Politics of exclusion: hegemony in Russian cultural policy discourse

Since 2012, the cultural policy discourse of the Russian state has been characterized by the values of bordering and separating. This development marks a shift from the earlier emphasis on interaction and co-existence. This shift can be partly explained by the fact that the state has recently concentrated on the institutional regulation of national security and enacted new legislation that now touches upon culture, information policy, communication, human rights and foreign affairs. Such changes, in turn, make the social basis for consent in society embedded in culturally shaped common sense, and for antagonism towards any opposition, ranging from political elites and academic circles to protest civic initiatives and critical media coverage. This paper focuses on the ways in which the core concepts of official ideology (Chebankova 2015) penetrate the discourses of cultural policy. It argues that such concepts as single national identity (2013-2015), sovereign state and non-western culture (2014-2015), and special path of development (2012-2015) have been successively introduced in the dominant narrative through which the state legitimatizes its decisions falling under the politics of exclusion. Contrasting images of "Us" and "Them"— highly-moral Russia vs. hedonistic countries of the West — trigger heated debates in 2014-2016.

Using methods and techniques associated with discourse analysis (Laclau and Mouffe 2001), this research explores the features of state and academic discourses in order to learn how these discursive practices engender the empty signifier around which the populist discourse is constituted. The analysis testifies that discourse structures controlled by the state confirm, legitimize and reproduce the paradigm of nation state in society and stigmatize alternative ideas as extremist. The major tools of doing so are fixation on the abovementioned notions, closed nature of communication, representation of top-down hierarchical relations and sacralization of governmental rhetoric. The paper demonstrates that asymmetrical communication, rigid structure of discussion and predominance of monologue in Russian state discourse drive cultural policy and powerfully influence academics debates.
The World Heritage List: credibility under threat?

According to UNESCO National Commission in the Netherlands, the credibility of the World Heritage List (WHL), one of the five strategic objectives of the World Heritage Convention, is currently put in question. The think tank “European politics” consisting of five Russian and five Dutch students who represent different scientific disciplines attempts to develop a set of recommendations on the increase of such credibility based on qualitative research.

In this study, the influence of diversity of various member states on UNESCO policy and the relative credibility of the WHL are considered. By comparing the views of two member states – the Netherlands and Russia – ranging from their interpretations of the term ‘credibility’ to evaluations of the WHL, the researchers attempt to find out if there are differences in the perception of UNESCO’s strategic objectives and functions in the countries under study.

The main research question is: How is the credibility of the WHL influenced by various factors perceived by the national commissions and organizations connected to UNESCO in Russia and the Netherlands? As the research is complex in structure and covers various dimensions of the problem, a kind of theoretical patchwork was developed by the team by applying a set of theories such as social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann 1991) and P. Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital investigating the contribution of cultural intermediaries. In the analysis of the political dimension of UNESCO performance, the authors rely on Barnett and Duvall’s theory on forms of power (2005). Subsequently, they investigate into the manner in which UNESCO presents itself within a cosmopolitan and universal framework. The issue of social engagement is considered from the perspective of the theory of civil society and interest groups.

Empirically, several tools of data collection are applied such as semi-structured interviews with experts from Russia and the Netherlands and qualitative text analysis. The research is still in progress but the preliminary results show that there is a gap between the official UNESCO strategy and the way it is implemented nationally. This could be explained by the fact that each national commission has a different perception of common aims, values and methods, as well as the role of individual stakeholders involved in UNESCO activities. These various perceptions are shaped by numerous factors including social, political, and cultural contexts. In our presentation, we seek to explain the gap between UNESCO structures and to answer the question whether ‘being political’ in fact threatens the credibility of the WHL.