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Analysts: “Consultants” or “Independent Policy Actors”

NINA BELYAEVA*

Summary

The author points out empirical indicators to distinguish “consultants” from analysts as “independent policy actors”. The complexity of decision-making processes in modern states created demand for independent expert support. This demand has been satisfied by new institutes of intellectual political support – think tanks. Support, an estimation of political decisions and alternatives, generating of ideas, education and elite formation became their functions. According to the functional approach, due to the complexity and scale of modern administrative problems, the expert became an integral part of the decision-making process. In differentiated social systems, in order to increase the efficiency of decisions and to maintain the social “feedback” mechanism, policy-makers involve experts, including think tanks, to work out new and to estimate old political decisions. In these processes think tanks are engaged, conducting researches and consultations for the decision-makers. So in modern states the mechanism of “feedback” is carried out. In practice, we can see some analysts and experts who pretend to play a dominant role in policy; some who legitimize policy of the government, decisions of a political leader or a current political regime; some who conduct professional research and development of the “feedback mechanism” within a policy cycle; and some who have real power on minds of the elites and/or citizens. The author aims to figure out the factors that influence the changing political status of the analysts, what makes them independent political actors, and in what conditions they come to serve the elites’ interest. And, most importantly, how we can fix or stabilize the analysts’ status as independent and powerful political actors even in an unfavorable political climate.

Keywords: policy analysts, policy consultants, policy actors, policy analysis

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Tracing the development of different traditions in assessing the role of analysts, researchers or any other type of intellectuals *vis-à-vis* power structures in defining and shaping up the policy process – from the ideas of ancient Greeks on “government by philosophers” and the neo-Marxist vision of a “power-legitimizing role”, to the modernist “functional role” of ethics-free technocrats and the more contemporary approach, currently building up recognition, with the analysts’ potential role of “autonomous policy-shaping actors” – we want to devote this article to the latest tradition, but with particular focus on social conditions and the institutional framework in which such an “independent role” is possible.

In order to present those conditions, we need to understand – and in some cases re-define – the changing institutional environments for analytical work in the policy-making process.

Understanding Governance in Three Traditions

Conceptualization of the notion “public policy” began in the United States at the end of the 1960s, and was driven by the need to re-design public service, to make it more effective, more dynamic, more responsive to societal needs. Since then, though experiencing many amendments and variations, there has been a recognizable model of defining the public policy notion which connects it closely to the actions of governing bodies.

Public policy is “what Governments do or do not do” – that is the most famous definition. So it allows to define a particular “American tradition” in public policy and governance studies that is very close to “public administration”, and defining “public policy” is viewed – in many cases – as just the “first step” of “public administration”, creating a “program” that would need to be implemented.

“European” tradition developed later, using the “American” tradition, but it was much more focused on the “variety of actors”, among which the Government itself is not necessarily the main one. European tradition is more focused on non-state actors, as well as on defining their different and often conflicting interests, mechanisms of regulations, procedures of agreement and reconciliation, including the monitoring of decisions based on compromises.

A new understanding of public policy as a system of “co-management” (governance) is developing in the practice of international supranational European institutions, the Council of Europe and the European Union (Holzhacker and Albaek, 2007).

No wonder that the concepts of “public policy” and of “governance” present the most relief in studies of the European Union devoted to the analysis of decision-making and institutions, since, unlike the nation-state, there is no essentially “chief executive institution”, and states in the EU are completely equal. Thus, all members

of this alliance are equally involved in “co-management”, which is managing the mutual influence on each other. Of course, this system of co-management demanded the creation of an additional set of structures and systems of coordination of interests, both between countries and governments. With the involvement of other actors external to the EU – representatives of national and international business networks, public and municipal associations, etc., in decision-making on each task: movement of labor resources, common education and migration policies, the harmonization of price policies for different sectors of the economy, etc. – it creates an appropriate structure. The result was a layered system of coordination of interests named “the committee system”.

The authors of the “Russian Business Lobbying in the U.S. and the EU: Evolution and Prospects” report (Peregudov, Utkin and Kostyaev, 2009: 14-15; see also Wallace and Young, 1997: 20; Shokhin and Korolev, 2008) indicate that, at various levels of EU public policy, there were approximately 1400 different committees and working groups at the end of 1990, in addition to the basic political institutions of the EU; this number rose to 1800 by 2005, and these institutions employ 80 thousand people. The authors emphasize that “the very nature of the formulation and decision-making in the EU turns out to be largely mediated by non-direct participation of EU interest groups and pressure groups of various nature and purpose in the institutional structure. Those groups include business organizations, and large corporations, and civil society organizations, regional and ethnic formations of the Union countries, many cultural, scientific and other entities” (*ibid.*).

However, this European approach does not put an end to the formation of the concept of public policy. At the present stage, the increasing popularity of and interest for the development of public policy have moved it to the global level, where co-management and mutual influences include not only the countries of one region – Europe – but countries around the whole world. Most current works about public policy and governance today are devoted to global relations. Among them we should note the compilation of works by Patricia Kennett, in which, based on the vast material related to the analysis of practical examples of mechanisms “of global coordination”, the author explores the strategy and tactics of global co-management actors, which lead to approval of new norms and rules of engagement in a rapidly globalizing world, and to the formation of new institutions of harmonization of different interests, whether in the sphere of international trade, the global labor market, the environment or protection of the rights and interests of citizens united in the global social network (Kennett, 2008).

There are several approaches to conceptualization of the concept of governance, defined as “a minimum of government interference, as corporate management, as the new public management, as ‘good governance’, or a socio-cybernetic system, a

self-organizing network" (Rhodes, 2008: 51-74). However, the diversity of these approaches is insufficient to explain the ongoing changes in modern politics, like the process of globalization, the growing influence of international and supranational institutions, the emergence of new political spaces beyond national borders, the "diffusion of political power" – from government to non-state political actors, as well as the "delegitimization of the nation-state", the crisis of "welfare state", and the old management paradigm based on hierarchical control of the state, sending signals from the "top" to the "down" (Koenig-Archibugi and Zürn, 2006: 178).

The new understanding of governance must encompass the idea of joint management, changing the management paradigm and offering a new style of management which means the inclusion of an increasing number of political actors in the process of formulation and implementation of public policy. The process of blurring the boundaries between public and private sectors has started. This demands new mechanisms of governance, based on other resources than the government's authority and sanctions (Kennett, 2008: 4). Political administration in the style of this new understanding of governance ("joint" or "mutual" control) suggests a new role for government and state, acting as moderators in the political and administrative process to harmonize and promote the interests of different social groups and political actors competing with each other.

Moreover, "mutual" administration is based on the inclusion of non-state political actors and institutions not only in the process of broad and public discussion prior to decisions, but also in the process of direct "doing policy" (business of policy). Non-state actors are included in these processes – at the stage of elaboration and adoption of policies, and also at the stage of implementation of public-policy decisions – through a variety of institutions, methods and techniques (outsourcing, delegation, transfer of state functions).

What is it that unites the three existing traditions of public policy (American, European and global), except the fact that they have been consistently evolving, maintaining the continuity of the "core" concept comprehending, and are based on the new social reality?

The main thing they have in common is the preservation of the concept of public space as the arena which hosts reconciliation of interests, and the public – as a set of independent, competent and concerned citizens who are able to participate in formulating and implementing policy decisions. It is important to note that in the development from American and European traditions to the global tradition, requirements for "quality" of the public will only increase.

The second thing they have in common is regarding reconciliation of interests as a policy goal, with its governance understood as collective solutions to common problems.

The third common trait that unites these traditions is an open public space for the stakeholders and the rate for approval as a principle of decision-making instead of pressure.

What distinguishes these traditions, and why do we consider them as independent?

The most significant trait to distinguish them is the attitude to the main actor in the public sphere or, in other words, to the “strategic management subject”. In the first case (the “American” tradition), such a subject is a public authority – the state. In the second case (the “European” tradition), there is no main actor, and all subjects of public policy are deemed to be equal participants in decision-making. In case of the “global” tradition, the focus generally moves away from the actors to the procedures, mechanisms and ways of coordinating interests.

Nevertheless, if jointly agreed decisions are adopted and other different actors accept them, it shows that in some way – through particular coordinating activities – the process of such decision-making had been organized. It is also obvious that this kind of task cannot be handled by “average” or “ordinary” actors. It is clear that, acting in the space of highly contradictory interests, such a type of coordination can only be exercised by those who can suggest a strategy of collective action. Hence, our next step is the analysis of these “strategic actors”.

Understanding the Classification of Actors

“Strategic Actors” or Full-Fledged “Participants in the Public Policy Process”?

Attention to “actors” of public policy was the “starting position” for the establishment of research approaches of the team of the Department of Public Policy, established in the National Research University “Higher School of Economics” in the early 2000s, in order to develop the concept of “public policy”. Indeed, if research institutes in Russia are admittedly weak and perform poorly, who determines political development? Who are these actors, how do they arise, how are they managed, how do they acquire resources and influence?

Finding answers to these questions has led to a series of studies, and then to the development of university courses devoted to specific kinds of “actors”, namely “collective actors” having a common social nature, common symptoms that are similar types of use of political resources and similar strategies aimed at achieving political influence.

The main actors reputedly include government authorities at different levels of government, political parties, federal and regional press, big business, regional elites, civil society organizations and movements, and the local communities. Obviously, the actors are very different not only between species, but also within each species – and not just in terms of “political weight”, but also with regard to another

criterion, which, in our opinion, is not less important: the degree of independence of their conduct in the political field. This criterion is central to political analysis, being converted to the actor's own, "inner" qualities, allowing or not allowing the building of the actor's own strategy for political behavior.

Categories of Actors

Further analysis led us to "structure" all actors in the field of public policy into three main categories – depending on their degree of "political independence".

The first category – the lowest level of political independence – consists of political "agents" who do not have and do not implement their own strategy of political action, who act in politics in "another's interests" and "at the expense of another resource", who, in fact, carry the political will of someone else (usually called "political booking").

In the second category, "political actors" may actually have their "own" agenda in the current policy (they have a collective consciousness and will, capable of goal-setting), but they have very little of their own resources to exert significant influence on the behavior of other actors in the political field.

The third category of actors – most resourced – we termed "independent actors" of public policy, because such entities (their representation in Russian political field is limited) are not only able to formulate their own strategies for their own behavior, but are also able to offer (to impose) such strategies to other political actors. They have enough resources to decisively influence the behavior of other political actors (as dependent agents and independent, but weak actors).

Moreover, in accordance with our research, "full-fledged actors" of modern public policy in Russia are not only a "collective Kremlin", or, in person, the President or Prime Minister, but also a number of public entities. For example, the "Memorial" organization or the Soldiers' Mothers Committee, not only offering state and society on its agenda in the area of public policy, but also forcing authorities to take their agenda into account.

Very similar approaches on the various "roles" of actors in public policy developed within the framework of institutional theory. Here the question arises: how new institutions are created, from what, and by whom, depending on their formation. Accordingly, N. Fligstin, a representative of the institutional theoretical school, said that actors do not simply follow generally accepted meanings in their field, but "have a certain amount of social skills allowing to reproduce or challenge the system of power and privilege" (Fligstin, 2001: 45), i.e. to transform institutions. While agreeing with Fligstin's basic idea about the role of "strategic actors" in the creation of institutions, we want to add that, in this case, there is a mutual enrichment of two related disciplines – sociology and political science.

The cognitive and analytical capabilities of a combination of the subject-oriented approach with the “new institutionalism” in its various versions, which we tried to make use of, are very productive and allow us to use a broader range of tools for analyzing the Russian political system, the specifics of its individual elements, the actors and subjects (see e.g. Belyaeva, 2006: 7-26, 2007, 2010, 2011).

However, given the apparent similarity between the “independent subject of public policy”, proposed by our team, and the concept of “strategic actor”, proposed by Fligstin, it seems to us that these are close concepts which should still be “dilute”: “strategic actor” is the notion of a more general than “independent subject of public policy”, but the latter is a mandatory part of the first.

The “subjectivity” of our approach lies in the fact that the “focus” of analysis is placed precisely on those members of modern politics which have a real impact on the political development of the country, and in this case are governed by their own goals and follow their own strategies. At the same time, the institutional component of this approach lies in the idea that in the aggregate political subjects can form new – but quite stable – institutions; for example, “the institution of regional lobbying” or “the institution of corporate representation”. The connection with the subject approach enables a comprehensive institutional review of the form of influence that this political entity has on the political process and the changing social and political institutions.

Our understanding of the public, i.e. of society composed of knowledgeable, competent citizens who are able to organize themselves in pursuit of common interests, is based on “classical” interpretations thereof, dating back to the meaning of the term *respublica*. Namely, in accordance with those meanings, the public is the foundation of civil society, and its activity in concert with other political actors leads to the implementation of the “public interest” and to achieving “common good”, to a change, if necessary, of the existing political institutions.

The ability to cooperate, to assist “others”, based on solidarity and mutual trust – that is a property of representatives of the public or subjects of civil participation. Since the public is composed of citizens who have certain qualities – competence, awareness, autonomy (of which more will be said below), the inclusion of them in an active political practice, and on a regular basis, establishes the practice as an institution of civic participation. Thus, only the active members of the public support public institutions or transform them by their actions, or else destroy the old and create new institutions.

Understanding Analysts and the Intellectual Class

In our study, by referring to “analysts”, we intended to cover quite a wide range of people, namely “professionals of mental labor”: the representatives of university and

academic communities, members of think tanks in the administrations on all levels of regional government and independent research centers, regardless of how they are funded. As it turned out during our research, this category also includes employees of analytical services and media services, public opinion polls, the staff of departments of social assessment in the medium and large businesses, as well as staff and outside experts from business organizations in strategic planning and philanthropy, as they also help their “bosses” make management decisions most directly affecting the state of society. Moreover, in the category of “workers’ intellectual services” we included: employees of informational and analytical services of all kinds of regional funds and a variety of voluntary associations, and representatives of foreign and international research organizations and projects! Everyone who is directly mentioned and who is referred to indirectly – all who are engaged in laborious work to collect data about society conditions (for a variety of indicators), who try to analyze and interpret these data and search for answers to solve complex social and managerial problems – we refer to the category of “regional intellectuals”, irreplaceable soldiers of the research front, who, through public presentation of the collected data and analysis, try to influence the decision-making in the field of public administration.

Thus – through public presentation of their intellectual products – intellectuals are trying to influence the government, to become part of the chain of decision-making, and the strongest and most independent of them are striving to become full-fledged actors forming the agenda, the subjects of public policy in the region.

Understanding the Challenges of Analyst/Power Interactions

In shaping the design of analyst/power relations, the main question is: how are “people in power”, or “people who make decisions” compatible with “intellectuals”? The search for the answer is based on several assumptions. First: an intellectual does not need power. Indeed, the phenomenon of power traditionally has been associated with coercion or threat of coercion: the power of the government, the power of the church, the power of the father – it is not by chance that we often use the term “power” when we speak about “force majeure”, which compels us to act against our will and apart from the dictates of reason – the power of nature, the power of circumstances.

As a social regulator, “power” appears where there is an opportunity to show force in order to control the other, where social categories are realized such as “dependency”, “subordination” or simply “fear of punishment”.

In this sense, “intellect” – as a way of controlling the behavior of others through an appeal to reason, to rationality – not only does not use coercion, but it does not even appeal to it as a possible threat (“... if you are not going to listen to father, church, government, you will face negative consequences...”). Using intel-

lect and “concentrated knowledge” in management is based on the justification of the position of manager (from the English word “reasoning” we derived the word “резонный” – reasonable), that is, a system of logical arguments addressed to reason encourages reflection and analysis of these arguments with the result of adopting an independent decision on a preferred follow-up action based on one’s own free will and choice.

In this sense, intellect as a social regulator is “interaction” of reasonable people, who can not only understand each other, but can also make joint decisions aimed at “common good” or “public good”, and then “management” in the traditional sense of “submission” is replaced by “co-management” (just as the term “government” in political science is increasingly giving way to the term “governance”).

Thus, the intermediate conclusion is as follows: intellect – as a means of controlling exposure – does not need power as a source of coercion.

Second, the intellect – as an attribute of a reasonable and free person – is able to construct a logical picture of the outside world and explain (at least to itself) the logic of events in the system of his or her own values, often opposed to, and even in direct conflict with “power” as a system of external coercion. If societal governance is implemented through “interaction between rational actors” (those who put forward ideas, articulate the problem, and agree on the order of problem resolution) and those who are rationally participating in such activity – in this situation, the power of coercion loses value. But if a free and educated person feels the influence of “irrational power” – in other words, the power which is uninformed, uneducated, incompetent, and, as a result, inefficient (we deliberately omitted all other possible defects of government), it inevitably awakens in this free and reasonable personality a sharp protest and a desire to “fix” the incompetent actions of “rulers” – in accordance with recommendations based on “expertise (expert’s knowledge)”.

This effect hinders dialogue between the authorities and the “intellectual class”, since both sides often demonstrate deafness, snobbery and lack of trust.

Another interim conclusion: due to their deep knowledge in their field, intellectuals are most sensitive to managerial mistakes of the authorities and are more prepared to oppose them.

Finally, we clearly observe a number of failures in social policy and infrastructure caused by inadequate and really poor intellectual preparation of large-scale management solutions. Quite evident is not only the deep “gap” between two major types of elites – “intellectuals” and “authorities” – but also the sad consequences of a long series of incompetent government decisions that cause more collective social protest in modern Russian society. Therefore, the third – and the main – preliminary observation in today’s Russia is that this “compatibility” between the authorities and the intellectual community is losing every possible reason and is close to zero,

so that there is an urgent need to look for an appropriate mode of analyst/power interaction.

Understanding Research Communities in Russian Regions

We decided to look into this issue from the grass-roots level – from the view of local-based intellectuals, who are currently working with decision-making structures in Russian regions.

In order to establish a face-to-face connection with the widest possible range of local analysts, we identified, as the first step, the regions to be part of our “pilot project”, regions chosen as “contrasting examples” of regional political cultures and as very different political environments: Saratov Oblast, Republic of Karelia and Tatarstan.

Second, we used all available sources of information to identify people who are known to be part of the local analytical community, and we invited them to an initial meeting. For this purpose, we mobilized all research contacts in Moscow analytical structures we used to work with who know those regions, all our international partners who have ever worked with Russian regional researchers, the database of the Russian Association of Political Science and our regional partners, as well as the advice of friends and analysts from other regions.

Third, we created a special “community-building methodology”, involving local researchers in the research of their own community, which was done by creating in selected regions “an open platform for dialogue”, trying to raise the interest in “analytical self-study” by representatives from all fields of research who contributed to the decision-making in the sphere of public policy in their respective regions. We aimed to ensure that in our coverage of regions most of the existing analytical communities were represented, and for this purpose we used several particular methods, e.g. participation in the preparation of most of our regional round tables, specially prepared by our regional partners, analytical reports, speeches and replicas of our round tables, as well as a questionnaire distributed among those who could not attend personally.

In addition to making an “inventory” of regional research communities themselves, it was important for us to highlight our research GOALS and make sure they are fully grasped:

- to understand and describe the political environment in which intellectual centers (think tanks) work in a particular region (such environment can be defined as “climate” of their activities);
- to specify the particular situation of every analytical center and every participating analyst *vis-à-vis* the power-structures, where they are positioned in the so-called “vertical of power”, both federal and regional;

- to identify the factors that allow them – and to what extent – to remain “independent” or “autonomous” from the power-structures in the process, as well as the contents of their research and what this autonomy really means;
- to describe the kind of “analytical product” that they produce and its “applicability” at the regional and federal levels;
- to identify the channels through which these centers promote their intellectual products to the public space and seek attention for their proposals.

Besides, we were seeking not only to collect the data on regional-level policy analysts, but also to contribute to the consolidation of the local research community. We hope that the experience of our established sites and the discussions about the condition of the analytic community will lead to new meetings, that there will be new cause for an exchange of ideas, and that this experience will be an ongoing need and will lead to achieving our primary objective – the establishment of several networks of regional analytical communities.

Understanding the Public

Speaking of interaction with the audience, it is necessary to clarify what kind of audience we refer to. Unfortunately, the meaning of “public” and “audience” in Russian analytic discourse over the last 20 years has been quite different from their original meaning. For the most part, it developed within the framework of the modern Western analytic discourse.

It must be noted that, although the use of the words “public” and even “public policy” in modern texts has been steadily increasing lately, in most cases “public” still refers to an audience that needs to be entertained. In this context, the meaning of the Russian word for “public” is very different from what Aristotle meant and from the original or “classical” meaning, which is comprised in the word “republic”.

The public in the cities of ancient Greece, which we keep recalling, was primarily a community that had several characteristics. Such a community, primarily related to general co-dependency of life on a common territory, was a people with shared responsibilities, which understood the common challenges involved in addressing these issues, a people with the quality of freedom of thought, will and action. And only then did the aggregate of all these qualities get the same “real audience” that wanted to have and was able to have an influence on the public administration. We have gone far from this classical understanding of the public, and today this concept is used more as a theoretical construct, not only in Russia. The reason for this is the transformation of society itself – into the post-modern society, with its special culture “mediated” by the media.

The emergence of a mass audience – “target audience” – of newspapers, radio, television, and finally the audience of the Internet, completely changed the understanding of the public. Now you do not necessarily know the person with whom you communicate “virtually” to share the general conditions of life or suffer the same problems, and most of all – to participate in solving them and to share responsibility for solving common problems. Every television show has its audience, but there is no interaction inside the audience, and hence there is no discussion of the problems, no making of personal and common positions, and above all – no shared responsibility. A related problem is identification of the “public opinion”.

The public opinion always stumbles on the fact that “opinion”, as revealed by the polls, is not a generalization of the individual meaningful solution, but the result of manifestation of the individual will. There is now a “massivization” of samples of public behavior – basically, an imposition of replicable ways of thinking and behavior through the media and advertising. “Hundreds of thousands of people have chosen this book/listened to this song/watched this film/gone to Seliger/bought this vacuum cleaner” – we are swarmed by intrusive information followed by a downpour of slogans. And this is not limited to consumer goods; everything is reproduced without exception – from patterns of behavior at home and at work to stereotypes of social behavior, such as focusing on “personal success” despite of the “common good”.

The modern technology of “marketing networks” creates and distributes a certain pattern of behavior, taste, and opinions on a particular issue, the attitude towards a political symbol or character. Then this sample spreads from one point of information on a wide network: it may be a newspaper, radio or Internet, and it is positioned as successful, “backed by all”, almost “universal”, so it is very difficult to keep from following this model, especially if it has to do with consumption of information. The definition of the modern notion of “public” in dictionaries is also linked to the consumption of information – in halls, stadiums, etc. Film and television viewers, fans, audience of rock concerts – that is the public. There is a “massivization” – the spread of a single sample of thinking and behavior. And the public follows those samples.

We must admit all of this – the realities of our time, the inevitable product of mass culture, in which it is incredibly difficult to maintain individuality, not to follow the mass, and preserve your own personal opinion. It is very difficult to articulate an original view, to clearly express it, and convey it to others in such a convincing way that this opinion might “break” through the noise of mass phenomena.

In Russia, the “true public” is yet to be created. The “public/audience” that wants “bread and circuses” is confined to any kind of “informational abuse” and manipulation – it can easily be “converted” and driven to support authoritarian leaders, aggressive ideologies or other myths created by skillful propaganda.

Only in a few places in our regions – especially in small towns and villages – are there visible attempts of citizens at consolidation, which is a manifestation of a “real public” which is observable in meaningful collective organized and responsible behavior. A community-based awareness of their own collective identity is created, and this results in the preservation and reproduction of this identity. If such “citizen coalitions” are built on common ethical norms or general political views, they are able to maintain and reproduce common citizen values, and on this basis, they are able to influence the broader community, thus creating a “responsible public” – in the true meaning of the word.

Conditions and Strategies for an Independent Policy Analyst

Now we come to the role of analysts and intellectuals in dealing with the “public” that is their “living environment” – which, just as with “power”, they choose to deal with (or NOT to deal with).

We must above all remember that, in the contemporary world, the policy process, as well as governance, is exercised on MANY LEVELS – from a small municipality to the global level. And “power” on those different levels – represented by specific institutions and personalities – can be of very different QUALITY, which allows an analyst the CHOICE with which level to interact.

In a similar way, the “public” that forms the “social environment” for an individual analyst or an analytical institution is also of very different QUALITY – in terms of the level of education and wealth, as well as in terms of values, interests and ethics – and it is very diverse and fragmented. This also necessitates a CHOICE – which public an analyst wants to be related to and associated with, and which “public interest” is worth being explored, presented and supported.

The majority of the population in every country is heavily influenced by mass media and intense advertising of all sorts, which are very hard to resist, and it is unable to create an individual, personally-developed opinion based on an understanding of events and on personal experience. This very special social quality – “stable self-reliance”, the independence and consistency of one’s own personal position – is a privilege of well-educated people, because it is their education and trained mind that help them build “filters” for information and propaganda flows; they retain the freedom to build their own intellectual worldview.

Thus, the intellectuals, capable of critical thinking and analysis, are a very important source of independent public opinion.

We are currently witnessing a decline in the meaning of “public opinion” in the original sense, which was used by Jürgen Habermas – the collective opinion of the INDIVIDUAL members of the public that is based on the ability of citizens for critical analysis of information and formed on the basis of individual experiences.

The intellectuals could become a “growth point” of independent public opinion, which we are desperately in need of.

Some recent examples from Russia of total dependence of public opinion on propaganda are appalling. In the early 1990s, when the country was run by “westernizers” and, according to public polls, political friendship with the USA was very popular, an average citizen perceived the USA not only as a “friendly” country, but also as a “role model”. After only 7-8 years, with a new political leadership and with a change of vector of the political propaganda to a new anti-western rhetoric, the majority of our citizens have come to regard the USA as “dangerous”, even as an “enemy”.

By sharing their knowledge and critical views with the citizens, the intellectuals and analysts can become an instrument of enlarging the critically thinking public, BUT this requires certain qualities from the analysts themselves: to behave as public policy actors, which means – to recognize and respect OTHER actors, be aware of the others’ interests, be prepared to listen and hear other opinions, be ready to compete, to defend one’s position, as well as to compromise and find some common ground – for the common purpose.

Unfortunately, we found in our research of regional analytical communities in Russia that analysts, who clearly positioned themselves as “consultants to power”, failed to demonstrate those qualities. Instead they preferred to stick to their own opinion, which is the “only right opinion”, and attended the regional meetings not to listen, but to “preach the truth”, which – in some cases – made obvious a deep GAP between regional intellectuals: those working “for the authorities” and those working on alternatives to the currently adopted policy options.

Among the analysts currently working for the acting authorities, there were many professional and responsible people, but they did not feel like engaging in a dialogue with other analysts of the alternative position. The same was observed on the other side: those actively seeking alternatives to the currently adopted policy options saw no benefit in engaging in a dialogue with their colleagues in an intellectual workshop, because they belonged to the “other side”. This was seen most vividly in Kazan, Tatarstan, where the political climate fosters such attitude, and least of all in Karelia, where the institutional environment for the analytical work is profoundly different – both in the power-design and the public political culture.

So what does it take for analysts – or an analytical center – to be an “independent actor”?

The results of our research – both on federal and regional levels – allowed us to specify several categories of those who are viewed as “independent from power”, but still influential enough to be regarded as “autonomous policy actors”.

First category: big and resourceful research and consulting institutions with history and reputation, and with highly diversified sources of income.

Second category: NGO-based analytical teams with strong public recognition and trust in their decency, and a firm position among the citizens.

Third category: issue-based, highly focused professional researchers, writing policy papers on request, often funded from outside the region or from abroad.

Those categories can be translated to successful “independence-building strategies”, which are focused on working with different power-levels or governance-levels, as well as working with different public. There is one important feature they have in common: respect for the public interest and the “public good” concept, engaging in dialogue and producing alternatives for collective solutions to common problems.

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