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Potential of Using the Network Approach in the Studies of the Russian Statehood in the pre-Romanov Period

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Abstract. This article aims to consider the possibility of using the network approach in domestic research on the foundations of the formation of statehood in the pre-Roman period of Russian political history. The paper pays special attention to the situation, existing methods and principles of the network approach in the context of the problem under consideration, as well as their applicability, taking into account the time frame and the amount of data available for analysis.

Keywords: network approach, methodology, analysis, foundations of the state, Russia, pre-Romanov period

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Introduction

Radical changes in the internal, regional and global political space in 2022 were expectedly followed by a shift in the focus of attention and the processes of updating scientific research aimed inward/at oneself in the context of Russian science. In parallel with this, there is an increase in social and state requests for such research, which, in general, indicates an attempt at public-state reflection based on the scientific community. As part of this process, researchers are tasked

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with a deep and comprehensive review, analysis and comparison of the historical contexts of our national political history and the history of state building. Moreover, in addition to a fairly high interest in the political processes of the last centuries, the subject field is intensively filled with problems and questions during the pre-Roman history of our country, including within the framework of the project program “DNA of Russia”. Under these conditions, one way or another, the question arises of choosing the most effective approaches, methods and techniques, which is an integral part of the development of research strategy and design. In this regard, this article is aimed at a comprehensive presentation of the current state of the network approach in domestic socio-political sciences, for evaluation and consideration by researchers in the process of forming the theoretical and methodological foundation of the study.

Consideration of the issue of the formation of Russian statehood in the pre-Romanov period imposes a number of restrictions on the range of applicable modern scientific methods and analysis techniques. On the one hand, this is due to the relationship between remoteness in time and a decrease in the number of surviving written and material sources of socio-political and economic orientation, as well as to the peculiarities of interpreting the results obtained and their scaling. On the other hand, this adds to the limitations of the network approach itself, and even more so network analysis, which is extremely dependent on access to data on communication between stakeholders and on the nature of their connections, not to mention the conduct of longitudinal studies. Nevertheless, as will be described below, there are many examples of the use of a network approach to the historical periods of development of individual countries, which made it possible to gain new knowledge or refute previous assumptions about the objects under study. Thus, in this work, we are faced with two main tasks — to consider the range of already used methods of network theory and, based on an assessment of the characteristics of the object of study, draw conclusions regarding their applicability.

Network approach

In 2008 The American Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and Office of the Director of National Intelligence published their fourth iteration of global trends research “Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World” with the paragraph entitled “A World of Networks”. The authors emphasize what a great power comes to international organization and NGOs gathering resources and stakeholders into flexible and open structures with common goal. Furthermore, they note that “a new set of social actors—super-empowered individuals and even criminal networks—increasingly will influence outcomes” [1]. New actors, game rules, the level of uncontrollability and the possibility of using new information technologies for criminal purposes cause understandable concern among authorities and those in power now.

Of course, the network concept emerged and developed in socio-political science and public administration expert community discourse long before 2008.

R. Rhodes, D. Marsh, C.L. Crumley [2], T. Borzel [3] and many others have made a great impact to the development of the network approach and its implementation. At first, they needed to distinguish policy networks and other form of social communication using different definitions of the term. For example, T. Berzel describes it as “set of relatively stable relationship which are of non-hierarchical and interdependent nature linking a variety of actors, who share common interests with regard to a policy and who exchange resources to pursue these shared interests acknowledging that co-operation is the best way to achieve common goals” [4]. As a result, we got an ideal model of communication and governance — not only elements and links between them but the new vision of alternative way of social organization. The biggest problem was just the gap between the network and hierarchical structures. For state, the situation is complicated by the difficulties of adaptation, systemic delays inherent in social systems and political reactionism.

As for studying of historical contexts network approach finds itself in a difficult position especially for in the Russian scientific field.

There are some Persistent misconceptions:

- Network — exclusively Internet, social networks of the XXI century;
- Network communication is a phenomenon exclusively of the XX–XXI centuries;
- Network analysis is an inaccessible, complex, expensive method.

Position of the network approach

- Methodological (meso level);
- Interdisciplinary (STS, ANT);
- Geographic.

Method

Speaking of the method, the study can be divided into three consecutive steps:

- First, we looked for cases in which many participants were involved in solving a common problem and one of the participants had to be a state or other powerful hierarchical structure. At this stage, we used the methods of included observation, content analysis, case studies and interviews.

- Next, we analyzed selected cases through the prism of a network and communication approach and the concept of political networks.
- After the first two steps, we recorded cases of non-standard behavior and disruptions in the network, caused in our opinion by the internal differences of the participants, guided by different principles of management and behavior patterns. To capture these differences, we tried using different approaches such as multi-level governance in networks, hybrid approach combining hierarchy and network.

Technological basis:

- Programs for the formation of a database (content analysis, analysis of digital resources, statistical);
- Network analysis programs;
- Data visualization programs.

Detecting new structure

The starting point for the study was Setting goals:

- As part of the Mission of Science — +-obtaining new knowledge, testing existing, debunking myths. (The problem of rewriting history);
- Identification of the network nature of relationships and network structures;
- Search for answers, confirmation of theories within the current discussion field;

Since the middle of the 20th century, the network approach has been actively used in political science research. The main directions of network research are:

- The emergence and formation of the ancient Russian state;
- The period of the baptism of Rus’;
- Feudal fragmentation;
- Rus’ during the Tatar-Mongol yoke;
- Russian Tsardom and the Expansion of Rus’ to the East;
- Time of Troubles and the transitional period between the kingdoms from the Rurikovich to the Romanovs.

As part of the study of the historical period of development of the Russian state that we are considering, special attention is drawn to the use of a network approach in political anthropology, research on power relations, the adoption of certain political decisions or features of the political structure of peoples. All these aspects are systemically important for networking. The analysis of that field revealed a complex system of relationships between the network of participants, including Councils of princes, boyars, zemstvo congresses. A certain correlation was found between the nature of these relationships and effectiveness. The main goals of this network are to make political and state decisions. The most difficult problem here was a lack of information on a grass-roots level. Work in the new mode led to the formation of new processes:

- The process of mitigating or dispersing the vertical impact;
- The process of vertical distribution of network relationships.

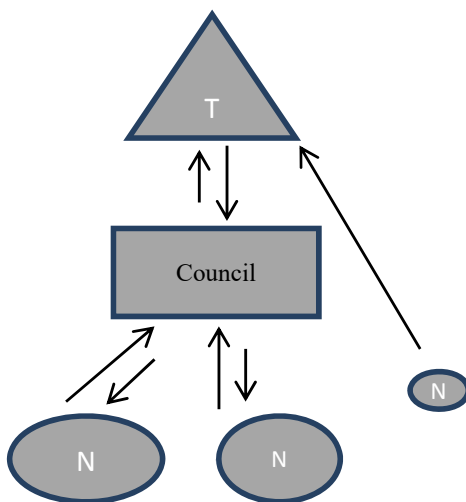


Fig. 1. Public council institution from Tsar to nobles.

Source: own research, 2022

Understanding of behavior

If you ask a political anthropologist [5] about state in the frame of variability of social evolution he wouldn't be so confident about the lack of alternative development with increasing complexity of society. But as we can see after the era of great geographical discoveries, the transit of European statehood and then the achievements of uniformity of state structure already in the era of globalization and nation-states, the position of state power seems to be the only available option. But the World of Networks is like shuffling new cards into a deck and putting them on the table by the new rules. Obviously, states do not want to give up their nature and internal organization completely, so there are two ways: adapt accepting its partial changes or to do what mankind does best — adapt the environment. Those are the new alternatives for political evolution.

The use of network approach:

- To see the improving the quality of decision making.
- Improving the effectiveness of the work of authorities. This has largely affected the diversification and emergence of new forms of political and non-political participation of citizens.

There is one problem with such an approach — reforms often go hand in hand with dissatisfaction of citizens and instability, at least for some political forces. That can push a state to another path — adaptation of the environment for itself, with the preservation and sometimes even strengthening of the hierarchy and centralization. That often leads to a situation with only a nominal or visible presence of several equal participants in the political process or the rules of the game, supposedly regulating a flexible system of decision-making and management, which is often necessary, for example, in case of artificial legitimation in case of growth of protest moods; involves the underdevelopment of network culture, the use of manipulative technologies, etc.

During this step there is an attempt to comprehend and describe relations between networks and hierarchy, which in the first place requires the choice of the correct methodology and scientific approach or several approaches to the study of the identified problem. The main requirement for the choice was to consider the complexity and heterogeneity of the nature of these socio-political relations, combining formal and informal horizontal ties and hierarchical ties of varying stiffness.

For the few years, we have been researching a methodological field and doing a comparative analysis of the various approaches and their heuristic potential within the framework of the subject field.

Three large groups of approaches were formed: the first one reveals the essence of the phenomenon of network interaction, typifies and describes them (network theory, the concept of political networks, cybernetics graph theory, network analysis and others, communication theory); it the second group there are approaches to the study of the modern state, its structure and functioning (general theory of state and law, the theory of politics and political management, the theory of political systems and system analysis of politics and etc.), and finally the third group covers

and describes the features of communication directly between the hierarchical structures of the state and the network structures of society, offers analytically and prognostic tools for a given subject field (Multi-level management, hybrid approach, good governance concept, Heterarchy concept and others).

The last group is possibly important for the research, since the scientific basis for the study and analysis of both political networks and the modern government is largely formed as we can see it in the modern theoretical researches [1], and the time has come for their synthesis, using non-reductionist approaches and taking into account the environment.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions. As we can see networks have started playing a crucial role for the mankind not only in 21st century. First, network approach is A non-reductionist communicative approach aimed at overcoming the limitations of the systemic and structural-functional approaches, obtaining and objectifying new knowledge. But the process of networks' development was not the same in different spheres of human life. The most enabling environment for networking is where people are ready for cooperation based on trust and common interests or goals on a horizontal level. But the reality and the environment are often far beyond the ideal models. Strict hierarchy, lack of resource parity, different interests and goals are usual for public administration's sphere and politics. It forms a special subject field which requires adequate methodological base, concepts and analytical tools.

A state due to its structural and system aspects is in a peculiar situation. Social reality is changing faster than a political subsystem. With the network approach we can observe how our state looked like in the past. Evidently, it was a world of networks and a world with networks.

In our opinion, the network approach allows us to raise a wide range of research issues, due to both the duration of the period under review and the level of problems from external state relations to internal relations between principalities, peculiarities of court life and political and administrative decision-making.

The main limitation of the network approach is the availability and accessibility of data and information sources.

Recommendations for researchers.

We suggest using the following information base:

- Results of archaeological research;
- Results of studies of Archaeogenetics (Analysis-DNA), radiocarbohydrate, paleomagnetic and other types of analysis [6].
- Anthropological research;
- Translations of texts.

On the step of content-analysis we suggest using following software for content analysis: Dedoose. For the more information about using this software refer to our previous publications on the subject [7; 8].

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Возможности использования сетевого подхода в исследованиях государственности России в доромановский период

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Аннотация. Данная статья ставит своей целью рассмотрение возможности использования сетевого подхода в отечественных исследованиях основ становления государственности в доромановский период российской политической истории. В работе особое внимание уделяется положению, существующим методам и принципам сетевого подхода в контексте рассматриваемой проблематики, а также их применимости, с учетом временных рамок и количества доступных для анализа данных.

Ключевые слова: сетевой подход, методология, анализ, основы государства, Россия, доромановский период

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