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From Government to Governance: Is there such a shift in the Russian Countryside?

Abstract

The questions of rural governance have been attracting growing interest in recent years. The idea of “new governance” could be seen as a response to the crisis of the Fordist mode of regulation. Governance signifies a change in the meaning of government, referring to a *new* process of governing; or a *changed* condition of ordered rule; or the *new* methods by which society is governed.

This article presents an analysis of the situation in the Russian countryside and attempts to answer the following questions: Is there a shift from government to governance? If there is, how does it work? Are there the same actors and the same interdependence between them? If not, what other processes are taking place in the Russian countryside?

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Keywords: rural, governance, local actors, Russia.

Rural Governance

The questions of rural governance have been attracting growing interest in recent years. Many rural scientists turn their attention to the institutional transformation. The idea of “new governance” could be seen as a response to the crisis of the Fordist mode of regulation, which is characterised by hierarchical and bureaucratic managerial structures, power relations between partners and non-flexibility. “Government is used to refer to the formal institutional structure and location of authoritative decision making

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in the modern state" (Stoker 1997). Fordism emphasised productivity and planning; regional policy was mainly oriented to the location of industry in interest to spread full employment. With such a mode of regulation, agriculture had a hegemonic position in the countryside.

The shift from government to a broader, more flexible system of governance, which is associated with post-Fordism, is widely discussed. Rhodes (1996) notes that the current use does not treat governance as a synonym of government. Governance signifies a change in the meaning of government, referring to a *new* process of governing, a *changed* condition of ordered rule or *new* methods by which society is governed.

Governance in rural areas can be considered multidimensional. "The concept of governance is wider... Governance is about governmental and non-governmental organisations working together" (Stoker 1997). It includes not only the public and private sectors but also communities and voluntary groups. It is very important for local government to get in contact with different actors. Foucault (1991) wrote that in the art of government the task is to establish continuity, both upwards and downwards. The dilemma is that no single actor, public or private, has the knowledge or capacity to tackle problems effectively. Interdependence among actors is very important, because each actor brings specific sets of skills and resources into the partnership (Goodwin 1998). Partnership becomes a key component of the process of governance (Jones & Little 2000).

The above describes the situation in Western countries, but what is the situation in Russia? Is there a shift from government to governance? If there is, how does it work? Are there the same actors and the same interdependence between them? If not, what other processes are taking place in the Russian countryside? These are the main questions I try to answer in this article.

For a better understanding of the situation, I would firstly like to give a short introduction to the administrative division of Russia. The administrative structure consists of three levels: federal, regional and municipal (local government). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the term "local government" (*mestnoe samoupravlenie*) was put into use in the Russian Constitution in 1993. The unified structure of the government was divided into two parts by the Constitution: public authority and local government. The public authority is realised at federal and regional level. Local government has been removed from the system of public authority¹ and it operates at municipal level. The municipal level, being an insignificant body dependent on the central authority in Soviet times, became a politically and administratively independent level of decision-making. This level has two sublevels. For example, in Russian Karelia the municipal level is

¹ Article 12 of the Russian Constitution.

represented by municipal districts (for example, Pryazha district, Olonets district) and municipality (village administrations, which consist of a central village and a group of small villages around the central one). I will pay attention to the lowest levels of governance – municipality (village administration) and municipal district (*raion*) in the case of Russian Karelia.

Actors

The main ideas of “new governance” are multidimensional governance and partnership. In Figure 1, actors that take part in local development are represented. One could say that all these actors exist in the Russian countryside. My first group of questions is about them. Who are they? What are their interests and what kind of role do they play in local development?

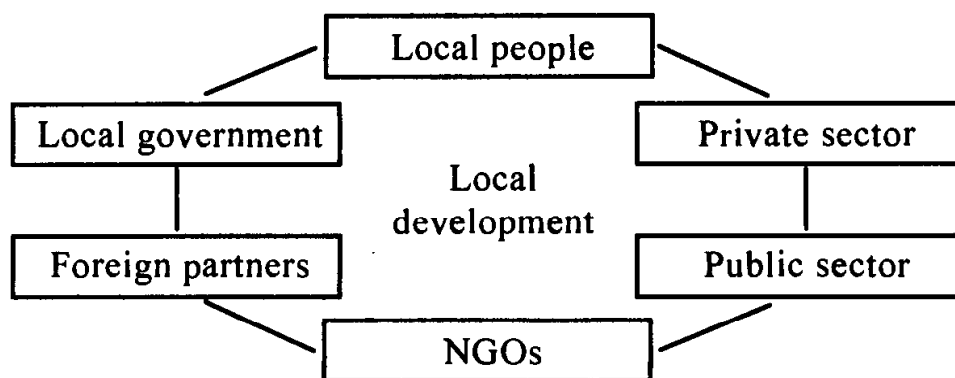


Figure 1

Participation in local development

The needs and interests of the local people depend on where they are in the development process: basic needs and/or general principles concerning individual rights and freedom. In the Russian case, basic needs (nutrition, education, medical care) are the more important aspect, and they are connected to coping strategies, level of income, household assets, household demographic composition, and the use of environmental resources. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the weakening of the Communist Party and the appearance of a multi-party system, there have been economic crises and a deterioration in standard of living, as well as certain changes in the consciousness of the Russian population. On the one hand, the “feudal consciousness” of Russians still exists in some groups within the general population. People do not take responsibility for their own lives. As in Soviet times, people have surrendered that responsibility to external actors. The paradigm of totalitarian-state paternalism remained during the 1990’s.

Possible improvement in living standards was perceived not as the result of changes in the form of social behaviour, but as a by-product of new government activity. What the communists could not do, democrats have had to implement. No personal responsibility, no personal initiative (Keselman et al., 1999).

On the other hand, the transformation of the relation between collectivism and individualism has also taken place. Collectivism, which was a characteristic feature of soviet man, is elapsing into the past. The collective consciousness (all for all) has changed into an individual one (for myself and for my children). After such changes, the majority of villagers are only interested in improving their own well-being and not in improving the situation in the villages or enterprises. According to M. Gorshkov (citation from T. Pichugina, 2001), order in the state and clear conscience were the main values of man. Now priorities have shifted to concentrating more upon personal success and first-class entrepreneurship. About 30–40% of Russian population support the idea of a western type of individualism, 53% prefer to live as all others, and only 15% support the concept of collectivism.

Moreover, the aggravation of the problem of the *lumpenisation* of the population due to long unemployment has become very acute. In Pryazha municipal district only 52% of the able-bodied citizens are working (less than 30% of the total population). There is a very high share of economically inert population in the district (59%), which includes pensioners due to old age (42.1% of economically inert population); pensioners due to disability (7.8%); students (3.2%), and housekeepers (46.9%). Now we can see, the economically inert population includes not only pensioners and students, but also a high percentage of housekeepers. One of the reasons for this situation is the low level of income in many branches of the economy in the rural area and especially in agriculture: 1602 roubles per month (about 53 euros) in 2000 in comparison with 3186 roubles (about 106 euros) in industry in Karelia. People are not satisfied with such incomes which adversely affect a number of unemployed and a high percentage of people who retired of their own accord. The main reasons for resignation are salary delays, falling enterprises or the possibility of earning money elsewhere. As a result, the social load on the working population in the district is higher than the average in Karelia and represents one of the main factors which increases the budget expenses per person inside the district. The rise in unemployment has been accompanied by a sharp rise in poverty and inequality (Csaki et al., 2000).

After long unemployment, labour force quality has deteriorated. In 1999, about 53% of Russian unemployed people did not have jobs for twelve months or more (*Sel'skoe hozjajstvo*, 2000, p. 157). According to the head of a village administration in Pryazha district, people will not return to

a normal working life if they have been unemployed for a year or more. This does not depend upon age and applies to both 40 and 20 year-old people. Such people have become the “social bottom” of the village. They usually are or become alcoholics; they neither have or want permanent jobs. They live with occasional earnings or at the expense of other members of the family. According to Kalugina (2000), one of the paradoxes of Russian agrarian reform is that instead of developing people’s market mentality and behaviour in the sphere of economy, their work motivation is being destroyed. Thus, during the transitional period, the local population became a non-active actor on the local scene.

Table 1

Level of unemployment in rural and urban areas in Russia, %

Year	Urban area	Rural area
1999	12.6	12.5
2000	9.6	10.4
2001	8.3	10.7
2002	7.7	11.1

Source: Goskomstat, 2002

The main interests of **the private sector** are commerce and profitability. Private sector development is about promoting growth, reducing poverty and helping people improve their quality of life. It is a way of doing things across sectors. Private initiative, unleashed in competitive markets, is a key to promoting growth and poverty reduction, in parallel with public sector efforts. Tax revenues generated by private markets are critical to support public expenditure programmes (Private Sector Development Strategy, 2002).

The sector is represented by several types: there are big private enterprises working mainly in agriculture (former sovkhozes), small and medium-sized enterprises working mostly in forestry and construction, and “private entrepreneurs” who work in trade, cafes, transport and tourism services. Most rural ‘entrepreneurs’ are self-employed former skilled workers who treat their businesses as a source of income rather than an entrepreneurial business venture. They are not ‘entrepreneurs’ in the classic sense of accumulating in order to further accumulate. Of the three types, the first one is the most active actor.

The public sector works in different branches of the economy: agriculture, forestry, construction, social sphere, and services. It is the main employer in rural areas. Most of such enterprises and organisations are financed by different levels of budget, such as schools, first-aid stations,

hospitals and libraries; others run on a self-supporting basis and give very small income to local budgets (for example, enterprises for housing and communal services, electricity supply network). They are weak actors in the Russian countryside and dependent on local government and big enterprises.

NGOs. There are organisations such as women's clubs, scouts, the non-governmental "rehabilitation centres for children," and branches of political parties. National level parties play an insignificant role at the local level. Few parties have local organisations within the villages (usually the Communist Party, sometimes "Yabloko"). The corroboration of this statement can be found in other sources.

Other organisations provide different types of social services. The main tasks of such organisations and clubs are to solve some social problems in villages: organisation of leisure time for women (women's club) and children (scouts and rehabilitation centre), work with alcoholics and homeless people and work with families and prevention of "social orphanhood" (women's club and rehabilitation centre). These organisations are active actors in local development, but they do not work in close contact with local government. They do not have common programmes or plans.

Foreign partners. These actors do not exist in Russian villages at the level of village administration. At municipal district level some projects are implemented together with foreign partners.

In 2000–2002 the project "Improvement of agricultural practices in Eastern Ladoga" was realised. Partners of the project are WWF Sweden, Baltic Fund for Nature, Karelian Research centre of RAS, State farm "Iljinskoe." The project was aimed to improvement of grassland management in favour of both cattle and geese in the Olonets region (Southern Karelia, Russia). Project results (since 1999):

- Grassland restoration – 450 ha
- Bush cutting – 250 ha
- Perennial grass productivity up 27%
- Silage production up 48%
- Milk production up 43%

2003–2006 – the project "Rural development in South Karelia" (2003–2004 – first step, 2005–2006 – second step).

The main idea of the new project is to support the wide range of activities aimed at sustainable development in the district. The specific project aim is to activate the economic interest of the local people and thereby increase their level of involvement and motivation to preserve their local natural treasures. Within the current project the main emphasis is on the training of local people and dissemination of the ideas of nature conservation and a sustainable way of life. More information about these

projects can be found on the web site of the Baltic Fund for Nature (<http://www.teia.ru/ecology/maineng.htm>).

An additional project, "Non-agrarian development of rural areas," was implemented on the territory of three south Karelian municipal districts with partners from SIDA (Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency) and the Ministry of Foreign Relations of the Republic of Karelia. The overall object of this project is to promote development in selected municipalities and give people more possibilities of having an influence on their future.

Some private companies also have foreign partners. Such cooperation is mainly based on private contacts. Thus, foreign partners have just started to appear on the local scene.

The main interests of **local government** are public welfare, the economy and the political atmosphere. It is the main actor in local development in rural Russia. Nowadays, local government has a wide latitude and very few financial resources. According to the chairman of the Committee of the Federation Council on the question of local government (Inter-regional fund... 2002), Russia has about 12,000 municipalities and only 400 of them are self-sufficient. More than 6000 municipalities do not have their own budgets. Heads of village administrations reported with one voice that they do not have real power; they are unable to do anything. "I don't know what we are doing. Our work is of sheer psychological nature. People come here to weep. They complain and feel better. We cannot help with anything. We are not a legal entity. We are deprived of everything. In principle we do not have the right to deal with any business. We have no budget, nothing. We just occupy a place, and I am not sure what the outcome will be." It is clear that one of the major conditions for the realisation of the constitutional authority of local government is the security of financial resources for municipalities together with an effective system of inter-budget regulations.

The main principle of the authority is not to disturb the functioning of the enterprises and entrepreneurs. Without financial resources, the only activities for local government are to help with the preparation and registration of papers, accelerate the consideration of documents, to allot forest resources for the population and enterprises. Investment in basic assets of the agricultural enterprises became possible thanks to an investment through the wood resources which the government gives to the agricultural enterprises. In the whole of Karelia, at the expense of forest resources, investments to fixed capital of agricultural enterprises are more than ten million roubles per year. These investments are mainly used for repairs and constructions of production buildings, and the purchase of machinery, spares and seeds.

Another problem in the functioning of municipal authorities is lack of staff capable of solving local problems. Nowadays this is one of the basic

causes restricting the development of local government. This problem is especially critical in the countryside. The problem of professional training of the staff is very acute. About 60% of municipal employees have university degrees, but only 3% specialise in "state and municipal management" and about 6.5% in "jurisprudence" (*Local government in Russian Federation 2002*). The deficiency of qualified staff prevents the rational use of resources and reduces the quality of services. The consequences of such a situation are the low quality of the standard acts, including the charter of municipality, which is the programme of local development.

In spite of the existence of the many actors in the Russian countryside, there is a lack of co-ordination between them. There is no clear programme of local development, no programme of interaction between actors, no common tasks or plans. Local government tries to work in close contact with managers of big agricultural enterprises, but they are not equal partners in local development. There is no interdependency between them. With the lack of financial resources, heads of village administrations have become dependent on directors of big enterprises in their decision-making process. Local resources are so small that village administrations do not have any way of influencing the processes taking place in their own administrations. Local enterprises carry the main burden of local development, and they can dictate their will to the local authorities. "Without the help of the enterprise life in the village would be paralysed," considers a head of a village administration. Another problem and central difficulty is the lack of experience within communities (Jones & Little 2000).

In such a situation, local government is the main and almost single actor in Russian rural areas. There is no partnership or interdependency between actors. There is no shift from government to governance. Thus, a second group of questions emerges. How does this main actor implement its duties? What kind of ways does it use? The main answer is adaptation. Several types of adaptation can be emphasised.

Adaptation Strategies

1. **Spatial or geographical adaptation.** The location of village administration in the district/region influences the socio-economic development, presence of special problems, ways of solving them and finding adaptation strategies. During the transition, the factor of the geographical location of settlements has changed this role in socio-economic development, in many cases from positive to negative. Construction of new roads around villages (it could be important for cities such as St. Petersburg, but not for villages), reduction in transport connections, location near big cities and location on the periphery are the main factors. Physically the distances have not

changed, but now we can speak about the social, cultural and economic isolation of some groups in the local population.

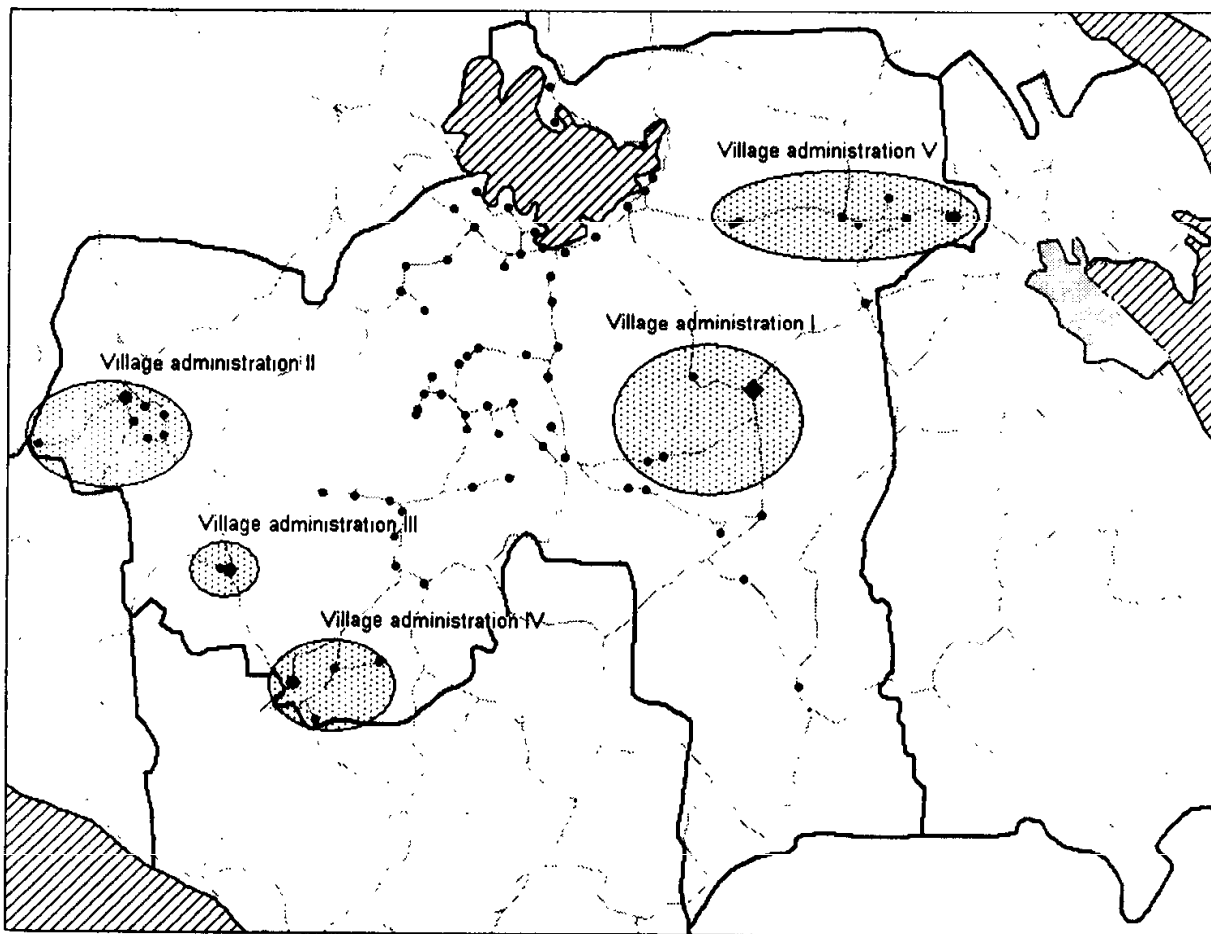


Figure 2

Pryazha district, Republic of Karelia

1.1. Village administration I is located in the district centre. In this situation, people prefer to come with their questions and problems directly to the higher level of authority, or the head of village administration can send people to the district level. Such a geographical location simplifies the work of the head at the lowest level and she/he can concentrate on selected issues.

1.2. Village administrations II, III and IV are located on the periphery of the district. The distance to the district centre is 100–150 km and there is insufficient transport connection. There is no Internet connection. The mobile phone service is very expensive and unaffordable for many villagers. This type of service only works in selected areas. In such areas, social problems are more acute: enterprises and their departments were closed because of the long distance and unprofitability (some of them even in Soviet times); unemployed persons live without social benefits because they do not have

the possibility to travel to the district centre to prepare the necessary papers; the level of alcohol consumption is very high. Heads of isolated village administrations are confronted with all of these problems. They work in isolation; they do not have many contacts with higher levels of authority. They can only rely on their own strength, knowledge and resources.

1.3. Village administration V is located on the periphery of the district and is within short distance of a big city (the capital of the republic). The location in the vicinity of the city gives both positive and negative aspects of development. Vacant jobs and different types of services are available for the population (as we know, local government is responsible for the provision of services and facilities), but the closeness of the city also brings specific problems to this area in the form of drugs and prostitution. With such special issues, the head of village administration has to work with colleagues at district and regional levels.

2. **Legislative adaptation** means adaptation to changes in legislation. During the transitional period, the system of local government (*mestnoe samoupravlenie*) has been developing. There were several steps in this process: The Constitution of 1993, the Federal Law "On the Basic Principle of Organisation of Local Government in the Russian Federation" of 1995 and 2003. The last law came into operation in October 2003, but the new system of local government will only start working in January 2006. Nowadays, the municipal district authority has organised a series of seminars for heads of village administrations. They study the new law step by step and adapt it to the local conditions. The new law gives great hope to many heads of village administrations for improvements in the situation of the local level of management on condition of changes in the Tax Code of the Russian Federation. Before the new edition of the Tax Code was introduced, there was a very high centralisation of tax-budget jurisdiction under federal authorities; about 80% of all finances were concentrated at the federal level. Then these resources were re-distributed among the regions. The New Code has revised the list of federal, regional and local taxes while enlarging the amount of local taxes, which will remain on the local level.

Other important legislative documents are the local acts. The most important act is "Functions of Head of Village Administration" and it lists all the duties of heads of village administrations. However, the list of duties is not permanent. Changes can take place in accordance with elections at regional and district levels (which take place every four years). New authority usually brings new rules. Most often there are changes in the extent of duties (for example, reduction in the staff of village administration from two persons to one and all duties transferred to the head) or there can be reformulation of some points. In my case studies, several heads did not sign the new list of duties after the election or signed it with comments:

“I disagree with point 18 – personal responsibility for the organisation of the preparation of housing stock, housing and communal services, and aspects of social infrastructure to work in winter conditions. It must be the responsibility of municipal district level or regional level.”

3. Adaptation connected with the structural changes in the Russian economy. Transition to the market economy has brought many changes in the structure of the Russian economy. The first big and positive step is the appearance of the private sector. It leads to privatisation of the former sovkhozes, development of private family farming, legitimation of personal subsidiary plots and other activities in the informal economy.² In 2002, 27% of the population were engaged in the informal sector. Two-thirds of rural inhabitants who indicated employment in the informal economy did not have other employment. Three-quarters of the villagers who were involved in the informal economy worked in agriculture, more exactly on subsidiary plots. Other important informal activities were trade, services and construction (Ovchinceva 2002).

The structural changes also have negative consequences. All these factors led to the disintegration of the agro-industrial complex and to the distraction of horizontal and vertical links between different enterprises and different actors.

How do all these aspects influence the activity of the heads of village administrations? The planned, command economy gave real power into the hands of managers of the different levels. In the transition to the market economy, the heads of village administrations lost a great deal. Nowadays, they do not have any instruments with which to influence the processes taking place in villages. They cannot control the situation on the subordinate territory. Neither private nor state enterprises are any longer under the control of local authorities. According to my observations, the heads of village administrations have become dependent on the activities of the big enterprises working in their territories.

The situation is better in such village administrations where big enterprises (mainly former sovkhozes) are located. Good personal contacts with directors help to solve many administrative problems for example in transporting pupils to the nearest school, cleaning of roads in winter, carrying out different types of reconstruction, organising village festivals, and so on. Enterprises usually support the local population in different ways: low prices for agricultural production, technical assistance with subsidiary plots, low prices for seeds and fodder, firewood, and funeral services. This type of interaction is a system of local exchange between business and local government (state). It is, mainly, a personification of contacts.

² From 2001, informal employment has been included in the index of total employment in Russia.

A more complicated system of "work" has arisen for the heads of such administrations that just have the social sphere or some small sub-units of bigger enterprises. They have the same latitude of duties but less chance of implementing them. In such a situation, the heads of small and isolated administrations have become more active in local development. First of all, they have closer contact with one another. They discuss common problems and possible ways of solving them. They try to maintain contacts with district level authorities. Actually, these contacts are made mainly by phone, but they are very important. The connections with different enterprises were represented by several types: sponsor help of enterprises, bilateral agreements between director and head of village administration, trilateral agreements with participation of higher-level authority. There are contacts with local enterprises located in the territory of the village administration or in neighbouring areas and contacts with foreign partners (both working locally and being abroad). An interesting way of solving the problem with firewood was used by one head of village administration: pressure was put on the director of an enterprise, based on knowledge of a technological process of forestry. The threat of penalty because of the broken rules helped to restore the technological process and to solve the problem with firewood. Some heads of village administrations have used the help of political parties and NGOs, but they are just solitary instances. As we can see, the circle of contacts becomes wider and the ways of surviving more diverse in small and isolated village administrations. Heads of such administrations try to find all possible opportunities for local development.

4. Psychological adaptation. The deep transformation of the social and economic life in Russia brings many other problems, which I have collected in the group of psychological adaptation. In Soviet times, the post of chairman in a rural council (*predsedatel' sel'skogo soveta*, now the head of village administration) was a very important and respected position. There were many candidates in the local elections. Now there are not so many people who wish to have such posts because it is very difficult work with an unclear job description. "It is my last month here. I am going to return to my previous job. I worked as an engineer, knew my duties and knew how to implement them. But here the situation is totally different. I have a huge list of duties, but I do not know what to do. I cannot help people and I feel really bad. But if we [village administration] will not help people, nobody will do it," said a village administration head.

Another problem lies in the lack of uniform comprehension of what "self-government" means. According to the Federal law,³ "a local government is a form of realisation of the authority by the people providing... independent and under their own responsibility the decision... of questions

³ From 6.10.2003 No. 131-FL, Article 1.

of local significance by the population, considering the interests of the population with taking into account historical and other local traditions.” “Self-government” means a voluntary union of people for the solution of common problems. In Russia it was, however, transformed to one more part of the “vertical” authority and people do not believe in it. In the consciousness of the population, the head of the district government and the heads of village administrations are executors of state politics and not exponents of people’s interests. The system of local government was built “from above,” and it defines the attitudes of the population toward this system. The people are not ready to participate actively in the community management. The election of the members in district local government is not a sufficient condition for the realisation of local governance. It is necessary for the population to realise the local (corporate) interests and achieve social maturity.

Conclusion

The concept of “new governance” is a western concept; the notion has no relevance to the Russian situation without taking into consideration important preconditions: legislation, taxation, decentralisation, stabilisation of living standards etc. But this concept can be used not only as the **normative proposition**, but as the **diagnostic meaning**.

As we can see, there is no shift from government to governance. Russia has just started to take the first steps toward it: Russian administrative reform is developing the system of local government. The new law will solve the main paradox that hampers the work of the local administrations: they have a wide scope of activities with very restricted financial resources. The law more strictly outlines the duties of the different levels of local government. Each level of municipal formation will have certain duties that have to be realised at the expense of their own budgets. The next idea of the forthcoming reorganisation is to build a more legible system of financing and to endow the local government with all the requisite financial resources for the realisation of the functions and duties.

This reform has a “top-down” perspective but does not have a negative meaning. It is important first to create the conditions for the realisation of future development strategies. Russia is at the beginning of the restructuring of local government. After the implementation of the main ideas of administrative reform, the understanding of the importance of participation in local development and the “bottom-up” perspective will appear. The understanding of the relationships and interaction between local people, private and voluntary sectors and local government is essential for the successful planning of local development. An effective dialogue between

the main actors could lead to stabilisation and economic growth, and to a solution to regional and local problems.

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