

**Regional Perspective on Modern 'Kremlin' Power:
The View from 'Novgorod Republic'**

By

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ABSTRACT

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The problem of regional differences within large state is great interest to social sciences and humanities. An academic study demonstrates that scholars use varies approaches to understand the bases of political and cultural diversities. The report discusses the influence of cultural and social factors in formation of regional political differences by the example of the Novgorod region of the Russian Federation. The analysis of semantic structures the regional image of central power is necessary in connection with the socio-cultural urgency of political designing and methodological problems in a theoretical field of democratic transformation researches.

The use of such methods as sociological observation of political pattern of the power is one of the most important ways to prognosticate the development of democratic institute in the region and center. The region's experience of Grate Novgorod shows that, local governments can have regional preferences from an historical image of Novgorod as the 'Land' of Russian republican traditions 'since Middle Ages'. Although thousands of articles have been written about origin of Russian regional political specific, the study of local aspects of political communications is one of the most important ways to scientific Russian studies.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Завершинский К. (2007). Региональные перспективы современной 'кремлевской' власти: взгляд из 'Новгородской Республики'

Проблема региональных различий в рамках крупных государственных образований представляет большой интерес для социальных и гуманитарных наук. Научные исследования свидетельствуют, что ученых используют различные подходы в понимании оснований политических и культурных различий на региональном уровне. Презентация нацелена на обсуждение особенностей влияния культурных и социальных факторов в формировании региональных политических различий на примере Новгородской области Российской Федерации. Анализ смысловых структур регионального имиджа центральной власти представляется весьма важным в связи с социокультурной значимостью политического прогнозирования и методологическими проблемами в области теоретических исследований процесса демократических трансформаций постсоветских обществ.

Использование таких социологических методов как экспертное и фокус интервью для конструирования теоретических моделей политической власти является один из важных компонентов прогнозирования динамики становления демократических институтов в регионах и центре. Социальный опыт развития Великого Новгорода показывает, что, местные органы власти стремятся использовать региональные особенности, в частности имидж средневекового Новгорода как 'исторической родины' российских республиканских традиций. Несмотря на то, что существует множество научных работ, посвященных природе политической специфики России, изучение региональных особенностей политических коммуникаций выступает важным способом исследования современного российского социума.

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Modern «Kremlin» political elite intend to perform «operated power transmission» and maintain “monocentric” political regime of the «imposed consensus», which was formed during the “reign” of president Putin. At the same time the political strategy doesn't guarantee that this political scenario - which includes the shift from moderate authoritarianism («sovereign democracy») to «controlled democracy», assuming the public competition within political elite circles by the power changing - will be entirely realized. Realization of such scenario will mainly depend on foreign policy factors as well as on the activity of regional political elite circles. That's why a «look» at the central and local power from some region permits to consider and prognosticate possible and inevitable deflections from the scenario of «operated power transmission».

Society's perception of the national institutions and political power in general is a significant index, used for prognosticating political evolution of the society in any political regime. Such indices are of special significance when investigating and forecasting social dynamics of the post-soviet societies. These aspects are great interest under conditions of political modernization when non-advanced institutions of civil society seem to have little importance in the political process to the considerable part of the population. What's more important is attitude towards institutional design and image of the power in “present-day” Russia, when we can

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observe within political elite a striving for «the Renaissance» of authoritarian institutions and ideological stereotypes, which has a great similarity to the last stage of national development. At the same time, despite the presence of common features of society's perception of the power in Russia, one can observe regional specificity.

The given presentation relies on the results, taken with the framework of interregional scientific project «Russia's future: a look from the center and regions (political sphere of the society)», carried out in 2006». Information was taken due to the use of expert interview with representatives from the public elite and focus of interviews with representatives of different age groups in Veliky Novgorod. As a result of the research were found specific characters of respondents' perception of the central and regional power in the Novgorod region and it were used to prognosticate the dynamics of the regional political regime.

The «look» at the political power from The Novgorod region is quite significant. From one point of view, The Novgorod region as a region of the Russian Federation has always been «politically sensitive» to decisions, taken in the center, as it is situated between Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, and as regional elite circles don't have enough resort potential to influence the central power considerably. Novgorod region is located in the north-west part of the West-European plain and according to the level of social development it belongs to the middle type of regional development in the European part of Russia. The constant part of the Novgorod region population in 2006 amounted to about 700 000 people, the citizens make up 70% among them. From the other point of view, under such conditions regional political elite was obliged to use the policy of flexible positioning with respect to the center and to look for dynamic consensus within regional interest groups. Thus, the public perception of the central and local government in the Novgorod region can easily serve in a way as an «averaged» index of the attitude towards the power in Russia as a whole. The important fact is that The Novgorod region can be taken up in

a way as a «small civilizational matrix» of Russia, as Moscow and St-Petersburg behave toward it as specific, external centers of pressure and «globalization».

And finally, capital's historico - symbolical stirring up in that region can give us cultural resources for successful trend towards democratic valuables. Veliky Novgorod was founded in the 9th century on a path leading «from Varangian to Greek» and became historical departure point of the Old Russian State system origin. It is known that in the political culture of the modern Russia Veliky Novgorod is considered to be the «historic home» of the medieval republican practices, unlike other «places of political memory», concerned with symbols of the despotic strong government.

Last decade political elite of the Novgorod region presented itself politically as a leader of market reforms and as an initiator in formation of more open state institutions. Mounting of the «monocentric regime» of «imposed consensus» («controlled democracy») in the Novgorod region went along with fewer conflict situations and quicker, than in other regions, and became a basis of relative stabilization of the political regime. At the same time, though many attempts of social reforms broke out in Veliky Novgorod earlier than in other regions of the Russian Federation, the peak of socio-political activity of citizens' associations by now has passed under the influence of such process, which is called the formation of «authority vertical line» in Russia. Thus, we can explain the «contradiction» in the contents of value aims of respondents, which was discovered during the conducted research.

Attitude towards political institutions. From one point of view, respondents are waiting for the legalization of pluralistic political regime in sight both in Russia and in a certain region. This is stated in the expectation of settled constitutional system and the growth of political, economic pluralism; in the expectation of amount growth of representative institutions and the institution for selection on every

authority level's for the state and regional development; in the public consciousness inclination to the ideology of social responsibility and constitutional state. The interview states the presence of a need for such values as «laws observance» (from 50 to 90 %), «human rights observance» (70%), «social responsibility observance» (40-70%). By the way, absolutely valuable preferences of older and younger respondents don't differ much.

But such value aims in existing «monocentric regime» environment adjoin with the recognition of need for absolute predominance of the presidential institution, governor institution and executive power as a whole. Thus, about 50 % of the respondents supported the idea legislature and civil society institutions should be strengthened. But the same number of respondents expressed their opinion about the absolute preservation of the presidential government priority, coercive structures and the executive power priority. President, executive power institutions and oligarchic groups are distinguished as real subjects of the government. Human rights are examined in the context of the national paternalism ideology: «not party, but national ideology is wanted».

On the whole, prevails typical for Russia power perception as an elitist phenomenon, which is determined by the fact that the republican institutions are not developed and there is no civil political culture. Personified perception of the power, paternalistic view on its functions in the society; state and civil institutions' authentication – are all the result of it. One may think that such things are quite natural for «monocentric personified political regime» of the «imposed consensus». Such a regime blocks civil self-government stirring up, stimulates the development of paternalistic perception of the power and is unable to solve everyday problems of citizens.

Political-psychological image of the power. On the whole political-psychological research corresponds with the revealed attitude toward authority

institutions. The results of the conducted investigation quite distinctly state, that population has little interest in politics as a whole and particularly, on the level of a region. Interest in politics as such becomes apparent only in the middle and older age focus group. Youth depoliticization, which is the potential actor of social-political innovations, is especially evident.

However, indifferent attitude of focus interview respondents towards politics doesn't abolish the existence of political-psychological image of the «real power». Power both *verbally* and *visually* is interpreted and described negatively mainly. There are following definitions on the verbal level – «thievish», «impudent», «unscrupulous», «vendible», «everything is decided without our will», «nothing depends on us», «they wait till all are dead», «they want us only to serve oil tubing and their mansions», «die laughing». In the estimation of the political elite prevails such a conclusion, that power is «a mob of thieves», «power of money and corrupted groups», « demagoguery and hypocrisy». Power is associated with resources' division, informal interactions of elite groups.

On the visual level power is associated with: «a rat», «a gangster», «three corpulent men» (*branches of power*), «oligarch capitalists», «net», «octopus», dark glasses. The image of the earth and the sky confrontation (the earth and the sun), the perception of the Russian emblem as a symbol of multidirectional powers and society's viewpoints – are quite demonstrative. All the focus interview participants quite distinctly express alarm against the growth of ethnic xenophobia and consolidation of nationalistic value orientations. Both expert survey, focus interview and projective tests reveal anxiety owing to the prevalence of such aim as «money solves any problem».

Major trends of regional political regime evolution. Data, got during the study of specific character of one's attitude towards power on the level of a region, make it

possible to characterize peculiarities of political regime, probabilistic scenarios of its further political evolution and modernization of a region more profoundly.

The scenario of «legitimate competition of interest groups» with the further transformation of such regime into the scenario of “operated democratic competition” is considered to be optimal one for the development of the region in the existing political atmosphere. Competition of elite groups could have shown the way to the strategy of establishing new public areas and effective civil institutions. Still, the scenario of “operated power transmission” will be more probable both for a region and whole Russia. If that’s the case, the core line of the political development of the Novgorod region in the nearest and foreseeable future will be highly «winding», and the political regime will be fragmentary and unstable under the influence of impulses, coming from the center.

Most likely, this will be «pendular variant» of «relatively inertial scenario» realization. It will be represented by the fluctuations of policy line between different scenarios, gravitating towards the project of « uncontrollable competition» or the scenario of «legitimate power transmission» with an opportunity for public communicating areas to exist in a reduced form. The existence of a region in the context of such political amplitude can’t be called optimal. At the same time, opportunities for political experience (resources) accumulation, that is very important for effective political modernization in the long-term outlook, still remain.