it was our initiative and only we could decide what we do next." (Female, 26)*

A healthy civil society has long been seen as a critical part of democracy. In the social science research on the internet, the interest has been how the civic actions online affect on this linkage between civil society and democracy (Jensen et al. 2007, 39). In a healthy society social networks – online or offline – need to have value and people need to have connection with each other in order to make the society function. American sociology Putnam (2000, 18-19) calls this "social capital" which he sees as the core for well being of the society. Although the social capital has both individual and collective aspect, it can also contain simultaneous benefit for both. For example charity organisations may benefit the members in their personal lives but also the community around the organisation. In the case of my studies the actors had no doubt their own interests at stake when they were fighting to get their university re-opened. But I also believe that their actions had a wider meaning in the society, since making difference through grass root civic action is a crucial part of functioning democracy (Dahl 1998).

Thus it is important that individuals can affect in and on society and on the matters that has an effect on their lives. In a functioning democracy citizens are able to act and influence. Grass root democracy demands that people have an access to public arenas where they can share their opinions and discuss various issues. People who work for a change in a society are defined as *publics*, which are essential for a functioning democracy. Without these active citizens the power would be left into the hands of ruling political and economic elite.

According to American pragmatic philosopher John Dewey publics are born when people face a problem that affects on their everyday life directly or indirectly (Dewey 2006, 17). Dewey who influenced in the turn of 19th and 20th century was hopeful about the power of public. He believed that the power of democracy could be found within the people. Dewey claims that people alter the society in everyday practices: when they face situations causing (negative or positive) problems, people start to act. In front of a new situation people generate information because they try to find new ways to solve the problems they face (ibid.). The idea of public was also visible in the interview I did with the creator of the blog<sup>18</sup>.

*"Maybe before I just didn't encounter such problem that would influence me so straight and it was really interesting because after that I became aware about everything what was going in the city. So now I try to follow all the other activities that are available in Saint Petersburg. So what ever it takes, whatever is it about, the city, movements or other movements, I try to follow." (Female, 26)*

Democracy cannot work without active citizens operating in a public life. Because new public actors and issues emerge all the time, publicity is like an amoeba that changes constantly. New problems occur in society all the time that motivate people to gather together and create publics that again influence on society in a new way.

But what happens to grass root activity when the once-mighty social institutions do not attract people any more? According to Castells (2000, 140), mass political parties are empty shells and trade unions barely survive. Hence, the formal civic organisations are in full decline when it comes to social engagement. For example, in the United States in 1973 almost all the Americans participated at least one of the forms of civic involvement (e.g. working for a political party, writing

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<sup>18</sup> This may also due to the fact that the person interviewed has a degree in sociology and thus she is probably aware of the concept of public.

a letter to the newspaper, attended a political rally or a speech etc.). By 1994 most of the Americans did not engage in any of them (Putman 2000, 44-45). A study on the participation activity in the late 90s conducted by Howard (2003, 80) shows that Russians are even more reluctant to join organisations than their Western contemporaries.

However, this trend does not mean that people stopped organising or mobilising in order to defence of their interests. During the decline of civic involvement there were some organisations that managed, in contrast to the trend, to blossom. These included, for example, self-help groups like AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and environmental organisations (Putman 2000, 150-156). Also semi-spontaneous mobilizations and ad hoc movements continued to increase their popularity. According to Castells (2000, 141) “emotional movements, often triggered by media events, or by major crisis, seem often to be more important sources of social change than the day-to-day routine of dutiful NGOs”. The internet was the arena, which made these kinds of manifestations more possible and gave an important medium for the actors to promote their cause (ibid.).

Dewey’s (2007) theory about public actors is easy to adjust to my case of the EUSP. When the students, researchers and teachers found out about the closure of their university, they faced a problem that impacted on their lives. Like Dewey suggested, they became publics who tried to solve the problem by defending their university in public and by disseminating information about the closure. What makes the group of actors interesting, is that they functioned online, which according the Castells (2000), is the new place for social actions and semi-spontaneous ad hoc movements, exactly like the one formed by the students of the EUSP. Even though the group of actors “met” each other online, their actions had also impact on the reality offline. The fact that spontaneously formed public may have had influence on society is a core idea that there may be a functioning civil society within the state.

## **4.2 Results: Communal Features of the Blog**

In this chapter the focus of the analysis is on communal features of the blog. The analysis method is qualitative and directed content analysis combined with quantitative analysis in reducing the data. The theory discussed above has directed my analysis and framed the analysis process. By using the dialogue between theory and empirism, the goal is to find out how do the online communities, in this case a community, function. The interest is to study what made the online group a community,

why I focus particularly on analysing the communal features of the blog.

Already the starting point of the blog, the fact that it was created for an information and discussion platform for the initiative group, makes it somewhat a communal blog. In the analysis process I categorised clear indicators, like using the word “community” or “us”, as communal features. In the analysis I also found out more latent features of communality, which were repeated throughout the blog. Prior to the qualitative content analysis I studied who were the bloggers behind the posts. The analysis revealed that majority of the bloggers were members of to the initiative group or students of the university. The bloggers who wrote about ”us” or indicated that they were members of the group were coded into the table as *involved members*, which meant that they had close connections and personal interest to belong to the LiveJournal community. The bloggers whose relation to the issue was *unclear* were classified into the third group of the users. Although many of these ”unclear” users might have been students or members of the initiative group but their relation was just not visible in their posts. So all in all the group of active bloggers were more or less connected to each other by the interest they had to re-open the university.

Table 6. Identity of the blogger

<b>Identity of the blogger</b>	Student / member of the group	Outsider	Journalist	Unclear	<b>Total</b>
<b>N</b>	124	20	2	75	<b>221</b>
<b>%</b>	56	9	1	34	<b>100</b>

There were about dozen active bloggers, who obviously formed also the core of the initiative group. They advertised the street activities online and posted practical information, like the phone number and email address of the initiative group. Some of these bloggers also moderated conversation and directed the discussion by forbidding anonymous comments and pleading the bloggers to behave in a certain way. They also sent messages, which I interpreted as kind of “community boosters”. These messages requested the followers of the blog to join the group with an aim to get publicity for the closure. The bloggers also often referred to the group of bloggers as a “community” like in the post send by the moderator after the start of the LiveJournal community blog.

Feb. 19th, 2008 at 4:49 AM

Дорогие друзья! Данное сообщество [ST] создано с целью координации и освещения наших действий в сложившихся условиях. Мне бы хотелось обратить внимания всех на один, на мой взгляд, важный момент. Есть скептики, которые считают, что студенческая активность не может сильно повлиять на ситуацию и все это бесполезно. Я не буду пытаться спорить с данной точкой зрения, поскольку дело совершенно не в этом. Дело, простите за пафос, в чести, в поддержании статуса Европейского университета и нас самих. Где еще, как не в Европейском университете студенты должны заявить свою активную позицию? Где как не в ЕУ, Университете, который является одним из самых прогрессивных учебных заведений страны, учащиеся должны встать на его защиту? В конце концов, мы должны показать всем пример, как надо действовать в такой ситуации, как бороться за свои права- кто как не мы?? Иначе нас просто не поймут. Наше молчание уже вызывает у многих недоумение. Понимая, что сейчас наш Университет находится в очень сложной ситуации, мы не можем остаться в стороне. Мы просто обязаны четко и открыто обозначить свою позицию и предпринять какие-то меры. В конце концов, само название нашего учебного заведения нас к этому обязывает!

Posted by: danis\_g

Dear friends! This community [underlining ST] is created to coordinate and enlighten our actions concerning the circumstances. I would like to draw attention to an, in my opinion, important point. There are sceptics, who believe that student activity cannot greatly influence on the situation and everything we do is useless. I wont try to argue with this point of view, because that is absolutely not the point. The goal in its honour, sorry for the pathos, is to maintain the status of the European University and the status of ourselves. Where else than in the European University students must take an active position? Where, if not in the EU, in the university, which is one of the most progressive schools in the country, students should stand up to its defence? Finally, we should show everyone an example how to act in such situation, how to fight for the rights – who else does it if not us? Otherwise, we wont be understood. Our silence is already confusing many people. Realizing that the university is now in a very difficult situation, we cannot stay away. We simply have to clearly and publicly state our position and take some action. In the end, the very name of our school requires us to do!

Statements like the one above clearly indicate that the bloggers saw themselves as a group, as an online community. In addition, the design of the blog was a “community journal”, which means that anyone who joined the community could publish posts in the blog. Commenting was possible for everyone else except for anonymous users. Hence the blog was something more than “a personal journal” (which has been the most used definition for blogs). There was no pre-censorship on behalf of the creators although few irrelevant comments/posts were deleted afterwards. Other manifest forms of community building were the requests to join the group or to participate the actions of support. Also distributing the letters of support and request to join support groups in Vkontakte (Russian equivalent to Facebook) were also part of the actions to expand the group and increase the publicity. In some posts there were encouragement to spread the word about the situation, join the group and participate street activities.

The group behind the blog was already set up before founding the actual blog, but it was seeking constantly new members. The following day after the blog was set up, there was a plea to join the group.

*Feb. 20th, 2008 at 12:23 AM*

*В настоящий момент хочется услышать голоса тех, кто ещё не с нами, но хочет с нами быть. Речь идёт о тех, кто планирует связать свою судьбу с ЕУСПб в скором (или нескором) времени, т. е. будущих абитуриентах. -- Если ваши знакомые собираются присоединиться к ЕУ, то давайте дадим им в едином порыве высказаться за то, чтобы им было куда поступать!*

*Posted by: autumnburn*

*At the moment, we want to hear the voices of those, who are not yet, but want to be with us. I'm speaking about those, who are planning to link their fate with EUSP soon (or later), I mean, the future students. -- If your friends are going to study in the EU, let's motivate them by telling there is much they can do!*

Still majority of the posts did not contain any of these manifest "community boosts", i.e. invitations to join the group, request for action etc. Like introduced above, the vast amount of posts included only a link to media webpage with no or little comments made by the blogger. The links usually led to articles in news sites of local radio channels or local newspapers, which were reporting about the events around the closure. During the analysis process, however, I learned to see this active linking as a one part of the community building. By informing other bloggers about the publicity and time on-air the initiative group and their actions got, the bloggers were motivating each other to continue the fight. Because the original plan behind the blog was to raise publicity, each news story online, could be interpreted as a small victory for the members of the group. Also articles including interviews with the students or with the members of the group were posted often to the blog. Sometimes the students even spoke with one voice in the local media releases. For example one of the moderators sent a copy-pasted article with an interview by one of the members when the problem was escalating, illustrating how the initiative group had an influence in media. (In prior to this post the city administration had refused to permit a new licence for the university to function in another building. The city officials had also refused to give a permit for the street demonstration planned by the initiative group.)

*Mar. 12th, 2008 at 8:24 PM (text copied from a news webpage zaks.ru)*

-- "Тем временем студенты Европейского университета с 5 марта проводят серию акций в защиту учебного заведения - "Дни закрытых дверей".

- Мы требуем предоставить возможность студентам Европейского университета в Петербурге реализовать законное право на учебу. Мы выходим на улицы, чтобы привлечь внимание к нашей проблеме, - объясняют слушатели.

5 марта студенты провели публичное собрание в арт-центре на Пушкинской. 7 марта в сквере в Соляном переулке студенты ЕУСПб представили "Раек про Европейского Университета закрыванье". А вот намеченный учащимися вуза на 15 марта митинг на площади Сахарова городские власти запретили. Формальной причиной отказа стало то, что площадь уже занята: подана заявка на проведение другого публичного мероприятия петербургским отделением Российского союза молодежи в том же месте и в то же время."--

Posted by: danis\_g

-- "Meanwhile, students of the European University on March 5th were holding a series of actions in defence of the institution - "The days of closed doors."

- We demand that the students are provided an opportunity in the European University at St. Petersburg to have their legitimate right to study. We go to the streets to draw attention to our problem, explain the students.

March 5th students held a public meeting at the art centre of Pushkin. March 7th the students of EUSP provided "Rusk [parody play, ST] about the closing of the European University at the park near Solianoi Street. However, city authorities banned the rally on the square Sakharov on March 15th, which was planned by the university students. The official reason for the refusal was that the area is already taken: the branch of Russian Youth League in St. Petersburg had applied permission to have another public event in the same place and at the same time."--

The members were also keen to post pictures and reports of their streets activities, which could have motivated the followers of the blog to join new activities. By illustrating how successful the previous events had been, the group could attract more media representatives and citizens to attend the following actions.

*Mar. 10th, 2008 at 4:21 PM*

Напомню, что в воскресенье 9 марта в Соляном переулке в два часа дня прошёл первый уличный семинар. Мероприятие продолжалось около часа, на нём присутствовали около 70 человек. Всё прошло совершенно спокойно. Было интересно и весело, и даже не слишком холодно.

Уличные семинары планируется проводить по воскресеньям, там же в Соляном переулке, рядом со сквером. Приходите, участвуйте и зовите друзей!

Posted by: nhah

The first street workshop was held on Sunday March 9th at Solianoi Street two o'clock in the afternoon. The event lasted about an hour and about 70 people attended it. Everything went very smoothly. It was interesting and fun, and it was not even too cold.

Street workshops are scheduled on Sundays, at Solyanoi Street, next to the garden. Come, participate and call friends to join!



The encouragement to join street activities was needed, because the cold weather was not the only thing that kept people from the actions. According to the interviewee the actions were seen by some of the members as harmful and they thought that the actions would make the situation even worse for the EUSP. The group support and community building was also needed to make the group to stay together, also against the state repression if needed. It was clear that the street activities organised by the initiative group were one of the most controversial issues among the bloggers. At one point the conversation heated up to the point, where one of the bloggers had to ask others to calm down. The online community was thus controlling itself to keep up the team spirit instead of letting the group members to scold each other.

*Mar. 9th, 2008 at 10:52 PM*

*Друзья, мы все устали и нервничаем, ситуация затягивается. Одна просьба. Пожалуйста, давайте постараемся быть добрее друг к другу!*

*Posted by: suibcenelt*

*Friends, we are all tired and nervous, because the situation is prolonged. One request. Please, let's try to be kinder to each other!*

A significant part of the posts included copies of the letters that different institutions, academics and other supporters had sent to the leading politicians, which was also a sort of community boost, since the bloggers were obviously keen to highlight the support they got. The support from outside was welcomed by the bloggers and sharing the information about the received support was common in the blog. Also the constantly increasing amount of signatures in petitions was saluted with encouraging remarks. For example the support received from the Humanitarian University of Vilnius was emphasised (probably because this university has been evicted from its original place in Minsk due to political reasons).

*Mar. 5th, 2008 at 2:14 PM*

*Нас поддержали коллеги из Европейского гуманитарного университета!*

*Posted by: new\_antaresov*

*Our colleagues from the European Humanitarian University support us!*

Even though the blog was written almost completely in Russian, the group managed to attract international support, probably mainly with the help offered by foreign students studying in the EUSP. Like Zassoursky (2001) argue, one of the most important features of the internet in Russia

has been the possibility to join the conversation with online communities abroad. Thus the Russian blogosphere has been connected to the English-language internet also in the case of the EUSP.

*Feb. 22nd, 2008 at 11:36 PM*

*Letter of Support for European University at St Petersburg, размещенное Алексеем Юрчаком, собрало уже 2071 подпись ученых со всего мира!*

*Posted by:korvol*

*Letter of Support for European University at St Petersburg, created by Alexei Yurchak, has already collected 2,071 signatures of scientists from around the world!*

All in all, there were various features in the blogging culture of the LiveJournal blog that strengthened the team spirit of the community. Some of these actions may have been intentional and some not, but the group obviously wanted act as a united community. This is not exceptional feature for Russian bloggers, because the communality has been seen somewhat especially Russian also in the previous studies of Russian blogosphere. This is one of the reasons why the LiveJournal is often seen as a particularly Russian phenomenon, although it was originally founded in US. Also the popularity of the Russian LiveJournal is often connected with the idea of cultural identity<sup>19</sup> of the Russians that sees them somehow more communal than the individualistic Westerners (Gorny 2006, 79; Schmidt and Teubener 2006, 16).

Some argue that Russians are attached to the LiveJournal social networking site, because of its communal nature, which allows users to have many friends and follow their actions online. Comments and unified identification of users create a feeling of community unlike other blog servers, which have limited services for amalgamation and communication between journals (Gorny 2006, 78). In LiveJournal everyone has their own profile page with information about the user: profile picture, interests, contact information and so on. By these identities and blogs together, LiveJournal allows users to create and build reputations based on their journals as well as their comments and network of friends (Raynes-Goldie 2004).

Another important feature in LiveJournal is a friend-list. By clicking the name of a friend it is possible to see the last postings of that person. Usually an average (Western) LiveJournal user has a

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<sup>19</sup> The concept of cultural identity is often criticised for its absence in scientific substance. Here, however, the cultural identity is not understood as something that exists in reality, but as something that has impact on world views of individuals and collectives (Schmidt & Teubener, 2006)

handful of friends in his or hers friend-list, most of whom are also personal acquaintances in “real” life. However, Russian users have usually hundreds of friends, many of whom they have never seen. The Russian internet users have even developed a word for their online friends: in real life friends are called *druzhja* (plural of the Russian word *drug*, meaning a friend). Friends in the internet are referred with the English word *friend* (pronounced and spelled as *friend*). (Gorny 2006, 76.) In early Russian LiveJournal almost everybody were each other’s friends and according to Gorny (2006) it was more “like an village than megapolis”. In early years of 21st century for example almost every Russian LiveJournal user were connected to the friends-lists of “Fisherman”, which brought basically all the Russian LiveJournal posts into the same page. Writing in Russian was reason enough to join Fisherman’s friend-list, which led the development of the one big “Russian LiveJournal community”.

The communal features of the LiveJournal were also one of the reasons, why the initiative group chose the server to host their communal blog. Many of the students were already members of the LiveJournal and had accounts there that made it easy to just add a new blog to their newsfeed<sup>20</sup>. The wide concept of “friend” in the Russian LiveJournal was also visible in the case of this research. According to the creator of the blog, the members of the LiveJournal community did not all know each other in prior to founding the blog.

*”--Sure but I, for example I told you about Sasha K...-- She was very active but she is, was from the other department so she is an anthropologist. So I only met her really when there was this case [of the closure, ST]. And first we were communicating through the internet so our first meeting was after several letters.” (Female, 26)*

The LiveJournal community was thus a place to make new friends but also a forum to discover new sides of the old ones. The interviewee told that the relationship with the ones she know in advance changed during the process, while the blog showed another side of them.

*”It was really, yeah, the discussions were really active and many people, I saw them from a new side because... yeah, you could really see if people were able to do something or -- just so upset that you could only see them crying in the corner somewhere. Yeah, because the situation was really like a source of new information about the people you knew before and also on the blog you could see it.” (Female, 26)*

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with the founder of the blog in 2009

One thing we can learn from the case of the EUSP is that the communality seemed to be crucially important for the group. Without support from the other bloggers, the action held offline would have been less powerful and also fragmentation of opinions by the students could have portrayed the problem in a different way in publicity. By acting as a group, as a community, the bloggers were one front in the public battle of the truth.

## 5 Russian Peculiarities in Social Action

Already the communal features of blogging discussed above have been seen as somehow typical for Russian blogosphere, but I was interested to study the special characteristic of Russian blogging even further. In this chapter I focus on the theories of Russian social action and organisation, which have been greatly influenced by country's social reality in the past. Like argued in the third chapter, the post-Soviet generation applied some of the practises common from Soviet era, e.g. sending citizen letters to the leading politicians. Next I discuss the Russian peculiarities further and study what they were.

### 5.1 Lessons from the Past

In order to understand Russian social organisation one has to know the peculiarities of the Russian society. Above I have discussed the possibilities internet offers for social organisation and for community building. However, majority of the theories formed in media studies are formed by Western scholars, who have based their studies on cases from the Western world. Thus the common question for the student of Russian media and society is: How can the Western models be applied to the case study from Russia?

Several Russian and non-Russian scholars criticise the researchers of post-Soviet media for narrowing the scope into the normative theories of democracy. Koltsova (2001, 317-318) sees that the researchers using these normative theories – usually emerged to the modernisation theory - presume that all the societies move or should move on the same trajectory into democratic and modern ones. She also opposes the idea that researchers assume that all media want to be become independent from any political or economic control. Few decades ago modernisation theory was even criticised to be “an ideological defence of Western capitalism over the rest of the world” (Giddens 1982, 44 in Pietiläinen 2002, 26).

I argue that Russia can and should be studied also with the means of Western theories - but with an extensive knowledge of the Russian cultural and historic context. Russia has various special characteristics, but also lot of similarities to other nations. For example social development of China has been paralleled often by the social changes in Russia (see more Pietiläinen 2002,

Nordenstreng 2001). However, in order to understand the role of media and what kind of part of Russian society it is, one has to understand the special characteristic of Russian society.

The generally accepted way to distinguish Russian ideology from the Western ones is to see Russian somewhat more communal in comparison to the individualistic Western people (e.g. Gorny 2006; Weigle 2000; Schmidt & Teubener 2006). According to Weigle (2000, 423) Russians conceive their social relations as belonging to the community (*gemeinschaft*) category in emphasizing the supremacy of the community, “understood as binding social ties based on amorphous concepts of cultural, psychological, and emotional bonding, over the individual”. Very few Russian and non-Russian scholars have supported the *gesellschaft* version of social organisation in Russia (*ibid.*). This is a great distinction to the Western way to conceptualise the means of social organisation. Usually Western forms of social organisation are categorised into the society (*gesellschaft*) category, where media is the essential tool for keeping the society together.

The idea of Russian characters as a somehow more communal goes back to the pre-Soviet era. Particular type of collectivism, *sobornost*, forms the Russian character that derives from the self-governed collectives in countryside of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Russia. According to Sergeyev & Biryukov (1993, 34) “sobornost stood for some mystic union of humanity and was opposed to the individualism believed to be characteristic feature of Western (unorthodox) culture”.

The idea of self-governed and self-organised communities was hampered during the Soviet-years, when all non-state action was subordinated under the power of the Communist party and the state. The civil society was practically silenced into dysfunction and all media were brought under the control of the state.

Although there was some kind of civil society action in pre-Soviet Russia, the seven decades long Soviet era killed almost completely the early foundations of country’s civil society (McFaul and Treyge 2004, 142-143). According to McFaul and Treyger (*ibid.*) the Soviet regime was probably the most hostile regime in the history for non-state action. The illegitimation of non-state organisations and wide state terror marginalized the civil society into total dysfunction. The death of Stalin brought some reductions to the society and the new social atmosphere gave people to courage to start to publish informal samizdats, self-printed newsletter, which circulated from hand to hand among Soviet intellectuals (*ibid.*, 144).

Still, it was only perestroika in the late 80s, which made civil society to blossom and finally polarised civil society and the state. Before that all organisations, e.g. sport clubs, trade unions and women's organisations were controlled by state, and joining them was usually a formality and a matter of obligation rather than a deep feeling to "join the cause". The compulsory membership created a deep mistrust to all the communist organisations. (Howard 2003, 27.) Although the number of NGO's grew rapidly during the last years of perestroika, the level on participation has regressed again. A study on the participation activity in the late 90s conducted by Howard (2003, 80) shows that Russians are still clearly more reluctant to join organisations than their Western contemporaries.

Thus Russian civil society and civic action cannot be studied without taking into consideration the deep mistrust toward all-sort of authorities, a tradition of suspicion, which was built during the Soviet era, but is still existing today. In the case of emergency or in need for help, people turned rather towards their circle of acquaintances than used the official channels. Today, the vague legislation and insufficient rule of law in Russia makes the society unpleasant environment for civil society to function. McFaul and Treyger (2004, 155) argue that Russia's socio-economic structure is the biggest handicap for country's civil society. Thus people rather function in society outside the "official civil society" because the risk of ending up as a target for a selective use of law is smaller when acting unorganised and outside registered NGO's. According to Howard (2003) "one of the most striking features of state-socialist societies was the clear distinction between the formal institutions and the informal behaviour of people in every day life". The same dichotomy continued during the closure of the EUSP: the official truth told by the university administration was not the same the students believed in.

Civil society made a comeback to the academic discourse after the fall of communism in the Central and Eastern Europe in 1989. The term was revitalized mostly due to the wave of democratization around the world (Howard 2003, 31). Classical examples of civic action that year were Polish opposition movement, student demonstrations in Tianmen and the fall of the Berlin wall. In Soviet Union the reforms of president Mikhail Gorbatshev, perestroika and glasnost, gave liberty and space for civil society for the first time in Soviet history. Until then the civil society was totally absent or at least illegalized in the Soviet Union.

Today, the term civil society is used widely among researchers, but it contains various definitions (McFaul and Treyger, 2004, 137). Usually, to the concept of civil society is subsumed all the actors,

who do not belong to either to the group of state actors or into the private sphere. Civil society is seen as a space distinct from the state and the market and the term refers usually "to the realm of organisations, groups, and associations that are formally established, legally protected, autonomously run, and voluntarily joined by ordinary citizens" (Howard 2003, 34-35). Naturally civil society does not function separately from other state actors, but its functions and goals overlap with other actors in society, i.e. state and markets.

Russian civil activity has been studied widely by analysing organisations and other organised actors functioning in civil society, which has led to the idea that the Russian civil society is dysfunctional in the means of an organisational participation. However, the concept of the Russian civil society is wider than this. I argue, that the core of the Russian civil society functions partly outside the official non-state actors, for example in cyberspace where there are hardly any limits for freedom of speech or gathering. That is why I included the discussion on civil society in my research. I see, that in order to understand the actions of the bloggers and the influence they had in Russian society, one has to also study the peculiarities of the Russian civil action. If the people do not trust official channels (Howard 2003) they will find some other channel for action. In this case it was the blog.

## **5.2 Society of Networks**

Like argued above, throughout the modern history of Russia there have been various attempts to limit the freedom of civic action. In the Soviet Union, the civil society did not officially even exist and the new millennium with Vladimir Putin's administration has introduced new restrictions to the Russian civil society. Thus the informal relations and connections have formed the core of civic action in Russia. In modern Russia one of the new forms of informal communication has been blogging, which has also been seen as a continuum for the Soviet unofficial social networks - so called *blats* (Gorny 2006, 30; Rohozinski 1999). In this chapter I study the concept of blat and the legacy it left for Russian blogosphere.

Russian history shows that when state fails to fulfil its functions, people find out a way to compensate these lacks in society. Back in the Soviet time the lack of everyday goods and difficulty to get healthcare etc. created wide network of social relations. Instead of relying on the official networks and channels of distribution people put reliance on their social networks, on blats. Schmidt-Pfister (2005, 56) suggests that blat is a fundamental part of social welfare, but that it can



also be described as grass root corruption. Whether you call it a form of corruption or a network of favours, blats were essential for the every day survival during the Soviet time (see more Ledeneva 1998, Sezneva 2007). Besides, that there was a lack of services and sometimes even food supplies, the trust on officials was low during the Soviet time, which increased the importance of the blat (in Salmenniemi and Rotkirch 2008, 16). Rather than relying on authorities people leaned on their circle of acquaintances in case they needed help.

There have been arguments in academic discussion whether blats still exist or were they just phenomena of the Soviet time. Some suggest that blat-system is still working, but you need money to benefit from the system (Lebeneva 1998, 211). Whether blat still exist or not, the mistrust against authorities is still existing. In a nation-wide survey made by research centre Levada in 2007, 30 percent of the recipients answered that they do not trust anyone of the Russian politicians and 48 percent believed that the Duma elections were manipulated<sup>21</sup>. The distrust in authorities causes suspicion against media as well, which makes the unofficial online circulation of information, e.g. blogs, more attractive for people to seek adequate information.

During the Soviet time consequence was blat, but now thanks to new information technology, the semi-public sphere of networks may exist online in blogs and in other alternative internet-based media. Like blats, also blogs can be placed somewhere between public and private sphere, because blogs are open to everybody but you have to have some personal connection with the topic of a blog or with the blogger in order to get some benefit out of the medium. Both blats and blogs are often formed around network of people who share(d) the same concern. In blat-system, people may have changed goods or services but in many cases the exchange object was piece of information.

According to Lonkila (1997) the time of unofficial networks, is not over, but still part of Russian everyday reality. The reliance on informal networks and the prevalence of “pulling strings” and using connections in post-Soviet Russian daily life “entitles us to call the present-day Russia a society of networks” (Lonkila 1997, 99). Some even argue that the significance of informal networks is increasing in business relations in contemporary Russian (ibid. 103). The popularity of blogs may be seen as a symptom of the reliance on the unofficial networks. When the students of the EUSP wanted to influence on the re-opening of their university, they formed an initiative group, which then started a blog to serve as an information channel.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.levada.ru/press/2007111600.html>

The goal my research is to find features of Russian blogging common for the Russian social action and for the civil society. In order to understand the civic action in the unofficial blogosphere, I study what kind of means the bloggers used to influence on the blogosphere, i.e. *how* did they discussed and acted in the blog. With the analysis I hope to study further whether blogs may be categorised as an offspring of the “network society” or something else.

### **5.3 Results: Russian Peculiarities of Blogging**

The analysis in this chapter is based on the idea that the blog was a forum for a group tied together by informal relations. With the means of directed content analysis I study the features, which were common for the blog and thus try to withdraw conclusions how the informal network of bloggers functioned and were there some new features to be added to the theories on Russian social action. The analysis process was framed by the theories on the Russian peculiarities of civic action (introduced above). What is typical for case study research is to test theories and develop them further (Yin 2009, Peltola 2007). In the analysis of this chapter, I compare the features of civic action in the blog to the ones introduced in earlier studies of Russian blogosphere and discuss the Russian peculiarities further. In addition to reflecting the traditional Russian ways to act inside an unofficial network, I hope to find some new features of social action. The main question in this chapter is *how* did the bloggers communicate in the blog.

#### **5.3.1 Hiding the Identity**

The most manifest feature indicating the informality of the blog was that the users were blogging under pseudonyms and mainly with fake profile pictures, which demonstrate the unwillingness to be identified. The mistrust in authorities, that in the first place motivate people to rely on official networks, motivates bloggers also to hide their identity (Schmidt and Teubener 2006, 15). However, it seemed that the other bloggers knew who was acting behind the pseudonym. According to the founder of the blog, who I interviewed, the groups started to decode each other's pseudonyms and found out quite easily who was who.

Using a pseudonym is common in Russia where authorities still limit the freedom of speech by punishing unfavourable media. The state has a tight grip on nationwide TV-channels and on major newspapers, but the internet is still an uncensored place for Russians to interact and disseminate politically questionable information. There have been some attempts to bring the internet under state control<sup>22</sup>. However, the sheer volume of online traffic and servers placed outside Russian borders has made the monitoring impossible. (Bowles 2006, 23.) Still, the dysfunctional Russian legislative with overlapping and contradictory laws enable authorities to apply “selective use of legislation”<sup>23</sup> in order to punish unwanted citizen activists (Rotkirch & Salmenniemi 2008). Practically, it is impossible to obey Russian laws due to this reason. Thus, one can hardly ever see a blogger posting with his or hers own name, usually the blogs and accounts are used behind nicknames and fake profile pictures. The use of LiveJournal or opening a LiveJournal account do not oblige signing in with a real name or revealing location, which is probably one of the reasons behind the success story of the LiveJournal in Russia. One of the biggest crisis Russian blogosphere has faced, was the sale of LiveJournal company to a Russian oligarch in 2006. Many Russian LiveJournal users were worried that the Kremlin loyalist Alexander Mamut would use his ownership to censor the blog server.<sup>24</sup> However, until now (May, 2010) there have been no signs of increasing the control in Russian blogosphere. LiveJournal headquarters are still placed in San Francisco, out of the reach of Russian legislation.

### 5.3.2 Professionalism of the Bloggers

During the analysis process I found three features common for the bloggers’ actions: *professionalism* of the writers, *un-politicisation* and *carnivalisation* of the political discussion. First, I discuss the most representational feature, the professional character of the posts that continued throughout the whole blog. The professionalism of the blog was visible in many ways, in the language the bloggers used, the way they spoke to each other and in the way they advertised their street activities online.

The posts often started with a polite form “Дорогие Друзья” (Dear Friends) as if the blog would

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<sup>22</sup> The first attempts to monitor Internet were the System for Operational-Investigate Activities. The first SORM was introduced in 1995 and it allowed FSB (Federal Security Service) to force Internet service providers to install a hardware that allowed FSB to monitor e-mails and Internet usage. The SORM-2 introduced in 1999 requires Internet service providers to route the incoming and outgoing data through FSB computers. (Bowles 2006)

<sup>23</sup> Also the closure of the EUSP can be interpret as selective use of legislation (Rotkirch & Salmenniemi 2008)

<sup>24</sup><http://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/6593/>

be an official letter. The bloggers also used the polite form "вы" (plural You) instead of "ты" (singular you). Other manifest form, which represented the formality of the postings, was that the posts were written mainly in standard language. It was a relief for me as a non-native Russian speaker, because often the slang used in the internet is understandable more or less only for the group of active bloggers. The choice to use formal language probably derived from the fact that the blog was formed in order to raise attention in media. By writing in a standard language the bloggers represented themselves as professional writers and their medium as a serious one. According to Russian researcher Silaeva, the usage of certain language builds also the community feeling of a group, because adapting the language used by other bloggers in the group, the user becomes "one of them" instead of standing out (Silaeva 2008, 105).

This kind of professionalism of bloggers may be connected to the fact that the initiative group consisted of post-graduated students of the university and of some civil society activists, who probably had some previous experience in civic action. The creator of the blog had also an education-related explanation why just her friends were so active in LiveJournal.

*"Because they're social scientists, so they have many words in their heads, more than mathematicians or something. They're very talkative in general." (Female, 26)*

The target audience of the blog was media and journalists, because the initiative group hoped that public support could bring some assistance to their predicament. The professional nature was thus used to attract journalists, civil society activists and other supporters to believe in the cause of the group. The start-up post of the community LiveJournal indicates clearly whose attention the group should try to attract.

*Feb. 19th, 2008 at 4:15 AM*

*Распространять информацию в блогосфере и масс медиа, по "сарафанному радио" и т.д.  
(применительно к ЖЖ - ставить ссылки на посты с актуальной информацией по ЕУ)  
Posted by: marchenk*

*Disseminate information in the blogosphere and mass media, from mouth to mouth etc. (in practise in LiveJournal - add links to the posts with relevant information on EU [European University])*

The group pleaded to the users to obey the wish of the university administration not to politicize the closure although the media in Russia and abroad were already speculating the possible political

motivation behind the closure (among others New York Times 13.2.2008<sup>25</sup>). However, the bloggers were clearly aware that restriction of the freedom of opinion would turn against them, which is a further indication of the professional nature the blog. As a serious opinion medium they could not restrict the freedom of speech.

*Feb. 19th, 2008 at 4:15 AM*

*Никто, разумеется, не может оспорить право высказывания всех, кто пожелает дать публичный комментарий -- Однако было бы естественно ожидать мобилизации ПРЕЖДЕ ВСЕГО представителей академического сообщества (ученых, преподавателей, аспирантов) и студентов.*

*Posted by: marchenk*

*Nobody, of course, cannot dismiss the right of speech from them who wish to give public comment - - However, it would be natural to mobilize ABOVE ALL the representatives of the academic community (scientists, teachers, graduate students) and students.*

The professional nature of the blog is not an extraordinary feature for Russian blogosphere. After all, the idea that the Russian blogosphere is more “serious” than the Western one has been widely highlighted in the previous research (among others Gorny 2006). This may derive from the history of RuNet, from the time when a small-scale club of pioneers started to post their writings online. According to Bowles (2006, 26), the key to understand the atmosphere of the Russian internet is to study the elite from the early 90s<sup>26</sup>, which was the core for the development of RuNet. Also the basis of the Russian LiveJournal stem from this small group of academic pioneers, which is now seen as a reason for the “seriousness” of the Russian blogosphere. According to Gorny (2006) the pioneers were no teenagers blogging about fashion but grown-up adults with academic backgrounds.

The early 90s, “the time of the elite” is connected to the technical development of the web, during the time when Windows95 was introduced. The new Microsoft standard enabled encoding the text into Cyrillic alphabet, which created the idea that RuNet “was something more distinctive than a mere adapted outpost of American technology”. By using Russian language and Cyrillic alphabet the RuNet was its own entity, closed from the users without knowledge of Russian language.

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[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/13/opinion/13wed3.html?\\_r=1&scp=17&sq=%22european+university%22&st=nyt](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/13/opinion/13wed3.html?_r=1&scp=17&sq=%22european+university%22&st=nyt)

<sup>26</sup> The first RJL blogger, blogging in Russian was Roman Leybov who opened his LiveJournal page 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2001. Leybov was then a university student from the University of Tartu in Estonia, living outside Russian borders, but nonetheless member of the old Internet elite with higher education and advanced technical knowledge.

However, using the internet in the 90s required a sophisticated technical knowledge because only the Unicode introduced in 2002 made RuNet more usable for the ones with little knowledge about the internet. (Bowles 2006, 21.)

Other factor that kept RuNet in the hands of few was the limited physical accession to the internet. Academic institutions were the first places where people were able to go online, which was one of the factors why early RuNet was controlled and managed by intellectuals. Bowles describes the user elite of the 90s to be “such an online class – implying as it does, hierarchy, definition and finitude, a subculture with leaders and a pecking order rather than a limitless expansion power” (Bowles 2006, 26). The first users of RuNet were academics, writers and other intellectuals who were mainly educated people with enough prosperity to access the internet. Some (among others Bowles 2006) argue, that the intellectual core of the Russian internet was due to the Soviet heritage of intelligentsia, with its ambivalent status as a social network, set apart from mainstream, state-controlled academic and political discussion.

In 2000 most Russian internet users were highly educated professionals, but the new millennium has brought internet more and more available also for people outside the old elite. The creation of Unicode in 2002 made the internet easier to use, because of the new possibilities to translate the text and use the internet in non-English languages. The technical development and also the increased awareness of the internet made it more popular among the people at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century (Bowles 2006).

In the case of my study it is obvious that the members of the initiative group were all active bloggers already before they founded their community LiveJournal blog.

*“I have an account in the LiveJournal and [also] many people from the group. It was more familiar and we knew that many people from the European University have their accounts there and it could be easier for them to read and comment. But I really think that in Russia, it’s the most popular.” (Female, 26)*

The European University at St. Petersburg has also a modern computer class with fast internet connection, which made the students more experienced users of the internet than maybe some other students with less technical knowledge. In Russia, domestic internet connections are still rare and most of the Russians log on at their work places (Gorny 2006, 79) or in universities (Bowles 2006, 23). Due to this the level of user-activity declines during the weekends. This was also visible in the

case of my study: the amount of posts usually dropped during the weekends. Gorny (2006,79) claims that the lack of domestic internet connection may account the social class of Russian LiveJournal-users, the majority of which consists of adults, mostly office workers. The idea that Russian blogosphere is somehow “more sophisticated” than the Western one was also visible in the blog discussions of the community.

*Mar. 9th, 2008 at 10:52 PM*

*Это ведь не сложно - быть вежливыми и сдержанными в дискуссиях. Все-таки это сообщество носит имя ЕУ, а культура ведения дискуссии в стенах нашего университета, кажется, всегда была на высоком уровне.*

*Posted by: suibcenelt*

*It is not difficult - to be polite and restrained in the discussions. After all, this community is named EU, and the culture of debate in our university, it seems, has always been a high level.*

With comments like this the bloggers follow the practises of the pioneers in Russian blogosphere. Writing in a respectful way, which is (according to the blogger I interviewed) common for the students of the EUSP they indicate that the bloggers want to represent themselves as serious and professional writers, instead of some sentimental flimflam-bloggers. In that sense the bloggers of LiveJournal community are more like the perils of the “elite bloggers”, not newcomers. In some of the posts, there were also indications to the literature, which could be interpreted as a sign of sophistication, or at least as a sign that the blogger wants to present him/herself as a serious and culturally oriented person.

The bloggers were informed also in other issues than in how they should behave towards other. There were instructions how to write letters of support, to disseminate information and to set up petitions online. The bloggers who did not belong to the initiative group, but send letters of support to the city and state administrations (the letters were usually copy-pasted into the blog) and signed petitions, were always given acknowledgements for supporting the university. Users were also requested to send support letters to the leading politicians in Russia and to the city of Saint Petersburg. The bloggers were well aware of the legal convolutions of Russia. The bloggers plead the supporters to send letters to politicians and city leaders because they knew that the Russian legislation required the rulers to answer the letter send by citizens. There was also lot of discussion how the online petitions should be signed in order to fulfil all the legal requirements. Such details may turned out to be crucial when interacting with Russian authorities.

The professional nature of the blog may derive also from the journalistic experience of some of the bloggers. The founder of the blog I interviewed had, for example, worked for the local 5<sup>th</sup> channel in St. Petersburg, where her duties included publishing articles in the web. Also some postings of the blog indicate that the members were familiar with the practises of journalism. For example one message posted by ella\_p (13.03.2008) suggested the group to send information about the situation of EUSP to LiveJournal page called "paparazzi", which is actively followed by journalists. Also journalist found the blog and used it as a source for their articles. The members of the group were interviewed in local press, which strengthened the original idea of the blog: to bring the issue into publicity also from their point of view.

In addition to informing the followers of the blog, the bloggers knew how to attribute the publicity with their own actions. Through the blog, the initiative group called people to join their street activities, including “round-table” discussions, parody plays on the street and one photo exhibition. The first activity advertised online was the “symbolic burying” of Russian science, a flash mob event, which included laying a wreath made out of fire hose at the statue of Lomonosov, who is known as a great contributor of Russian education and science.

*Feb. 28th, 2008 at 9:24 PM*

*Завтра, 29 февраля, в 12 часов, студенты Европейского университета в Санкт-Петербурге проведут театрализованное действие у памятника М.В. Ломоносову на Менделеевской линии. В ходе мероприятия, которое займёт несколько минут, состоится возложение 50-метрового пожарного шланга к подножию памятника одному из основателей российской науки. Пожарный шланг в свёрнутом виде напоминает логотип Европейского Университета – стилизованную улитку. Возложив символ своих невзгод к подножию памятника, слушатели закрытого университета хотят выразить свою скорбь в связи с тем, что пожарный шланг связал руки научной и образовательной деятельности. --  
Posted by: norlap*

*Tomorrow, February 29th, at 12 o'clock, the students of the European University at St. Petersburg will hold a theatrical show at the monument of M.V. Lomonosov, on Mendeleev Street. During the event, which will last a few minutes, we will place 50-foot long fire hose to the monument to one of the founders of Russia's science. Fire hose in a form of wreath resembles the European University logo - a stylized snail. By assigning a symbol of their misfortunes to the monument, a private university students want to express my sorrow at the fact that the fire hose tied the hands of the scientific and educational activities.--*

The way the bloggers describe the event indicates their awareness about the common problems of Russian civic activity, i.e. possible interference of authorities. The word “demonstration” and the word “акция” (action) were actively avoided, and instead the actions were described as “events” or as “theatrical shows”. For a demonstration the group would need permission, but in flash mobs that



last only few minutes people just show up and leave straight after the event. To avoid any consequences the group announced that there are no organisers of the event. In the message the participants are also requested to take their passports with them, which indicates that the group is well aware that the police might show up in the event.

*Feb. 28th, 2008 at 9:24 PM*

*--Приглашаются все желающие! Будьте добры, захватите с собой паспорта, на всякий случай. Это не акция, а флеш-моб/ театрализованное представление, санкции у нас нет. Подходить лучше заранее, при встрече не кучкуйтесь, пожалуйста. А сразу после возложения шланга - все подходим и грустно обнимаемся... Организаторов у нас нет, детали можно уточнить по тел.--*

*Posted by: norlap*

*--Everyone is welcome! Be so kind as to grab a passport, just in case. This is not "action", but a flash mob / theatrical presentation, sanctions we do not have. Show up rather early but not in a big group, please. And immediately after laying the hose – we will all leave and embrace sadly... We do not have organizers, but details are available by phone.--*

After all, it was not a secret event but an action of support where the press was also invited.

Replacing the flowers by fire hose was an effective image to attract media attention: there were pictures and stories about the event in several local media outlets.

### **5.3.3 Acting “Within the Truth” – Avoiding the Politicisation**

*“And then there was this press conference in Dom Zhurnalista [=House of Journalists, ST] and also the rector said that now we need publicity, so it’s a problem and we make it public. And I... there was also a strange feeling that we have to make it public, we have to discuss it, but he said but let’s not mix it with politics. So we didn’t have to mention that it was political problem too, so it was very strange and we didn’t know what to speak, how should we speak about it, if not in political terms?” (Female, 26)*

The second feature characteristic for the blog posts was their political nature - or rather evasion of the politicisation. In the first phase of my analysis process, when I was categorising the tone of the posts, I marked the ones as “political”, which were directly speculating or claiming that there was a political motivation behind the closure. Also the posts, which encouraged to send mail the then President Vladimir Putin or his – at the time - most likely successor the First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev were categorised as political, even though the posts did not include any more direct speculation about the political motivation of the closure. The links, which led to articles with clear political agenda, were categorised as well as political.

In earlier research, political nature has been seen somewhat characteristic particularly for Russian blogosphere and Russian LiveJournal blogs (Gorny 2006, 78-79). Compared to US or British bloggers, whose postings concentrate mainly on their personal lives, fashion and entertainment, Russian bloggers are comparatively political and their focus is often on social issues (Lonkila 2008, 1141-42). In a research specialised on the Russian LiveJournal, Gorny (2006) even sees Russian LiveJournal as somehow superior to the Western ones. According to him, the core of Russian LiveJournal is intellectual and creative, because first blogs were founded by “mature professionals, predominantly male” while Western bloggers were conducted by teenage girls “prefer to party and waste time in idle chatter” (ibid.).

Although it is common for Russian blogs to be political, the members of the initiative group faced a dilemma in their own blog: how to be apolitical? In the first post of the blog, one of the creators emphasised the wish of the university administration that the closure should not be linked with the any possible political issues, even though these issues might have caused the closure. Or if some of the bloggers had the need to do so, he or she should highlight that opinion like that was personal.

*Feb. 19th, 2008 at 4:15 AM*

*Уважать просьбу Н.Б. Вахтина и других сотрудников университета: даже если Вы придерживаетесь версии о политической подоплеке конфликта как основной и желаете поделиться этой версией с миром - пожалуйста, укажите в своем постинге, что ректорат с такой интерпретацией не согласен.*

*Posted by: marchenk*

*“To respect the request of N. B. Vakhtin and the other workers of the university: Even if you agree with the version that the background of the conflict was primarily political and want to share this version with the world - please specify in your posting that the rector's office does not agree with this interpretation.”*

Although the blog was founded in order to have communication channel bypassing the official information, the request of the rector Vakhtin was obeyed rather well: only 14 percent of the posts had a political tone. However majority of these politically oriented posts were links to media webpages, in which the political motivations were discussed. Thus the bloggers followed the common practise of journalists, *the strategic ritual of objectivity*. Instead of writing their own opinion, the bloggers widely linked news articles to their postings, which made them look objective and only transmitters of the information (see more Tuchman 1972). The ritual of objectivity was used widely, while almost half (43 %) of all the posts contained only links to media, to webpage of the university, to other blogs or copy-pasted message of a letter of support.

Some of the most widely posted links in the blog were the articles of polit.ru, an independent political discussion and news platform in RuNet. By referring to the articles of polit.ru, the bloggers could express opinions close to their own without having to stand behind the statement. The wide use of the strategic ritual of objectivity indicated also the professionalism of the writers and thus some of the political features overlap with the professional character of the blog.

The general conception of the posts was that they were mainly neutral, but with closer observation there were latent political messages to be found. For example several posts encouraged bloggers to send letters of support and petitions to the First Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Medvedev, probably because he was the “chosen one” by Mr. Putin to stand in the next presidential elections. There were also some speculations in the national press that the problem of the university would be solved only after the presidential elections (Kommersant 20.02.2008)<sup>27</sup>, which may have sparked the will to direct the support letters to Mr. Medvedev. The bloggers also tried to avoid the politicisation of the issue by trying to direct the public opinion about the closure. After the first press conference held by the university administration the rumours of political motivation behind the closure started to circulate. The bloggers viewed that one of their duties was to direct the public discussion to right tracks, in order to match the public opinion better with the one of the university administration or the one of the students.

*Feb. 20th, 2008 at 10:21 AM*

*Ну что, дорогие друзья, "война интерпретаций" в масс медиа, похоже, уже началась. Тем кто был на пресс-конференции или слушал аудиозапись, наверное, акценты сделанные "Коммерсантом" должны впечатлить.--*

*Одна единственная фраза Н.Б. Вахтина и не к ночи упомянутое имя Дм. Медведева в письме зарубежным коллегам (на английском) казались достаточным основанием, чтобы вписать историю с ЕУСПб в сюжет о политическом ратоборстве. -- Надо быть готовым к тому, что общественное мнение будет формироваться в иной "системе координат", нежели свойственна сотрудникам и слушателям ЕУ, а так же поддерживающим их людям из академического сообщества. Что делать с этой "сюжетной инерцией" СМИ?--*

*Posted by: marchenk*

*Well, dear friends, "the war of interpretations" in the mass media, as it seems, has already begun. Those who attended the press conference, or listen to audio recordings, it seems, that the emphasis of "Kommersant" should be impressed. --*

*A single phrase N. B. Vakhtin and not to mention the name of D. Medvedev in a letter from colleagues abroad (in English) seemed sufficient reason enough to speculate that the closure of EUSP was politically motivated -- We must be alert to the possibility that public opinion will be*

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-y.aspx?DocsID=855001>

*formed in a 'coordinate system " [media, ST], rather than by the staff and students, or by people from the academic community who support us. What to do with this "silent plot" of media?--*

The evasion of politicisation indicates that in a situation where open political speculation is restricted, the post-Soviet generation of active citizens quickly accepted the old forms of official speech, in which the direct political claims are dissipated.

The situation comes close to practise of "antipolitics" that Václav Havel and György Konrád found typical for East Central European civil society during the Cold War, when society was politicized and ideologized throughout of all the spheres of human life. In situation like this, the driving force of "anti-politics" is the question how the politics could be returned back to its proper place i.e. among citizens. During the socialist governance in the Eastern Central Europe and under communism in Russia there was an imperative to "live within the truth", which meant obeying the official ideology and politics. However, according to Havel this truth was characterised with hypocrisy and ideologically imposed norms and slogans i.e. with falsity and lies. (in Kivikoski 2000, 48-51.) Although Havel and Konrád were forming their theories concerning whole society on a macro level, the case of EUSP had similar tendencies, but only in smaller scale, on a micro level.

In the case of the EUSP the university administration urged the students "to live within the truth", which in this case meant to avoid politicisation of the closure. The avoidance to debate the motivations of the closure openly, indicate that the atmosphere of fear is still affecting on the society. There were comments in the blog objecting the street activities because of the fear how the city authorities may response. The founder of the blog described the atmosphere in the interview quite frankly:

*"You know in Russia, they are usually against street activity and whatever. And people coming to the streets they are really afraid after all these orange revolutions and people were always scaring us with that orange revolution that some FSB [Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation] will take us all to prison because they are so afraid of the street activities or... And that was not very easy, you know because people were scared, when it comes to such expressions, the civil expressions on the street or in the meetings--." (Female, 26)*

The street activities were debated online but mainly in the comments, which were excluded outside the research data. However, some of the actual posts were dedicated to comment the comments left

in other posts. The discussion was not limited only concerning the issue of the EUSP, but the bloggers discussed more in general, what is the role of civic actors and intellectuals in the society.

*Mar. 11th, 2008 at 3:06 PM*

*Проблемы, которые затронул Артём Марченков в комментариях к одному из постов в нашем сообществе, вполне могли бы стать темами и для "Уличного университета", и для семинаров в дружественных помещениях:*

*Мне кажется, сейчас, помимо ситуативного акционизма (нужного или нет - решить можете только Вы), стоило бы сосредоточиться на другого рода работе: на стратегических интерпретациях этой истории, на "крупных вопросах"...*

*Какой должна быть дистанция между академической средой, политикой, гражданскими организациями? какие роли может играть интеллектual в государственной, партийной и публичной политике, не теряя своей профессиональной идентичности? –*

*Вы - оторванные от любимого дела аутичные интеллектualы, готовые пойти на любой компромисс, напуганные, носа не выказывать "на улицу", где "подмораживает"? --*

*Вы - гражданские миссионеры, отрицающие "политическую ангажированность", но - заинтересованные в развитии гражданских сетей, движений и проч.*

*Все эти вопросы - о Вас "в контексте" (про то, что Вы по амбициям прежде всего исследователи, интеллектualы и т.д. - ясно).*

*Кроме того, раз уж мы оказались на улице, то на улицах города неплохо изучать городскую антропологию или социологию.*

*Posted by: hnah*

*The problems that were discussed in the comments of Artem Marchenkov, which he left to one of the posts in our [LiveJournal] community, could as well concerning "the street university", and seminars from friendly premises:*

*I think now, in addition to occasional actions (whether is needed or not - only you can decide that), it would be wise to focus on other kinds of actions: on the strategic interpretations of the history, on the "big issues" ...*

*What should be the gap between the academic environment, the politics and civil society organizations? What kind of role can an intellectual have in the state, in a party or in a public policy, without losing her/his professional identity?--*

*You are separated from the work of autistic intellectuals, who are ready to go for any compromise... too frightened to show nose on "the street" where "it's freezing"? -- You are a civil missionary, who denies "political participation", but is interested in the development of civic networks, movements and so on.*

*All these questions - about you "in context" (that your ambitions are primarily researchers, intellectuals, etc. - it is clear).*

*In addition, once we were on the street, it was not a bad way to explore the anthropology or the sociology of the city.*

The reaction of the initiative group was similar to the typical action for civil society in the then socialist East Central Europe. Like Konrád (1984) argues the "anti-politics" refused to compete with the political power understood in a narrow way, which is way the "anti-politics sought to create new, independent forums for action" (in Kivikoski 2000, 52). The change should begin from within the citizens i.e. from the emerging civil society. Through free movements from below, the

citizens would eventually form structures that function outside the possibly interference of the state. According to Havel the actions could be started within the cultural sphere, while the alternative political culture, or “second culture”, already existed in forms of samizdat publications, private performances, seminars, concerts etc. (ibid, 53).

These kinds of features of alternative political culture were also part of the social actions of the LiveJournal community and the initiative group. Politics were not discussed directly and in the traditional public sphere that consisted of media but in forms of parody theatre performances (*raika*) and seminars. In the next chapter, I discuss the third features of how the bloggers were discussing the situation, which comes to close to the idea of ”second culture”, speaking about doing politics in untraditional ways.

#### **5.3.4 Carnivalisation of Political Speech**

For states with repressive governance it is typical to speak about the forbidden issues in the forms of culture. For example, in the Soviet Russia, where the system penetrated ideologically and politically throughout the whole society, the culture of political anecdotes and self-publications was vivid. Despite the hard state censorship, for example, the satirical publication *Krokodil* published stories mocking the Soviet system in a way, which was not possible for “serious” media outlets. However, most of the ironic stories about the Soviet rulers and system were told in anecdotes i.e. in jokes, which were rarely documented and which mainly circulated from mouth to mouth (among others Chamberlin 1957).

Today, Russian society can hardly be described as a totalitarian system as it was during the Soviet rule, but neither as a free state.<sup>28</sup> I am aware of the difficulties when applying theories from the Soviet era into the contemporary Russian society, but what has been an interesting feature in the case of my research is that the Soviet traditions constantly appeared in my research when I was analysing the data. What makes the case of the EUSP similar to the Soviet era civic action is the demand not to speak outside the official truth i.e. in this case: not to politicise the issue because the university administration said so. However, politicisation of the closure was not completely quieted down, but dressed into satirical notions.

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<sup>28</sup> In the report “Freedom in the world” by U.S.-based in 2010, Russia was categoriesd as a “not free”. [http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/FIW\\_2010\\_Map\\_CEE-FSU.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/FIW_2010_Map_CEE-FSU.pdf)

There were only few direct emotional bursts, like the one posted after the city administration refused to give permission for a demonstration planned for the support of the university.

*Mar. 7th, 2008 at 3:30PM*

*Запрещен митинг в поддержку ЕУ.*

*Площадь Сахарова, не слишком популярная среди митингующих, "вдруг" оказалась занята уже кем-то. Ничего не напоминает?*

*Занятно, что митинг вообще-то должен был быть в поддержку "качественного российского образования". Да кому оно нужно в этой стране, образование-то? этой стране нужно, чтобы умели работать руками и выкапывать нефть из-под земли, а остальное - думать там, анализировать - ни к чему.*

*Наше скоморошество - вроде бы аполитичное привлечение внимания "в творчески шутилом виде" - тоже кого-то испугало. Запретить! Уйдите с улиц!*

*Ничего нельзя, все всех боятся, а в первую очередь "власти" своих собственных граждан. -- Все это начинает разить гнилью еще сильнее, чем казалось сначала*

*Posted by: mesopotam*

*Banning the rally to support the EU.*

*Someone else "surprisingly" already occupied the Sakharov area, which is not too popular among the protesters. Sounds familiar?*

*Interestingly, that the rally in general was intended to support of "the high education in Russia." But who needs it in this country, it is just some education? In this country one needs to know only how to work with his hands or how dig oil from the ground, and the rest - they think how to do it, but to analyze – nobody.*

*Our buffoonery – planned to be non-political and to attract attention in a creative form of joking – got someone too scared. Denied! Depart from the streets!*

*Nothing is allowed, everyone is afraid of everyone, but first and foremost "the power" [is afraid] of its own citizens. -- All this begins to strike rotten even stronger than it seemed at first.*

Although the post above illustrates the frustration of the students when the city authorities banned the rally of support, it also indicates how the initiative group was planning to demonstrate the situation in the action: with the means of humour in a buffoonery. The bloggers used the carnivalisation of the politics in various ways: there were poems published in the blog, which had a clear political tone even though nothing was alleged directly. The initiative group even advertised a seminar with a sarcastic name "Yearly puristic and unacademic conference in Hebrew: Practises and discussion of fire in Slavic and in European context".

*Mar. 10th, 2008 at 4:16 AM*

*В последнее время культурная история пожаров и противопожарной деятельности стала особенно актуальной для ученых различных специальностей: антропологов, историков, искусствоведов, социологов, экономистов и др. Трудно переоценить значение этой темы и для исследований в области иудаики. Начиная с I в. н.э., когда, после множественных возгораний в иерусалимском Храме, римская администрация приостановила его деятельность, тема пожаров и борьбы с ними оказалась связанной с такими*

*фундаментальными концептами еврейской культурной традиции как галут (изгнание) и геула (избавление). В XVIII – XIX вв. многочисленные пожары в местечках черты еврейской оседлости, как и противопожарная активность российских властей, способствовали расширению славянско-еврейских контактов и во многом определили облик восточноевропейского и (пост)советского еврейства.*

*На конференции предполагается обсудить различные аспекты славянско-еврейских противопожарных практик в широком социально-политическом и историко-культурном контексте. Приветствуются также доклады, не связанные с темой конференции.*

*The contemporary cultural history concerning fires and fire activity has been particularly relevant for scientists from different disciplines: anthropologists, historians, art historians, sociologists, economists, etc. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this subject and of the research in Judaica [Centre of Jewish studies]. Since the beginning of the first century before Christ, when, after multiple fires in the Temple, the Roman administration suspended its activities, the theme of fire and fire control has been associated with the fundamental concepts of the Jewish cultural tradition of the Diaspora (exile) and the Geula (redemption). In the 18th and 19th centuries the numerous fires in the villages in the Jewish Settlement, as well as fire activity by the Russian authorities have fostered Slavic-Jewish contacts, and in many ways shaped the Eastern European and (post) Soviet Jewry.*

*The conference will discuss various aspects of Slavic-Jewish fire practices in the broader socio-political, historical and cultural context. We also welcome presentations, which are not related to the theme of the conference.*

Also satiric pictures and video clips in YouTube, concerning fire in some way, were posted in the LiveJournal webpage. Some even made the effort to design banners themselves, which they later posted into the blog. These banners were often ambiguous and hard for me, as non-Russian researcher, to interpret. Luckily some of the allusions required also knowledge of Western culture. For example, one of the banners illustrated of a manipulated picture of a fire fighter putting out the burning building of the EUSP with a text “Illustration of Bradbury? – No, Russian reality”. The slogan refers to the American science fiction author Ryan Bradbury. Students also performed a satirical play in a park nearby the university as a part of “Days of Closed Doors” which displayed the events in a satirical way.

The events around the closure were a few times portrayed in poems, which were sent to the LiveJournal blog. However, it seems, that writers, who were not otherwise active in the initiative group, wrote poems. It is possible that poets just took the opportunity to post their work online in the LiveJournal webpage. For example one poem that was performed in the street action by its author Dmitri Bykov, a professional writer and poet.



In the analysis of Russian peculiarities, I found out that the wish not to politicise the issue, revealed interesting features of the online community. Instead of ignoring the wish, the students quickly revived the old Soviet forms of civic action. The fact that the bloggers turned back in the Soviet traditions of “living in the truth”, opens new ideas of how Russian online activism functions in a situation where the freedom of speech is limited and where the actors come from young post-Soviet generation.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Conclusion

The goal of this research was to continue the discussion about the impact online actions have on Russian society, by examining the features of a blog community formed by an *ad hoc* movement. In the previous researches (Fossato et al. 2008, Lonkila 2008), the focus has been on civil society organisations and established movements, whereas I wanted to study how the online civic action functions outside the established civil society organisations. The results of the case study analysis indicate that there are similarities in the online action of ad hoc movements with the online action of the civil society organisations.

The group, whose LiveJournal blog is studied in this case study research, consisted of a typical group of web users in Russia. They were highly educated, young and urban citizens from a big city, St. Petersburg, who were experienced users of the internet and the LiveJournal blogging server. According to Rohozinski (1999) this elitist nature of web in Russia makes the internet action privilege for the elite instead of being democratisation tool for a wider audience. In the other hand, the young generation operating in the internet play a significant in social change (Fossato et al. 2008, 7) and possible conductors of social change. This is why the active youths were also in focus in this case study research.

The conversation that occurred in the LiveJournal blog had several features, which indicate the elitist nature of the Russian internet (RuNet). Poems, references to literature and demand from the bloggers to maintain the quality level of discussion high, illustrate how the bloggers wanted to make their blog a serious channel for information and discussion. The blog managed to attract lot of media attention due to the professional, or if you want the elitist, behaviour of the bloggers, which led to the dissemination of their agenda also in traditional media publications with a wider audience. Even though the bloggers in the LiveJournal may be part of the educated elite, their message reached also a wider audience outside the internet communities. One curiosity told by the founder of the blog illustrates, how fast information posted online circulated in RuNet, and further on, in media both online and offline.

*“Once when I went to the university, it was not near but, well by the Letnyi Sad [Summer Garden], I met a babushka, so an old lady and she asked me for help, so that I guided her to her home. And she started asking me what do you do, where do you study and I said European University and she said aaah, I know! And she was so confident, she new everything what was going on. -- just a simple grandma. -- I guess she was, she was reading internet. She said that I read Fontanka.ru so I know everything. Older people, they use, not blogs maybe but this internet media for sure. She was really aware.”  
(Female, 26)*

One manifest feature of the blog was its professional nature, which probably attracted the media representatives to follow it. Fossato et al. (2008) argue, that one of the features that have hampered the development of the Russian internet, is the low quality of the discussion. In the case of my study the findings were quite the opposite. The usage of standard language and polite ways to speak to each other made the blog a serious forum to discuss and to debate. Other features, which the earlier researches of the online activism related to civil society organisations in Russia have claimed to be harmful for the democratic possibilities of the web, are intolerance (Fossato et al. 2008) and introversion (Lonkila 2008) of the online communities. Lonkila (ibid.) revealed in his study on the anti-military movements in Russia, that the groups fighting the same cause had only little connection with each other. However, the online community in the case of my study acted differently. For their cause it was useful to advertise their actions and invite as many people as possible to join their community. Also other blogs discussing the closure of the European University of St. Petersburg (EUSP) were advertised in the LiveJournal community page.

This feature reveals the importance to extend the research of Russian online activism also to the civil society outside the established organisations. The ad hoc movements have different means in influencing on the society than the organisations, whose goal is usually to change the social structures through legislation and whose focus is on more institutionalised problems in society. The students of the EUSP just wanted to get their university re-opened as quickly as possible, which is why the publicity and cooperation with online actors with similar cause was essential.

According to Rohozinski (1999) RuNet is based on the same society of networks that played a significant role in the Soviet system. Despite its professional features, the blog can still be defined as an informal network, while the members acted under pseudonyms and were cautious to make forthright political statements about the closure. The Russian internet may seem as a continuum for a *blat* system, an informal network of exchange, which helped people to exchange goods and favours during the Soviet era, when shortage of everyday goods was rather common problem. In

contemporary Russia, there is a lack of freedom of speech, which drives people to exchange information via informal channels, like blogs. The popularity of messages that included only a link to another blog or to a media webpage comprised a big part of the content of the blog. However, a majority of the links posted in the blog led to alternative news sites, e.g. polit.ru, zaks.ru and chtodelat.org, which are known to be independent media. The distribution of selected information supports the idea, that to get independent and critical information in Russia, one has to find information somewhere else than in the traditional mass media<sup>29</sup>.

However, the blat system was not the only legacy from the Soviet-style civic action that the case study revealed. For me it was surprising, how well the bloggers obeyed the wish of the university administration not to speculate the possible political motivations behind the closure, although it curtailed their freedom of speech. Even though the bloggers consisted mainly of the generation that grew up in post-Soviet Russia, they fast adapted the Soviet tradition to "live within the truth" (Kivikoski 1999). While ceasing to discuss the possible political motivation behind the closure, the students speculated the forbidden topic in innovative ways, e.g. by carnivalising politics in satirical banners and parody conferences; speculating politics mainly by posting writings by journalists; and encouraging the supporters to send citizen letters. These actions were also common for the civic action in the Soviet Union (see more Fitzpatrick 1996). The fact that students wanted to obey the wish of the university administration might have occurred from the fear of authorities and their possible reactions if the closure would be politicised. Compromising actions under pressure supports what Fossito et al. (2008, 51) found in their research: "it seems that leaders of internet sites can often be co-opted, compromised or frightened". The atmosphere of fear of the authorities still exists in Russia, if even the informal group acting online under pseudonyms are unwilling to discuss social issues openly. Features like this indicate that democratization through internet action still has to develop in order to start the next crucial social change in Russia.

However, there were also features in the blog, which could strengthen the civil society in Russia. One striking feature of the online community was its quickness in reaction. Every time there was a new twist concerning the closure or an interview about the closure in the media, the bloggers

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<sup>29</sup> Without underestimating the meaning of the thousands regional newspaper published in Russia, the most significant parts of the media, the national television channels, are today under the political control of the state. The main TV channel covers approximately 98 % of Russian territory or 140 million viewers with 51 % shares controlled by state. The second big television channel is channel Rossija that is totally owned by the state. ([http://www.ejc.net/media\\_landscape/article/russia/](http://www.ejc.net/media_landscape/article/russia/))

reacted. The group posted new information more or less in real time in the blog. The group also managed to launch and distribute several petitions collecting thousands of signatures in couple of weeks. The online community also advertised their street actions online and managed successfully attract press and audience in to the scenes. The professional feature of the blog and street actions with media-appealing events thereby spread the influence of the blog to concern the society also outside the online community. In fact, it is quite typical for the civil society organisations in Russia to mobilize people online to attend actions also offline. In the case of the EUSP, the online group managed to mobilize also journalist in to their offline actions. According to Lonkila (2008, 1126) "in Russia, the significance of the internet as an alternative medium for information diffusion, communication and mobilisation has grown markedly with the strengthening of state control over the traditional media, particularly television, in the early twenty-first century".

All in all, the online action of the spontaneous ad hoc movement studied in this research had several similar features with the online action of the Russian civil society organisations. However, there were also some additional features in ad hoc online action compared to the online civic action around the established organisations. The goal of my study was to extend the idea of the civil society actors in the Russian internet and to study how the informal movements, or networks, function online. With the case study research I could study the phenomenon around one online group and attach the special features found in the analysis to the conversation about Russian blogosphere, and whether the web can be strengthen civil society in Russia.

## **6.2 Reliability of the Research**

The goal of a single-case study research is to make general interpretations based on the analysis conducted on one case. Thus one way to evaluate the success of the study is to examine its *generalizability* (Peuhkuri 2007, 130). In principle, generalizability means, that in a single-case study, the results would be the same if the circumstances remained unchanged but different empirical part was conducted to the research. In practise, the same research is impossible to be redone, because each case is unique and gives different empirical results. However, what is important for the qualitative analysis is not to get statistically significant results, but to study those features of the case, which may be generalized to apply also in a different research composition. The question at the beginning of the research was: *what can we learn from the case?* (Stake 1995).

By comparing the results of the analysis with the theories I made general interpretations based on the empirism, which were supported by the theory. The case of my study consisted of a phenomenon around a unique situation. However, the phenomenon in general is not unique: Russian people will face another problems in their society, which they will try to solve by mobilizing people online. I see that the case of my research was a representative sample of the online action of Russian ad hoc movements, and thus the analysis conducted in this research may be generalized.

Other common practise to measure the success of the case study research, is to estimate the *reliability* (or relicability) of the research, i.e. the research should be possible to be repeated by other researcher (Gerring 1998). According to Gerring (ibid, 193) two conditions must be obtained in order to achieve the reliability in the research. First, the research process must be carefully laid out that also someone else with requisite research skills could follow it. Second, the case chosen for the study should be available for future research. In this research report I have explained in details how, when and with which tools the data were collected, how the analysis was conducted and how the empirical part and theory were studied simultaneously. The analysed data were filed and they are also available in the internet, although the bloggers may have modified or deleted their posts afterwards.

There are still obvious shortcomings in my research. The scope of perspectives was relatively wide to be studied carefully in one master's thesis. As a student of Russian society and politics there were too many interesting points and perspectives I wanted to study. However, the shortcomings the scale of theories introduced may have caused in the analysis, at least I personally learned to see the phenomenon around Russian blogosphere from various perspectives.

Like Gerry remarks, (ibid) "to be sure, some research is messy", which describes my research process quite well. This research was made partly in Finland, partly in Russia and mostly in Switzerland. The dispersion of the sources and perspectives is due to the disassembled research process, which was consequence of the long period dedicated to studying the theories. Three different theoretical entities in one research is challenging, but by explaining each process carefully I tried to make the report easy to follow and to be repeated when needed. In addition to the broad scale of theories in this research, there were more challenges that may have affected on the research results. When a non-Russian researcher interprets

Russian documents, it is obvious that some of the nuances of the language are bypassed in the research. On the other hand, a foreign researcher may notice some features, for which Russian researchers are blind. Also the status of an outsider helps the researchers to stay in a more objective position than a person who would be more involved to the case.

Nonetheless, the main way to measure the success of the research is to ask: Did I study what I was supposed to? In my research the goal was to find features of online social action based on the case study of one ad hoc movement. The phenomenon was studied with three entities that combined empirical part and theory. All these three entities examined the case of study from a different angle and the goal of the analysis was to continue the discussion presented in the theory chapters before the empirical part of each entity. The analysis confirmed some of the theories formed in earlier researches, but the analysis also brought up some new features of the online social action. Thus I feel that I managed to join the discussion about the theories on Russian online civic action and also to continue it by introducing the new findings based on my analysis.

### **6.3 Further Openings**

Although this research has revealed some new features in the social organisation of the Russians, many questions remained unanswered. In order to make deeper analysis and interpretations the research of Russian blogosphere should concentrate on one perspective at a time instead of examining the case from several theoretical viewpoints. But nonetheless, I definitely agree with Lonkila (2008) and Gorny (2006) that Russian blogosphere and LiveJournal communities have not been studied enough. It is obvious that under the surface of Russian society, there is a whole different world of online actors and civic involvement functioning, whose significance to the social change cannot be neglected. The interest of media studies should focus in the future on the democratic potential of blogosphere, even though the web action already attracts great academic attention. The social media have already proved their power in some countries with limited freedom of speech, so the next big social movement directed and mobilised in the internet may as well happen in Russia.

I feel that the case study research is a viable way to study Russian blogosphere, because each blog is different and thus large N-studies would be hard to realize. Although, I think that some generalizations are possible to make based on a single-case study, a comparing multi-case study

research could reveal more accurate and general features of the online action. I think that more research is needed concerning especially the ad hoc movements and spontaneous organisation in the web. After all, the Russians are not keen to join any organisations (Howard 2003), which is why studying the unorganised civil society is important in order to understand the effect the internet has on social change in Russia. The “uniqueness” of Russia could be challenged with a multinational cross-case study, where some of the cases would be collected from countries with somehow similar political situation, e.g. Iran or China. By comparing the online action in Iran and Russia, it would be possible to study what similarities Russian blogosphere has with the one in Iran. This would be a refreshing exception in a research field, which usually concentrates on finding the peculiarities of Russia.

Knowing Russian blogosphere and its special features is essentially important also for the journalists, who have specialised in Russian society and politics. Even though Westerners use mainly Facebook and Twitter, it does not mean that Russians are active in these same social media. Like argued above, Russians have their own favourites for online interaction. Journalists should know that Russians are not in Facebook, but they use V Kontakte and Odnoklassniki (“Classmates”) and that when Russian activists start blogging, they most likely join the LiveJournal blog community instead of starting a Twitter or Blogspot account. Despite the popularity of the new media research in almost every scientific field, I feel that the issue has to be studied more and from different perspectives.

Like Castells (2000) argues, the internet has started a revolution equivalent to the social changes after industrialisation. Even though this research concentrated on the bloggers from dynamic and educated young generation, blogosphere can also mobilise disengaged people to become more politically active (see more Simmons 2008). In order to understand the change that is already happening, both the social scientists and the journalists should look openly what happens in the society beyond the institutionalised organisations, in the unorganised social sphere. I hope this research enlightened this sphere at least in a degree to motivate someone to dig the phenomenon even deeper.



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## Appendix 1. Research Data: Blog Posts

ID	Title
190208001	ЕУ: всем ау!
190208002	-
190208003	-
190208004	-
190208005	This means that activities of EUSP are still suspended
190208006	Нужна официальная информация!
190208007	-
190208008	Сегодня после пресс-конференции
190208009	формат
190208010	Petition to reopen EUSP is online
190208011	Справка
190208012	ЕУСПб: учебный курс перемещается в Интернет
190208013	написавшим у себя
190208014	Рейдеры ходят пожарниками: параллельная московская история с Союзом Журналистов
190208015	Группа вконтакте
190208016	Подписные листы
190208017	(Banner)
190208018	Открытое письмо слушателей ЕУ
190208019	(Banner)
190208020	viribus paucis...
190208021	-
190208022	Официальные письма
200208001	Коллеги и друзья!
200208002	нам не дано предугадать, чем наше слово...
200208003	-
200208004	Сохраним Европейский
200208005	Проект письма от Института славяноведения РАН
200208006	Сохраним Европейский
200208007	ОБНОВЛЕНИЕ ИНФОРМАЦИИ О ПИСЬМАХ В ПОДДЕРЖКУ ЕУ
200208008	SOME ADDRESSES IN ENGLISH
200208009	Аудиоверсия выступления Вахтина на Эхе
200208010	-
200208011	ищем видео
200208012	Обращение от зарубежных коллег
200208013	Инициативная группа аспирантов Европейского университета в Санкт-Петербурге
200208014	Сбор подписей под обращением от студентов, аспирантов и преподавателей вузов СПб
210108001	Готовы бланки подписных листов в поддержку ЕУ (от Инициативной группы аспирантов ЕУ)
210208002	Обращение в поддержку ЕУСПб на рутении
210208003	Open letter from EUSP students, English version
210208004	еще одно письмо в поддержку ЕУ СПб

210208005	Заявление от Правозащитного Совета Санкт-Петербурга
210208006	English online petition
210208007	список поддержки на английском
210208008	интервью
210208009	УЧЕТ ОТДЕЛЬНЫХ ОБРАЩЕНИЙ
210208010	Письмо группы слушателей факультета социологии МВШСЭН
210208011	-
210208012	Письмо сотрудников Пушкинского Дома
210208013	Letter of Support for European University at St Petersburg
210208014	предложение
220208001	Образец письма от коллектива авторов
220208002	Письмо сотрудников БИН РАН в поддержку ЕУ
220208003	Ещё письма поддержки
220208004	Обращение Межфакультетского центра "Петербургская иудаика"
220208005	Письма друзей
220208006	-
220208007	-
220208008	Слушателям ЕУСПб!!!
220208009	Обращение независимых центров социальных исследований
220208010	положительное
220208011	Еще хорошее
220208012	Обращение от ректора
220208013	Письма в поддержку ЕУ от сотрудников Пушкинского Дома
220208014	Сбор подписей в поддержку ЕУ в субботу, 23-го февраля!
220308015	-
220308016	Петиция Северо-Американских коллег
220308017	Суть событий о ЕУ
220308018	Заявление МО РАПН
230208001	Сбор подписей в выходные
230208002	Открытое письмо преподавателей факультета политических наук и социологии ЕУСПб
230208003	English blog
230208004	Обновленная информация на счёт сбора подписей!!!
230208005	5-ый телеканал о ЕУ
240208001	Сбор подписей продолжается!
240208002	Как отправить письмо поддержки или собранные подписные листы
240208003	Спасибо!
240208004	Обращение с Рутении: подписи теперь собираются здесь!
250208001	Спасибо!
250208002	Новая мобилизация
250208003	Обращение МАГ
250208004	нужен человек из ИЛИ
250208005	вропейского университета
250208006	-
260208001	Давайте приглашать в группу ●●Поддержим Европейский университет!
260208002	вопрос
260208003	помощь зала
260208004	ещё о наших возможностях

260208005	приостановка лицензии
260208006	Лицензия приостановлена
260208007	-
260208008	Вытаскиваю из комментариев - ЭТО ВАЖНО!
260208009	Приостановка лицензии — комментарий Викторова
260208010	-
260208011	-
260208012	Пресса
260208013	Коллективное письмо ИГИТИ ГУ-ВШЭ в поддержку ЕУ
270208001	по поводу ситуации с Европейским университетом в Санкт-Петербурге. От Татьяны Косиновой ("Мемориал")
270208002	Распространение информации об ЕУ СПб
270208003	отчет: письмо от кафедры истории рус. лит. СПбГУ
270208004	Еще 40 человек высказались в поддержку университета
270208005	СПС высказался в защиту Европейского
270208006	это нужно использовать по максимуму
280208001	Feb. 28th, 2008
280208002	Заметка в "Русском репортере"
280208003	+1 академик
280208004	ещё о прессе
280208005	дежавю
280208006	Раёк на наболевшую тему
280208007	Университет выходит на улицу!
280208008	Университет выходит на улицу!
290208001	at St Petersburg
290208002	Ситуация вокруг Европейского Университета остаётся критической
290208003	Пожарная тревога для избранных
290208004	Лекции профессоров Европейского университета продолжаются. Пока в Москве
290208005	-
290208006	Прошла первая уличная акция в защиту Европейского университета
290208007	Как это было
290208008	-
290208009	Письмо кафедры истории русской литературы СПбГУ
290208010	Статья Н. Б. Вахтина в "Ведомостях"
010308001	Важное
010308002	-
010308003	Ещё несколько картинок со вчерашнего мероприятия
010308004	Список адресов
010308005	Открытое письмо Общегородского социолингвистического семинара
010308006	-
010308007	Обращение Центра научных работников и преподавателей иудаики в ВУЗах «Сэфер»
010308008	-
010308009	Фотографии
020308001	Письмо Арутюнова
020308002	Сбор подписей продолжается
020308003	-
030308001	-
030308002	-

030308003	Нормальная наука в ненормальной стране?
040308001	«Дни закрытых дверей» Европейского университета в Санкт-Петербурге
040308002	Немного иронии в грустный момент
040308003	Письмо поддержки от иностранных студентов
040308004	Подано уведомление о проведении митинга
040308005	-
040308006	Плакат
050308001	потрясная винтовая лестница
050308002	Индивидуальные обращения. Часть 1.
050308003	Индивидуальные обращения. Часть 2.
050308004	saveeu.blogspot.com
050308005	Письмо 28 академиков -- в Коммерсанте
050308006	Программа «Дней закрытых дверей» Европейского Университета в Санкт-Петербурге
050308007	-
050308008	Анонс
050308009	цит. по регнум.ру:
060308001	Пожарный генерал Российской газете о ЕУ
060308002	В Ведомостях – Дым учения
060308003	Заявки на Уличный университет 9 марта!
060308004	Аналогии
060308005	-
060308006	Закрытие Европейского Университета, или
060308007	Письмо В.И. Матвиенко от Пекки Хакамиеса (Турку, Финляндия)
070308001	Бегу за ЕУ
070308002	сегодня раек !
070308003	В. Гельман на "Полит.ру"
070308004	Кто боится "мирных студентов"?
070308005	Нецелесообразно
070308006	Вокруг митингов – частное мнение
080308001	открытое письмо правления и научного совета РАПН в поддержку ЕУСПб
080308002	Проявим солидарность?
080308003	Раёк - видео
080308004	-
090308001	Бегу за ЕУ ОТМЕНЯЕТСЯ
090308002	постановка райка с новой концовкой
090308003	Просьба
100308001	пуримская конференция
100308002	-
100308003	The New Times, Владимир Ядов, 07 Марта 2008 17:40
100308004	Мои уличные университеты
110308001	Предложение помощи в защите диссеров
110308002	Уличные университеты: предложения
110308003	Нашли!
120308001	Гнесинка
120308002	пресса сегодня
130308001	пресса о ЕУ
130308002	В отсутствие временной лицензии...



130308003	журналисты в сообществе?
130308004	пиар
130308005	С днём рождения,
130308006	Круглый стол
130308007	Точка на арендном" решении проблемы"
130308008	О пресс-релизах (полупереваренное)
140308001	Некоторые подробности деятельности пожарных
140308002	Раз пошла такая пьянка... почему бы администрации города не закрыть метрополитен?
140308003	Письмо от РГГУ (Москва)
150308001	Разъяснили
150308002	А где юристы???
150308003	Где юристы?? - 2
150308004	-
150308005	В.Топоров о закрытии ЕУ
160308001	стих,
160308002	Круглый стол
160308003	Сразу два
160308004	пресса о ЕУ
170308001	С пометкой "МОЛНИЯ"! :)
170308002	официальное -- в Хронике событий на сайте ЕУ
170308003	Пожарные картинки
170308004	сегодня по Эху Петербурга
170308005	-
170308006	Уважаемые участники сообщества!
180308001	пресса о ЕУ
180308002	не рано ли - до суда-то...
180308003	Письмо издателей, отправлено Медведеву, Фурсенко и Матвиенко
190308001	пресса о ЕУ
190308002	музыка пожара
190308003	Какой корабль?
190308004	СУД в пятницу
190308005	Уведомляем и поздравляем!
190308006	-
200308001	Образование не желательно (заметка о закрытии ЕУ)
200308002	Турнир по мини-футболу 19 марта
200308003	Уличный университет-3
210308001	УРА! Мы можем вернуться в свое здание!
210308002	СПАСИБО!
210308003	-

## Appendix 2. Classification table

1. ID (date and number)
2. Title
3. Structure of the post
  - 1. text
  - 2. forwarded link / copy-pasted information
  - 3. banner
4. Blogger
  - 1. registered user
  - 2. moderator
5. Amount of links
6. Genre
  - 1. information
  - 2. advice / instructions
  - 3. question
  - 4. comment / taking of an attitude
  - 5. statement
  - 6. irrelevant message
7. Tone
  - 1. neutral / informing
  - 2. negative
  - 3. positive / encouraging
  - 4. worried
  - 5. sarcastic
  - 6. political
8. Theme
  - 1. clarification of the events
  - 2. new events
  - 3. petitions / letters of support
  - 4. demonstration / other offline actions
  - 5. something else
9. Theme (lateral)
10. Identity of the blogger
  - 1. student / member of the group
  - 2. outsider
  - 3. media
  - 4. not clear
11. Links
  - 1. media
  - 2. university webpage
  - 3. other blogs
  - 4. other social media (YouTube, Vkontakte)
  - 5. other link
12. Communal features
  - 1. request to join action
  - 2. invitation to join the group
  - 3. request to disseminate information
13. Summary of the content