

The authors concede that, while effective and progressive as deliverers of policy, both Staraya Russa and the broader Novgorod *oblast* have local political regimes which are so executive-dominated and uncompetitive that they scarcely qualify as minimally democratic. This raises the intriguing, if disturbing, possibility that informal elite networks and local consultative bodies able to foster consensus and trust can compensate for the absence of liberal democratic representation as drivers of effective governance. Indeed, it would seem to imply that the democratic or undemocratic character of city government is largely irrelevant to its effectiveness. Given the limited number of cases examined, further research would clearly be needed to substantiate both this and the other implications of the book. This perhaps highlights its main shortcoming. The multi-layered nature of its comparison and the complexity and richness of data uncovered sometimes overwhelm the book's ability to analyse them coherently. The book's analytical passages range confidently between different sets of cases or levels of comparisons but do so in a somewhat ad hoc fashion. This is more than effective for falsifying or qualifying existing explanations, but largely proves unequal to the task of integrating the key factors highlighted into a bigger analytical picture or sketching the beginnings of a new theoretical model. Instead, the authors appeal to Putnamian notion of local civic traditions as the master variable underpinning varying levels of institutional and policy performance. However, their chosen research design offers no scope for examining such a thesis – which would have required a quite different book. This leaves the reader only with a series of suggestive, but largely speculative, asides in lieu of a clear conclusion.

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Martin Horak: *Governing the Post-Communist City. Institutions and Democratic Development in Prague*

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This book presents an historical institutional analysis of the first decade of democratic local government in Prague following the collapse of communism. It attempts to measure the performance of government in two policy areas – transport planning and the preservation and development of Prague's historic core. To do this it applies two criteria – systematic policy-making and government openness. The principal argument that emerges from an analysis based on extensive, mostly interview-based research is that policy-makers eschewed systematic policy-making in favour of a short-term, incrementalist approach, and that this approach was relatively closed to the influence of civic groups and the public. In side-stepping the challenge of the 'critical juncture' – when 'the absence of a firmly established political order means that political actors have an extraordinary amount of influence over the future development of the polity' (p. 21) – their decisions did not, however, lack long-term consequences, due to a version of institutional lock-in, which Horak ascribes to the *increasing returns* of continuity with a certain policy direction.

Central to the whole account is the thesis that political institutions 'generate incentives [for political actors] that privilege certain forms of behaviour over others'. (p. 76) The book pursues this argument by examining the political influence of two sets of institutions in particular – the municipal administrative bureaucracy and organised civil society. It is argued that institutional incentives provide a particularly strong explanatory framework because of the weakness of political party structures and programmes. The loose, decentralised structure of the dominant parties in Prague

during this era – initially Civic Forum (OF) and then the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) – meant that they were unable to develop a strong citywide electoral or government programme in the early 1990s, leading to short-term, ad hoc decision-making, open to the influence of external institutional pressures.

Horak's choice of policy areas for his case studies reveals some interesting contrasts between the ways in which competing institutional pressures played out. During the communist era, both spheres were dominated by a strong, stable bureaucracy, with substantial expertise and a commitment to technocratic rationality as a means of planning and problem-solving. Autonomous societal interests were largely excluded from the process until the late 1980s, when protest movements mobilised, with particular force in the transport sector (notably in defence of Stromovka park, which was threatened by the road-building programme conceived in the early 1970s but delayed until then by scarcity of resources). In keeping with the generally accepted account of environmental protest in the late communist era – that environmental protest was essentially a surrogate for 'political' demands that dare not speak their name – Horak describes how this movement waned after the change of regime, allowing the administrative bureaucracy to reassert its dominant influence on political decision-making. Thus the institutional incentive for democratic politicians to rely on its expertise and retain relatively closed policy processes prevailed over the (weakening) pressure to embrace the demands of civic groups for open policy processes and a different approach to solving Prague's increasingly acute transport problems. In a short space of time, there developed a 'deep mutual suspicion, in which each side in the debate denied the very legitimacy of the other'. (p. 157) Some of the quotations from Horak's (anonymised) interviews with former Council and Board members, in

which they denounce the 'craziness' of civic activists, dispute their legitimacy ('so-called' civic initiatives), and even dismiss public consultation itself as an unproductive exercise, bear witness to the firmness with which open government was rejected by municipal political leaders after 1990. The interview data from the side of civic activists provides a mirror image – cynicism about the value of entering into dialogue with the city government, and a continued, if not increasing preference for the tactics of protest and media campaigning. The result of this 'politics of mutual delegitimation' was that 'in the 1990s, Prague's political leaders spent more than one quarter of the city's total transport infrastructure investments on a project that had been the object of a major public protest movement in 1989 and whose benefits were questionable in terms of the officially stated goals of the city's transport policy.' (p. 133)

In the sphere of urban preservation, the communist-era bureaucracy had held similarly technocratic ideals, including the belief that the public interest could be defined through expert planning processes. But the situation differed in one important respect: the preservation of the historic core of towns and cities was an area that fell largely outside the interest of socialist economic organisations from the point of view of investment, in part simply because mass construction techniques were ill-suited to the development of that part of the urban environment. This situation only changed in the late 1980s, when planners in other sectors began to take an interest in the tourist potential of Prague's old city, placing the urban preservation officials on the defensive. Thus, in sharp contrast to what occurred in the transport sector, where 'the Stromovka issue [became] a broader symbol of communist disregard for quality-of-life issues and linked this disregard to the dominant technocratic approach to policy development' (p. 96), an alliance had developed between the historic preservation

professionals and voluntary organisations in defence of the city's historic buildings. This meant that there was less opposition to the reassertion of the symbolic dominance of the technocratic planning approach after the fall of communism in the urban preservation sector.

A second key difference was that 'transport infrastructure remained a matter of public investment, but the nationally led transition to a market economy rapidly replaced public with private investment as a dominant force in the real estate sector'. (p. 105) As soon as a market economy began to emerge, a new and more powerful institutional force altered the incentive structure in relation to the development of the historic core. 'High investor interest and underdeveloped regulations separating public from private activity gave them opportunities for private gain ... The more councillors and bureaucrats chose to pursue private gain, the less attractive any move to open or systematic policy became.' (p. 198)

A third difference is hinted at, if not fully fleshed out. Horak notes that the demands of civic activists in relation to urban preservation were for systematic policy – clear rules and guidelines – rather than for greater involvement of the public in decision-making, as was the case in transport. This is logical, since decision-making with respect to historic buildings and monuments is largely about effective regulation. Thus as long as clear rules are in place, and are transparently enforced by municipal officials, there should be little need for the kind of participatory decision-making which activists were pressing for in the transport sector, where long-term strategic decisions were at stake. This provides an additional reason why the main strategy of civic groups became one of publicising conflicts and scandals in the media (p. 187). Not only was it the only route available to them to expose and deter corruption (since civic groups in this sector had no legal en-

titlement to access decision-making arenas); it also coincides with one of the basic functions of the mass media in a democratic context – ensuring the transparency of political processes.

Although this book – based on Horak's doctoral thesis – is a thorough work of scholarship, a number of reservations should be cited. Firstly, Horak claims that his case study of Prague produces conclusions which can be extrapolated to the national scale. The choice of a capital city with a relatively strong local state, it is alleged, makes it possible to 'scale up our insights' (p. 32) and thus comment on the quality of post-communist democratic rule per se. This claim remains problematic because, as he admits, local government lacks essential characteristics of sovereignty, and the institutional environment for many policy areas is shaped by decisions at the national level. For this very reason, Horak excluded issues like housing from consideration. The resulting problem is twofold: firstly, it undermines his claim to be holistic (for instance, we don't have an example of redistributive policy areas such as housing or social welfare); secondly, it risks over-simplifying the portrait we get of policy-making in an era when shared competences and multi-level governance are increasingly the way in which governments have to operate at all scales of action. Indeed, given that trends towards a more networked style of governance (placing emphasis on partnership, community planning, public engagement, etc.) are probably stronger at the local than national scale, it is arguable that different levels of the state may increasingly require separate performance evaluation criteria.

A second reservation is that although Horak pursues his main lines of argument rigorously and persuasively, this is sometimes to the detriment of other possible explanations. For example, the account of the split of OF neglects to note that the ideological differences between ODS and other

factions (notably Civic Movement (OH), which is not mentioned) related not just to market reforms, but to the institutional design of politics. Horak claims that both OF and ODS 'were internally organized to embody norms of participatory democracy'. (p. 81) It is true that ODS retained OF's decentralised party structure, and particularly in Prague (where OF and initially ODS were organised at the district, not the city-wide level) this hampered coherent policy formulation. Yet one interpretation of the split of OF is that it opposed those who believed in participatory democracy (OH) and those who believed in representative democracy (ODS). From the outset ODS was imbued with a philosophy that parties and elected politicians are the main, if not the only, legitimate representatives of public opinion, and had a deep suspicion of civil society organisations and organised interests. This is important because it bears upon Horak's explanation for the rapid weakening of civic groups as an influence on decision-making in Prague. Two factors are considered: the stronger incentive structure which the bureaucracy was able to offer to political actors, and the failure of civil society itself to organise effectively. Civic groups continued to use protest tactics, a form of public participation which Horak sees as increasingly redundant in the double sense that it retained the structures appropriate to anti-regime protest, failing to adapt to a democratic context, and that it produced knowledge resources that were 'useless' as policy-making inputs (petitions, demonstrations, unformulated lists of demands). There is truth in this argument, but an alternative hypothesis also deserves consideration: that regardless of the types of demands put forward by civic groups, the forms of collective action they chose, or their willingness and capacity to engage in 'constructive' policy-making processes, the political elite, led by ODS, closed the door on them because it regarded 'unelected pressure groups' as less legitimate repre-

sentatives of the public interest than political parties, and thus did not attach any value to the knowledge or experience that these groups might bring to the table.

Finally, it is surprising, given the wealth of Czech primary sources consulted by the author, that there are so few non-English secondary sources. I could find only about three exceptions in the bibliography. Although Horak is broadly correct that 'the literature on local government in the region is written largely from the perspective of public administration or policy studies' (p. 28), two non-English studies of local governance have made use of an institutionalist perspective, and would therefore have provided useful comparators: Iwona Sagan's [2000] study of the Polish city of Gdynia and the three-volume study of a Czech town dubbed Filipov, edited by Josef Kandert [1998–2000]. Also overlooked are the numerous empirical studies by Zdenka Vajdová and Michal Illner on the development of Czech local government and local democracy (albeit mostly in rural and small town settings), some of which have been published in English. Melanie Tatur's [2004] edited volumes of regional-scale institution-building in Poland, Hungary, Ukraine and Romania would also have provided a useful reference point.

The concluding chapter, in which Horak attempts to scale up his insights from Prague, is not wholly convincing for reasons stated above, but it still adds considerable insight to the study of transformation in the region. The observation that institutional change is asynchronous and transformation necessarily multi-staged, the consideration of not only state but also societal institutions as factors providing important incentives for decision-makers, and the treatment of social and cultural factors embedded in institutions as both limitations on the decision-making environment and also repertoires that decision-makers can and do draw upon, are all fruitful lines of argument. The account might

have benefited by drawing on some other theoretical perspectives, such as social movement theory and theories of the public sphere, and from broadening its scope to consider the influence on decision-making of other institutions, such as the media. Overall, however, this detailed case study is a welcome addition to the literatures on both transformation and governance.

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Melissa Feinberg: *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship, and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950*

Pittsburgh 2006: University of Pittsburgh Press, viii + 275 pp.

Melissa Feinberg explores disputes about the position of women in Czechoslovak society and situates them at the heart of the debates about the role of the state, the construction of the nation, and the nature of democratic citizenship. The book presents a gripping story of the ups and downs of the Czech women's movement. It spans from the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the time of the interwar First Czechoslovak Republic to the first Communist show trial in 1950, which ended with the execution of one of the leading figures of the movement – Milada Horáková. How-

ever, it strives to be more than a history of one particular movement in one Eastern European country. Feinberg addresses general questions about the intricacies of building a democratic society in conditions where different visions of state, family, equality, and individual freedom co-exist in conflict with each other. Thus, the significance of the analysis goes far beyond Czechoslovakia and the selected historical period. The book will therefore be of interest to diverse audiences including historians, sociologists, political scientists, and legal scholars.

Feinberg's approach to the history of the Czechoslovak First and Second Republics, the aftermath of the Second World War, and the immediate aftermath of the Communist takeover of 1948 is refreshing. Rather than emphasising the role of 'external' geopolitical pressures of fascism and totalitarian communism, she reveals how the Czechoslovak democratic system was undermined from within. In this way, she problematises the image of the 'Czech nation' as essentially receptive to democracy. Instead of taking for granted the idea that Czechs always wanted democracy, Feinberg's analysis invites us to 'think about how and why they feared it' (p. 9). It is in this context that she situates her scrutiny of the Czech feminist movement as an example of the potentials and limits to progressive politics in Czechoslovakia.

The story begins with an account of the surprisingly quick success of women's suffrage activism in Czechoslovakia. The newly independent country was exceptional also in other respects. Its first President, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, openly supported and strongly influenced the women's movement for equal rights, and the country's first Constitution of 1920 abolished privileges of sex, birth, and occupation. Rather than dwelling on the maternalist discourses dominant in the neighbouring countries, Czech feminists grounded their activism in demands for equal citizenship