

NETWORK GOVERNANCE IN RUSSIA: COSTS AND BENEFITS

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This special section of *Demokratizatsiya* was inspired by the research project “Network Governance: A Tool for Understanding Russian Policy-Making?” funded by the Research Council of Norway (NORRUSS program, 2013-2016). The project sought to examine how Russian state and non-state actors collaborate to make decisions or, at least, implement current policies with regard to three social issues - migration, drugs/HIV and child protection. Empirically, the project was designed as multi-sited and was carried out at the federal, regional and local levels (particularly, in the cities of St. Petersburg and Samara). The articles presented here cover some, but not all, of the research cases and include some contributors who were not project participants.

Our interest in the collaboration of state and non-state actors in Russia was stimulated by the controversial post-Soviet transformations in the sphere – from the deterioration of the state after the collapse of the USSR to the current strong state dominance over civil society and business combined with consultative mechanisms. The effects of the changes in Russia’s legislation regulating non-state actors showed the heterogeneity of the Russian third sector. Since November 2012, the context of this collaboration has been also dramatically changed due to the adoption of the notorious law on “foreign agents,” which made the work of many Russian

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NGOs more difficult or even absolutely impossible. In a time when some NGOs were deprived of almost all resources, others were encouraged by the government to participate in decision-making and received additional opportunities for development. The Russian state manifests a great desire for civil society's participation in solving social issues, but in reality critical actors from the third sector face barriers to participation in an open dialog with officials. In this context, Russia confronts new policy-making challenges with an institutional heritage that seemingly may be conducive to the development of a Russian variety of network governance.

Identifying a unified theoretical framework, which can explain the pattern of interaction between state and civil society in Russia today, is a challenging task. Theories of civil society, democratization frameworks, and concepts of the third sector are able to reveal only some aspects of such interaction, which may differ across policy fields. In the articles published here, we are testing a network governance approach as one of the possible analytical frames for analyzing the interaction between state and non-state actors. The analytical tools offered by the network governance perspective have been developed for Western settings.¹ Applying them to the analysis of Russian policy-making requires careful attention to the Russian context. The trajectories followed by Russia's state bodies, businesses, professional associations and voluntary groups are quite different from those in the West, and the circumstances under which policy networks develop differ. While classic definitions of network governance presume collaboration among state and non-state actors on more or less equal terms, in the Russian context policy-making takes place against the background of deep-seated legacies, one of them being the mix of formal and inefficient hierarchy with real-life problem-solving networks within state socialist modes of policy-making. The project explored to what extent non-state actors on various levels are included and endowed with power within these networks. The main research question was related to the functions and roles that are delegated to non-state actors in a period of increasing state dominance.

The pages that follow include three empirically based articles. The research sought to go beyond explicit transformations of the regime towards an authoritarian model of governance because the actual consequences of legal and political changes may be ambiguous, unpredictable, and not always negative for the non-state actors. By communicating with

¹ Jacob Torfing, 2005. "Governance network theory: Towards a second generation." *European Political Science*, 4: 305-315; Erik-Hans Klijn, 2008. "Governance and Governance Networks in Europe: An Assessment of Ten Years of Research on the Theme." *Public management review*, 10 (4): 505-25; B. Guy Peters, 2006. "Concepts and theories of horizontal policy management." In *Handbook of public policy*, edited by B. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre. London: Sage Publications: 115-138.

NGOs and other non-state actors and observing state-society interactions at various sites of interaction, the researchers tried to identify implicit, hidden, and unobvious ways available for NGOs to cooperate with the much more influential state actors. Trying to avoid simplification of the problem and findings, the contributors took into account such factors as the Soviet heritage of non-state activism, and the specific functionality of informal networks in Russian society.

Meri Kulmala, in her article “Post-Soviet ‘Political’? ‘Social’ and ‘Political’ in the Work of Russian Socially Oriented CSOs,” deals with unusual organizations, which typically do not fit into the overall picture of the Russian third sector, and are overlooked by most researchers. These are voluntary organizations, which have a long history covering both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The third sector in Russia is usually understood as a collection of socially oriented NGOs, which do not engage in “political” activities. Seeking to understand the role of these organizations in contemporary Russian society, Kulmala is particularly interested in whether such organizations, alongside their more obvious social role, do in fact play any political role, and in the possible interconnections of the “political” and “social” in their work. The research shows the dramatic importance of the context – Soviet and post-Soviet – for understanding the very origins of Russian NGOs’ activities and for the interpretation of such notions as “political,” “illegal,” “independent,” and “civic,” which underline the Western concepts. Analyzing empirical data, Kulmala argues that one theoretical approach is not enough to explain the functions and societal roles of the Russian voluntary organizations, or for the classification of NGOs operating in Russia.

In their article “‘You Are Responsible for Your People’: The Role of Diaspora Leaders in the Governance of Immigrant Integration in Russia,” Mikkel Berg-Nordlie and Olga Tkach analyze how Russian network governance practices are organized in the sphere of immigrant integration. They specifically look at the role of a certain form of ethnic NGO, the so-called “diaspora organizations,” in governance networks that are represented by the regional Public Consultative Councils (PCCs) under the Federal Migration Service (FMS). Although diasporas do not really operate as interest-representing organizations, but rather as culture-and-community promoting organizations, the state charges them with a special responsibility for keeping law and order among their migrant co-ethnics, assisting, informing and monitoring them. Based on empirical data, the authors argue that the participation of diaspora leaders in PCCs under FMS has mutual benefits for both parties. The state involves them into the formal network in order to have available intermediaries between the official bodies, such as the migration service, police and prosecutors, and the immigrant population, especially in emergency cases. In turn, diaspora leaders benefit

from such cooperation by moving closer to the state bodies and their officers, thereby enriching their symbolic, social and – indirectly – economic capital. Berg-Nordlie and Tkach conclude that the Public Consultative Councils operate by the principle of metagovernance. Rather than being framed as interest representation, PCC participation is framed as assistance to the state. The authorities organize, and mostly participate in and guide discussions. There is no “culture of horizontal decision-making,” but quite the opposite. The immigration sector comes across as being one of the more heavily controlled policy fields, and a case where the potential to receive effective input from user groups is particularly limited.

Elena Bogdanova and Eleanor Bindman, in their article “NGOs, Policy Entrepreneurship and Child Protection in Russia: Pitfalls and Prospects for Civil Society,” discuss activities of NGOs, operating in the sphere of child protection. This is a special area in Russia, in which NGOs historically play an essential role. Giving evidence of contradictory and partly repressive state policies towards NGOs in general, the researchers still find ways in which the NGOs may provide policy entrepreneurship. This article explores how NGOs involved in the protection of children interact with state actors in their policy networks and the extent to which such networks may offer these NGOs some scope to act as “policy entrepreneurs” with some degree of influence over the direction of policy development and practice in their area of expertise. The article reveals the outstanding role of formal and informal networks, which are both engaged by NGOs in their attempts to influence policy. Even if networks do not provide direct access to the mechanisms of political decision-making, they open windows of opportunity for small steps and indirect impacts by NGOs. Opportunities of influence for NGOs are restricted by many obstacles, but still, active networking, constructing the “right” reputation, and correct positioning of NGOs in the networks allow for promoting independent projects to relatively high levels of state policy in the sphere of child protection.

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