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Sources of Political Marketing Knowledge in Latvia

Abstract

Political marketing is an international phenomenon in the sense that the methods for the achievement of one's political goals in a contemporary society to a large extent are similar all over the globe. One of the explanations why such a phenomenon exists relates to the fact that the knowledge about strategic and tactical planning and implementation of political campaigns are spread from country to country via the services of a foreign political consultants, international organizations, education programs, literature etc.

Latvia is a post-Soviet country and it is geographically, historically, culturally and economically located between the East and the West. The methods of contemporary political campaigning primarily are developed in the Western democracies, however during the last ten years the distinct political consultancy school in Russia is developing as well. The most widespread term of Russian political consultancy industry in a post-Soviet sphere is called "political technologies".

Russian political technologies as well as the Western political consultancy are export industries, and from here derives the main question of the paper – what are the sources of political marketing knowledge of the persons who are in charge of carrying out election campaigns in Latvia? Which influence dominates in Latvia – the Western or Russian? In order to find answers to the questions, expert interviews with political marketing professionals in Latvia are conducted.

Research design

Interaction between political parties and voters, public institutions and citizens, interest groups and public officials is an essential area in politics in which the struggle for power and achievement of one's political objectives are taking place. Since the middle of the last century these political processes in the Western democracies are guided by using tools

and techniques that has proven to be effective in the business world. Kotler and Levy (1969) almost a century ago found out that marketing concept overcomes the borders of a commercial activity and in politics are used the same marketing campaigns as for consumer goods and services. In other words – political campaigns are an important part of modern politics that is characterized by a shift from “selling” of ideologically pre-defined strategy to political marketing, and the focus from community mobilization has shifted to the public persuasion (Scmitt-Beck, 2007).

Political marketing also is an international phenomenon in the sense that the methods for the achievement of one’s political goals in a contemporary society are similar all over the globe. In relation to the fact that political communication methods used throughout the world are similar to large extent in all countries where democratic elections take place, there are two theories that explain these trends – the modernization and diffusion approach (Plasser&Plasser, 2002, pp.16-17). Proponents of the modernization approach stresses the structural changes in politics, society and media system as the key determinants, while the diffusion theory interprets this phenomenon as a process by which methods, concepts and strategy that are developed in one country, are exported and implemented in other countries. This paper uses transnational diffusion approach and focuses on micro-level actors that facilitate political campaigning knowledge transfer from one country to another.

The USA is considered to be a major exporter of political campaigning methods due to the fact that in this country each year are held large amount of public elections and the election organizers face minimal restrictions (Scammell, 1997, p.7.). This way the USA becomes a global training ground for political campaigners and the accumulated and approbated political campaigning knowledge can be exported to other countries. In this regard Mancini and Swanson (1996, p.4) raises the presumption that the politics in today’s world is being Americanized, as many national political candidates, parties and news media overtake approaches used by their counterparts in the USA. Plasser and Plasser (2002, p.21.) points out five micro-level actors, who provide the USA political campaigning expertise spread in trans-national level:

1. Market-driven activities of USA Overseas Consultants and Vendors of Campaign Technologies
2. Market-driven campaign training, seminars and trade journals
3. Donor-driven democracy assistance
4. Professional organizations and transnational platforms and networks
5. Academic programs and USA campaign literature

However, in order to understand the political campaigning environment in Latvia, it is necessary to take a look also in the direction of the post-Soviet region and Russia as its power center, because Latvia is a post-Soviet country with a close economic, cultural, media, social and other ties with Russia. Political campaigning practice in the post-Soviet region, particularly in Russia and partly also in Latvia is called “political technology”. What is a “political technology”? The simplest answer to this question would be that it is a Russian political consultancy school and in fact the term “political technologist” can be used as equivalent to the Western term “political consultant” (Минченко, 2004). Still, one has to be careful with announcing these two terms as equal, because this linguistic peculiarity covers deep conceptual gap between them.

After the breakdown of the USSR there was a hope that states from the post-Soviet region will develop democracy, but today political reality is different – some of the Eastern European countries have developed in the direction of authoritarianism. “Guided democracy”, „managed democracy”, „decorative democracy”, „facade democracy” – these are the terms that are being used for describing current political regime in Russia. The key characteristic of such political regimes – democratic state institutions combined with growing authoritarianism. Krastev (2006, p. 54) calls these regimes “democracy’s doubles” which is the form of authoritarianism suited for the era of democracy. Democracy’s double is a political regime that imitates democratic institutions and procedures, but in fact there is no political representation and pluralism. The definition of decorative democracy given by Kimmage (2009, p. 53) complements the explanation of democracy’s doubles. He stresses that decorative democracy is the political system in which political elite uses elections as a precondition for legitimacy, but do everything in their power to control the outcome.

Since the essence of the guided democracy is the imitation of democracy, the outer manifestations of the political campaigning in Russia and the Western democracies may seem similar. Still Krastev (2006, p. 56) states that “the Russian political technologist resembles a Western political consultant in the way that electric chair resembles an armchair”, because political technology is the key driver of the new form of authoritarianism. Negativity in regards to the phenomenon of “political technology” can be found in other sources as well. For instance, Wilson (Wilson, 2005, p. xiii) explains that the usage of the term “technologies” in a context of political campaigning in Russia derives from post-bolshevik political culture – “black magic” of political manipulation and demagoguery is a characteristic feature of this culture. But Russian political technologists Malkin and Suchkov (Малкин&Сучков, 2006, p.24) are even more frank – they have an opinion that the term “political technologist” gains

more popularity in Russia than “political consultant”, “image maker” and other terms due to the fact that it is the one that best fits with the word “dirty”.

The essence of the “political technology” is political manipulation, and there is a fundamental difference between the Western “political consultancy” and Russian “political technologies”, because the latter imitate democracy within authoritarian political system, but the Western political consultancy techniques operate within democratic political system. Despite the fact that the outer manifestation of the methods used by Russian “political technologists” and the Western political consultants are similar, “political technologists” advanced the development of current authoritarian regime in Russia. In fact the development of “political technology” in Russia is paradoxical, because it started after the breakdown of the USSR with an intense import of the Western political campaigning know-how that was done with a purpose to advance democracy. But gradually the powerful techniques of mass persuasion were used for the sake of strengthening the power of the ruling elite. This can be better understood by taking a look at major turning points in the development of “political technology” as they are outlined by Malkin and Suchkov (Малкин&Сучков, 2006, pp. 34 – 37):

- **1989 – 1996** – the intense education of Russian “democrats” by the Western experts in political campaigning;
- **1996 – 1997** – B. Jeltsin’s election campaign and following regional elections proved that political manipulation is more effective than the usage of physical force;
- **1998** – elections in St. Petersburg with the intense usage of “dirty technologies” and the growing importance of a “political technologist “ as a profession;
- **2000** – Election of V. Putin as an indicator that the “political technologists” art of political manipulation is a key instrument for the government of Russia.

In terms of the distribution of “political technology” abroad Russia in the post-Soviet region, there are some similarities with the role of the USA as a political campaigning vanguard in the Western countries. The research carried out by Mincenko (Минченко, 2004) gives evidence that Russian political technology have become the country's export industry, which is demanded in the post-Soviet countries for several reasons:

1) Like in the USA, there were much more elections in Russia than in neighboring countries (until 2004, when direct elections of governors was abolished). It gave the

possibility for Russian political consultants of extensive development and improvement of the political campaign techniques.

2) Russian political consultants are much better in understanding the post-Soviet political culture than their Western counterparts.

3) Many potential customers of Russian political consultants in the post-Soviet region have business contacts in Russia and they often recommend Russian political consultants outside Russia.

4) After 2004 the amount of work between the national elections in Russia decreased and Russian political consultants became interested in to seek markets outside their home country.

The study of Russian political consultants' international activities (Минченко, 2004) reveals that Russians have provided their services in 27 countries in various regions of the world, but the greatest demand for Russian “political technology” services are in Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Both countries are geographically close to Russia; their political and electoral rules are similar to the ones in Russia, and there are close ties with Russian politicians and political campaign specialists in political and business elite in Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

Taking into consideration that Latvia is a post-Soviet country that tries to integrate into the Western democratic society, two research questions are formulated in respect to the flow of knowledge about political campaigning:

RQ1: What sources of knowledge about political campaigning are used by Latvian practitioners of political campaigning?

RQ2: What influence can be found in Latvian political campaigning practice – the Western or Russian, or both?

Research Method

For the purpose of answering research questions, 12 in-depth interviews with Latvian political campaigning practitioners were conducted. In order to gain more open and more accurate view on the political campaigning practice in Latvia, the identities of the respondents are not disclosed. Such an approach proved to be effective as some of the respondents disclosed certain facts and views after they have double-checked that their identity will be anonymous.

In the scope of respondents there were included politicians that had taken part in at least one election campaign on behalf of their parties, and external experts that are not members of the parties, but who has been hired for at least one election campaign as

consultants, public relation and/or advertising experts. The decision to include in the research both politicians and external experts are based on two considerations. Firstly, in Latvian political practice representatives of the party has the main responsibility for the overall strategy of political campaigning. But they hire external experts for carrying out such important tasks as advertising material production, event management, media planning, sociology etc, which means that the role of the external experts also is considerable. Secondly, the number of experts in political campaigning in Latvia is very small; therefore it was useful to interview both types of experts. In order to get a comparative perspective, one manager of a foreign non-governmental organization who has office in Latvia also was interviewed.

All the interviews were conducted from February till April 2011, the length of the interviews ranged from 40 minutes till 1 hour. This paper covers only one part of the broader research that includes also such topics as applicability of Western and Russian political campaigning methods in Latvia, the peculiarities of Latvia as an environment for political campaigning, political consultancy as a professional field in Latvia. The part of the research that is covered in this paper focused on the transnational micro-level actors as defined by Plasser and Plasser (2002) that is used by Latvian political campaigning practitioners for gaining knowledge about political campaigning. During the interviews the respondents revealed other important sources of the knowledge as well.

Findings

Latvian politicians who were interviewed for this research, fully agrees with the theorists who argue that political campaigns have become a major part of today's politics (Interview 3, Interview 4) and the same techniques that are used for commercial goods and services promotion are fully applicable to politics (Interview 4, Interview 6). For example, one of the politicians emphasizes that effective political communication is one of the most important prerequisites that is necessary in order to gain political power:

Political communication – it is more than important in politics, because the form is as important as the content of politics. One thing is what you as a politician, as a party or the country want to do, but if you cannot put it in the right form, you will never be able to implement the content of the politics. Every politician needs power, because without the power she will not be unable to realize herself, but in order to gain power, political communication is of crucial importance. (Interview 3)

Political communication plays a key role in the fight for political power; therefore one can conclude that parties' success in elections is largely determined by the knowledge, skills and competence of the people who are responsible for political campaign management. In this regard, it is important to note that in Latvia the overall strategic direction of political campaigns are largely carried out by the people from the political parties, but the external experts of political communication are hired for carrying out separate political campaign elements, such as media planning, promotional materials production, event management, etc. (Interview 1, Interview 2, Interview 5, Interview 8, Interview 10). What knowledge, skills and qualities are considered to be essential in Latvia for a person who is responsible for political campaign strategic management?

From a number of politicians who were interviewed in this research came out an unequivocal conclusion that a political campaign manager must be a person with a versatile knowledge (Interview 1, Interview 5 Interview 6). Political campaign manager needs to have a common understanding of the structure of the state, the distribution of responsibilities between different state organs, basics of public administration and legislation (Interview 1). Political campaign managers must have a thorough knowledge of current political situation and be well aware of the spectrum of problems in national and international level that are considered to be important by the political party one represents (Interview 5). She also needs to have a very good knowledge of her own party - what is its purpose, its political program, members of the party, as well as the party's electorate (Interview 6). Political campaign manager should also be aware of the social and economic situation in the country and how to use it in the political campaign (Interview 6). As for higher education that could be useful for a political campaign manager, such areas as economics, management science, sociology and political science were mentioned (Interview 1).

In addition to the full and comprehensive knowledge that is necessary for the people who run political campaigns, there are also a set of important character traits and professional skills. Given the fact that political campaign manager cannot take decisions alone and usually she has to work together with the party leadership, she must also be a good manager in order to deal with different organizational issues (Interview 5). An essential skill for this work is an ability to sell (Interview 6). One of the politicians, in response to a question about characteristics of the external expert that determined his choice to work with him, indicates that the most important thing was to his inherent cynicism:

Absolute cynicism, because it is a pretty important quality if you want to sell something. You have to be very cynical towards the object you sell; you must not be

emotionally in love with it. Many people do not have this trait, but he has the innate cynicism. Yes, other think that cynicism is a bad feature, but it depends on what profession you work. (Interview 4)

Of course, there is also a different view about political communication that is expressed by a foreign non-governmental organization leader that works in Baltic States. He also points out that political communication is very important in politics, but it should be based on building up permanent and long-term relationship between politicians and the public rather than product sales in the short term. According to the foreign expert, there is a huge deficit in such an understanding of politics in Latvia:

Constant communication with the electorate is very important, and I think it is a serious deficit in Latvian politics. We try to explain and convince that this is an essential prerequisite for the party to succeed in the long run. It requires continuous contact with the electorate, rather than a public relations campaign every four years. It also requires effort from each of the politicians so that they understand what their role is as politicians. They must understand that their role is not only to make decisions about the future development of the country, but also listen to the people, and carry back their statements to the parliament. At least this is the way how I understand politics. In business it is known as customer relationship management, but none of the political parties in Latvia are doing it, because political parties are too weak. (Interview 11)

So in order to maintain the constant communication and be responsive to the electorate, it is important that not only political leaders and political campaign managers, but every politician must have an understanding and knowledge of political communication processes. However, as it was pointed out by several respondents, the lack of knowledge of Latvian politicians is quite common (Interview 6 Interview 7 Interview 11). For example, the opinion of one of the external experts:

I have many friends in current parliament, therefore from my direct and first-hand experience I can say that many of these people can be characterized by the lack of knowledge of political communication processes, the image building of the political party, they do not understand how their every word and action may transform not only their image but also the party's image. (Interview 7)

The manager of the foreign non-governmental organization in the Baltic States is looking at this problem from a comparative perspective and concludes that political parties in Germany invests far more resources in educating their members on matters of political

communication. He also points out that in the countries with old democracy traditions of particular importance in the education of party members are the youth organizations of political parties, because it is the first step how people are integrated into the party:

Overall, I think that education and knowledge is a key element in any political party – the political campaigning, the rhetorical skills and other skills. In this respect, Latvian parties are far behind other European countries. (Interview 11)

The conclusion that Latvian politicians have low education level in terms of political communication corresponds with the fact that both politicians and external experts that were interviewed in the course of this study, indicated that their most important source of knowledge on political campaigning is a self-study – books, publications, online sources, as well as their practical experience that is gained by leading or participating in political campaigns (Interview 1, Interview 2, Interview 6, Interview 8 Interview 9, Interview 10, Interview 12). For example, one of the politicians talks about his experience as of becoming a political campaign manager:

I was a Head of the regional branch of the party and I wanted to participate in self-government election campaign. That was a challenge and responsibility; therefore I had to do self-study in order to understand how to build up a scenario of political campaign and to present it to colleagues. If you have a vision and a plan then you can become the coordinator of the campaign. Then you plan the campaign on your own intuition and knowledge how to address voters. If the result is good, then one can conclude that it was well done. Interview 1

Many of the politicians, who today are active in Latvian politics, started their political career before of the collapse of the USSR. An interesting experience is shared by the politician who took part in the election campaign of the Communist Party during the period of the change of the political regimes:

In 1990 there were the Supreme Council elections, and the Party had a small group of three persons who was responsible for the election campaign. Despite the very limited financial, technical and intellectual resources, we achieved not bad results. For me it was the first experience to work in election campaigns. This was the beginning and it was a self-education – I had to read books, look at how campaigns happened in other countries. The situation has changed, people changed, so one could not use such methods as were used in all previous years, when the communist bloc won each and every elections. There were quite sharp and not always civilized competition, but the main source of knowledge was self-study. Interview 2

Self-study as the main source of knowledge is mentioned not only by politicians, but also by the external experts of political campaigning:

I've been reading some of the ordinary American books, but my main work tools are "Paul's Letter to the Romans" and "The Prince" by N. Machiavelli. On the overall it is sufficient, and the rest is small matters – analysis of the campaign results and a healthy cynicism. N. Machiavelli is an underestimated author in the field of public relations, because all of the principles defined by him are very well applicable in corporate governance. Interview 12

Another external expert stresses that the most important source of knowledge is practical experience:

The main source of knowledge is life, and when I listen to some academic political scientists comments about politics in media ... I know that there is just a quarrel between two persons, but political scientists raise some sort of theory about it ... In fact, the politicians just have not divided a cup of coffee, and so it really is, because Latvia is a very small country, and all those people have quarreled somewhere in life ... Interview 9

The practical political experience as more important prerequisite for successful political campaigning than academic education in political science is recognized also by a politician who has a political scientist background:

Political science background can definitely help to plan the campaign, but it is not enough. In the first place there must be something of a political experience, because much of the academic life is different from political life which is more trivial. Interview 3

This politician as an important source of knowledge indicates consultations with more experienced Latvian politicians that have been in politics for around twenty years (Interview 3). Also, one of the external experts pointed out that at the time when she involved in political campaigning for the first time, she has consulted and asked for advice to people with practical experience in this area (Interview 7).

Self study or "life education" usually is contrasted to the academic education that is a systematic and comprehensive way of obtaining knowledge in a certain field of study. In this respect, respondents are divided - some are very skeptical with respect to academic education as an important source of knowledge for political campaigning (Interview 2, Interview 9), but some of them has a positive attitude (Interview 1, Interview 7, Interview 10, Interview 12). However, academic education is not considered as a crucial prerequisite for running political

campaigns, as several successful experts in the field are without higher education at all (Interview 4, Interview 9, Interview 12) and it is widely recognized that theoretical knowledge that can be obtained in Latvian higher education system either give an incomplete picture of the Latvian political practice, or may even be the contrary. The explanation why political theory contradicts Latvian political practice is given by an external expert:

Most of the political theory is not applicable in Latvia, because we have different political structure. In the Western democracies, there is "the political fabric" in which all this can happen, but we have no political discussions among clearly defined political forces, we do not have right – left political discussion. We have division in the "good" political forces and the "bad" political forces. Interview 12

Moreover, none of the respondents had studied abroad, and in particular did not consider the possibility of complementing their knowledge in foreign universities. Scientific conferences as a source of information on political campaigns do not use any of the interviewed politicians and external experts, except one of the experts who attended conferences at the time of her doctoral studies (Interview 10).

The essential knowledge source for Latvian politicians and the political campaign outside experts is the international networks of political parties, the circulation of information in those networks, which also spreads information on political campaigning practices (Interview 3, Interview 4, Interview 5, Interview 6, Interview 9, and Interview 11). Since the Latvian party system is very weak and parties do not have well-developed structures (Interview 11), the involvement in the international party networks, is one of the ways to acquire the knowledge and to compensate for the shortcomings of the Latvian political system. Number of respondents indicates that they use the opportunities offered by the party alliances, which brings together parties with similar ideological guidelines, such as the European People's Party, the Liberal Democrats, etc. (Interview 4 Interview 5 Interview 9).

Two respondents, representing different political forces, indicate that they themselves or their political campaign managers have traveled to Italy in order to learn the methods used in political campaigns (Interview 5, interview 9). One of the arguments as to why Italy was chosen was the fact that it is relatively inexpensive to go to Italy (Interview 9). In this respect, it is important to note that Latvian parties involve not only in the European party networks, but also have cooperation with Russia's political parties. For example, the party union "Harmony Center" cooperates with the Russian party "United Russia", which is exactly the same model of cooperation as is with European parties, which is used to promote the Latvian development in a certain ideological direction (Interview 6).

However, as is witnessed by a foreign NGO leader, Latvian politicians do not use the opportunities given by the European party networks as actively as it should be possible:

International party networks play an important role, but the Latvian political parties are not overly active in these international organizations. In order to access the knowledge, it is necessary to have an active networking. This is the way how to learn from one another, and here I see that Latvian political parties are not active doing it.

Interview 11

Of relatively great importance is the training courses provided by various foreign non-governmental organizations aimed at promoting democratic development. Several politicians pointed to the fact that they have visited the training courses and named such organizations as the U.S. Democratic Institute, the Friedrich Neumann Foundation, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Interview 1, Interview 2, and Interview 5). The purpose and the mode of such cooperation are explained by the interviewed manager of such an organization:

The training is not so much about the political campaign strategies, as we focus more on programmatic issues of the Latvian political parties. We see shortcomings in Latvian political parties in this regard and we provide support. For instance, we bring Latvian politicians to Germany, so they can discuss with leading German politicians about the party's ideology, organizing principles and the party life, as well as how to build a programmatic structure of the party. We also bring experts to Latvia and organize seminars, exchange ideas and discuss various party building issues. Interview 11

By contrast, completely unused source of political campaigning knowledge is participation in international professional organizations, such as the International Association of Political Consultants. The external experts of political campaigning, who might be the most interested in participation in such organizations, even are not aware that such organizations exist (Interview 9). Only one of the experts theoretically considered that it might be an important additional information and knowledge source (Interview 10). Latvian experts of political campaigning also rejects the usefulness of training courses and seminars provided by international professional organizations, as all the necessary information can be found on the Internet (Interview 8 Interview 9). Of little importance also are commercial activities by foreign political consultants in Latvia. There have been some cases when Latvian politicians have used their services, but it happens very rare due to the facts that it is expensive and that external experts are not aware of the peculiarities of Latvian political system (Interview 3, Interview 4, Interview 8, Interview 9).

One of the sources of knowledge for the “older” generation of Latvian politicians could also be the experience gained in a Communist Party and soviet secret and security services. Towards such an idea leads the fact noted by one of the external experts that there is a significant difference in political communication style between the politicians that were active in politics before the breakdown of the USSR and the new political generation that came to power recently. According to the view of the expert, the older generation of politicians can be characterized by a higher level of professionalism in terms of political communication (Interview 7). Politician has an idea that the older politicians are more professional due to the fact, that Communist Party was the only “real” party in terms of party building and organizational structures that Latvian society has been experienced:

In Latvia we do not have political parties in a sense how it is understood in the Western Europe, because our parties do not have an ideology. For us a good example of political party, not in terms of the ideology, but in terms of building a party, working with young people and other social groups, and promoting ideology with the help of media, was the Communist Party. At that times the new members of the Party had to undergo lots of schools, they had to have the experience, but in nowadays often completely accidental people get elected into the Parliament. Interview 6

This politician also agrees from her practical experience that the Soviet secret and security services people were well trained in various aspects of political communication, but she regrets that after the restoration of Latvian independence, this human resource had not been properly evaluated and used (Interview 6). In terms of the period shortly before and after the collapse of the USSR, the politician points to yet another group of people who had an advantage in politics. They were people who acted in opposition before the breakdown of the USSR and it gave them practical know-how about working in circumstances of political competition that was not the case with the members of the Communist Party (Interview 6).

Interestingly, movies are one of the sources that form an idea and understanding of the way how political campaigns are run and how political consultants are working. A number of respondents (Interview 6, interview 9, Interview 10) enthusiastically named the films that they liked and what they would recommend as a source that gives insight into political campaigning behind the scenes, for example, “Spinning Boris”, “The Dog wags the Tale” and many more.

As to Western vs. Russian influence, one can say that experience of the Western Europe is prevailing, but there is also some USA and Russian influence. Many respondents are following and comparing political campaigning practices in different countries (Interview

2, Interview 7, Interview 8, and Interview 9). For instance, one of the external experts is actively using Russian on-line book store, but not only for obtaining books by Russian authors, but also for purchasing books by the Western authors that are translated in Russian and are cheaper than their English versions (Interview 7). Both politicians and external experts of political campaigning admit that in order to build up their knowledge of political campaigning, they use both sources – Western and Russian (Interview 2, Interview 8). As to the Western influence, then it differs from each respondent's personal views and taste, some prefer Western European experience as more suitable for Latvia (Interview 2, Interview 6), but some have focused and tried to implement in Latvia USA political campaigning experience (Interview 5, Interview 10).

Discussion

Research findings about political campaigning strategic knowledge transnational diffusion micro – level actors are summarized in Table 1 (p.15). In order to gain a full picture of the Latvian political campaigning practitioners' sources of knowledge, the global sources are complemented with local as they were mentioned by the respondents. The table also includes the evaluation of the importance of the source: very low – low – medium – high – very high; and an indication about the foreign influence: Western and Russian.

In general, Latvian political campaign practitioners do not use all opportunities that are available for purposeful and systematical complementation of their knowledge. Overall one can say that the level of knowledge of political communication in Latvia is rather low and amateurish as the main source of knowledge is self – study. Undoubtedly, this is a very important element of education that can give people a lot, but it is not systematic and comprehensive study of the field that could be possible through academic education. However, given the fact that Latvian academic education does not meet the Latvian political practice, it is clear that such studies does not help one achieve their professional goals in the practice of political campaigning. Why studies abroad are not considered by the respondents of the survey? One of the reasons is that some high-level external experts are very successful without higher education at all, but active politicians are busy with their primary tasks.

International party networks and foreign non-governmental organizations are the main sources of knowledge, through which the knowledge of a foreign political campaigns are imported in Latvia. In this respect, there is both Western and Russian influence, but in general, one can find more Western influence, because the Western non-governmental organizations aimed at promoting democracy are active in Latvia. Russia's political forces

cannot do anything like that, because it would be perceived very negatively in Latvia, as such activities would be treated as an operational tool for Russian interests. But certainly, there is also great Russia's influence on political campaigning practice, because Latvian political campaign practitioners read Russian authors works and learn from Russian experts.

Table 1. Sources of knowledge of Latvian political campaign practitioners

Sources of knowledge	Importance	Western and Russian influence
GLOBAL		
Self study – books, publications, the Internet	Very high	Western and Russian
International party networks	High	Western and Russian
Donor driven democracy assistance	High	Western
International professional organizations	Very low	n/a
Market-driven trainings and seminars	Very low	n/a
Academic education	Low*	Western and Russian
Scientific conferences	Very low	n/a
Feature films	Medium	Western (and Latvian)
Market-driven activities of foreign political consultants	Low	Western and Russian
LOCAL		
Consultation of experienced colleagues	High	n/a
Academic education	Low	n/a
Experience in the Communist Party	Low	n/a
Opposition before the regime change	Low	n/a

*The respondents of the study have not been studied political communication abroad, but some other practitioners in Latvia have studied in Russian and Western universities, but these are rather exceptional cases.

The indicator of the Latvian political campaigning practitioners detachment and seclusion is the fact that almost all respondents were not aware that there exists international professional association of political consultants. Consequently, those organizations do not have members from Latvia. However, this trend could also be related to the fact that political consultancy as such is underdeveloped in Latvia and there are just a small number of people who can be considered to be political consultants (according to estimation of respondents of the survey – in Latvia there is no more that 10 political consultants (Interview 4, Interview 6,

Interview 10). Nevertheless, this is a missed opportunity that for some could become a competitive advantage in the political Latvian market.

Interesting research finding is that feature films can be considered as one of the political campaigning transnational diffusion micro-level actor. An important finding is also that our current political environment and the distribution of power to some extent are determined by the situation before the Soviet collapse. For instance, politicians that were former members of the Communist Party were more experienced than political newcomers. By contrast, certain competitive advantage gained also those politicians that acted in opposition to the Communist Party, because they were more prepared for political competitions right after the restoration of the independence of the country. One of the important findings is that the critical source of knowledge is practical experience in a given political system and it brought to yet another source of knowledge, which was not identified prior to the initiation of the study - the most experienced colleagues' advice that was pointed out by a politician and an external expert.

Conclusion

The research of Latvian political campaigning practice reveals that in respect to the transnational flow of information and knowledge about political campaigning it is more accurate to speak about the “globalization” of political campaigning rather than “Americanization”, because in Latvia the most dominant influence is from the Western Europe and Russia, but the USA political campaigning practice is used to a lesser degree, although it is important as well.

All of the transnational diffusion micro-level actors of the USA campaigning expertise as defined by Plasser and Plasser (2002, p.21) are relevant, but they can be complemented with **feature films** as an actor that gives overall understanding of political campaigning practice in the USA. Within the European context such actor as **international party networks** is very important for exchange of know-how about political campaigning. It is also important to mention that in Europe there are European non-governmental organizations that are promoting democratic way of party building and political campaigning. In Latvia very active are German NGOs - Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Friedrich Neumann Foundation, and Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

The research also revealed that Latvian political campaigning practitioners are using just a limited scope of possible education sources, and the most important one is the self study. From here it can be concluded that overall Latvian political campaigning practice is

amateurish. Another related conclusion is that Latvian political campaigning practitioners are rather locally oriented, because they stress the uniqueness of Latvian political campaigning environment and in this regard they are rather skeptical about involving foreign political consultants in the political campaigns in Latvia. Of course, this skepticism about the possibility of foreign political consultants to understand Latvian political context goes hand in hand with the lack of financial resources that might be another reason for the overall seclusion, because participation in international professional organizations, attendance of market-driven seminars and trainings and even visits to foreign political party offices – it all takes some amount of financial investment.

It is also evident that an important factor that determines the political campaigning environment in Latvia is its post-Soviet reality. The general lack of democratic traditions, values and understanding makes impossible fully adopt and implement political campaigning solutions that are used in the Western democracies. One of the most crucial problems in this regard as was mentioned by several respondents is the lack of the left – right structure of competing political forces and ideologies. Also one has take into the consideration the communist past that was a learning environment for many politicians that are still active in Latvian politics. At the same time Latvia is far more democratic than Russia, therefore methods of political campaigning created and used in Russia also can be implemented just partially. Therefore in terms of understanding the principles of political campaigning Latvia is a mixture of the Western and Russian influences with its own uniqueness that is determined by mentality of the people, political culture and to some extent the communist past.

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