

Governance in Russian regions: a policy comparison.

Sabine Kropp, Aadne Aasland, Mikkel Berg-Nordlie, Jørn Holm-Hansen and Johannes Schuhmann (editors). 2018. London: Palgrave Macmillan. xi + 249 p, hardcover. ISBN 978-3-319-61701-5. £109.99. doi: [10.1007/978-3-319-61702-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-61702-2)
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The title of the present volume slightly misled this reviewer at first, as it seemed to promise something broader in scope and more general than it does. This misunderstanding was, however, clarified in the preface (chapter 1), in which S. Kropp states two main goals, which the book largely fulfils: first, to contribute to governance *network* theory with a reflection on its applicability in hybrid or authoritarian regimes, and second, to provide ‘thick descriptions’ (p 5) of *some* selected and very specialised policy areas in *some* of Russia’s regions: HIV prevention in Saint Petersburg and Samara, Environmental Impact Assessments in Krasnodar and Irkutsk, climate change adaptation in Saint Petersburg and Arkhangelsk, child welfare in various undifferentiated regions, ethnic conflict management in Krasnodar and Stavropol, and indigenous (Sami) self-representation in Murmansk. These two goals are reflected in the circular design of the collective work: a theoretical introduction (chapter 2), empirical case studies (chapters 3 to 8) and a conclusion feeding back empirical findings into theory (chapter 9).

Throughout the theoretical parts of the book (preface, chapters 2 and 9), the authors claim a non-normative stance vis-a-vis Russia, and assume that the ‘pattern of the mix’ (Davies, 2011) of vertical and horizontal governance methods applied in this country is not qualitatively different from that in western democratic societies. This is a refreshing approach, contrasting with the many western studies of the Russian regime whose systematically accusatory tone, rooted in the neo-liberal or social-democratic ideologies of the European Union and the US, often limits the usefulness of the argument. However, this same claim of non-normativity somewhat backlashes, as could be expected, against the authors as they obviously have not found the long-sought secret to ‘objectivity’ in social science and introduce *some* normativity in the focus and frame. Namely, both the case studies and the theoretical chapters focus on *meta-governance* tools, that is, ‘which tools the state authorities utilise in order to govern networks’ (p 4), and are largely framed to highlight the place and role of NGOs rather than the whole range of network participants. This frame and focus, even if the authors justify them at length, end up producing a mixed impression about the *effective* impact of the book, which I cannot help but feel is partly to assess by means of a narrow lens Russia’s level of democracy (a vain endeavour in my opinion!), in spite of claims to the contrary. This tension is manifested throughout the book in the frequent citations of authors such as Davies who have pointed out the fallacies and ‘democratic problem’ of governance theory, citations that come across as a sort of excuse or alibi for using this theory regardless.

I feel compelled to note that the remark above is guided by my deep dislike for governance theory, which however does not affect my appreciation of the book’s other merits. The second chapter, which lays out the theoretical framework for the rest of the book, will satisfy scholars interested in governance/governance network theory in that it thoroughly

situates the study in the existing literature and clearly announces its purported contribution, all the while demonstrating a fine and documented understanding of the Russian political context. One may feel overwhelmed by the profusion of analytical tools and typologies presented in this chapter, but this reflects the variety and complexity of the following case studies.

The case studies themselves I found rather uneven, both in content and form. The chapters about Environmental Impact Assessments (4, Schumann and Kropp) and Sami politics (8, Berg-Nordlie) are structured, theoretically sound, instructive and stimulating. Both I would expect to be able to quote in my work about local politics in Russia. Other chapters (3, HIV prevention; 6, child welfare) are rather unstructured and inconclusive, as well as less clearly rooted in the theoretical framework of chapter 2. One may discuss the relevance of chapter 5, on climate change adaptation, in which the authors undertake to describe the *absence* of governance networks on a policy issue that has *not* been framed as such in the regions under focus. Finally, although the chapter about ethnic conflict management (7) has merits, it is rooted in the very specific context of the Krasnodar and Stavropol regions and should not be taken as reflective of the richness and diversity of ethnic politics in Russia as a whole. Specialists of and in Russia will surely notice that the case selection is biased in favour of regions located west of the Urals, and that Siberia and the Far East are not sufficiently represented, nor is the potential relevance of distinguishing such or other macro-regions discussed.

I was not convinced by the authors’ attempt to ‘systematise the empirical observations’ in the concluding chapter (9), in which they seem to struggle to combine their dense but circumscribed empirical fragments into heavily qualified general conclusions. I remained frustrated with the profusion of notions whose place in the authors’ explanatory framework is unclear. For example, the issues of *informality* and attending vested interests come up several times in the book, but are not ‘fed back’ systematically in the concluding chapter. The same goes for potential determining variables for the formation and functioning of Russian networks, such as *time*, *trust* (chapter 4 and 7), and *scale* (chapter 3, p 65), which remain exogenous to the authors’ model(s) although they clearly appeared to me as crucial when reading the case studies. The ‘idiosyncratic features of the participating actors’ (p 77) are also mentioned several times, which seems to undermine the whole explanatory endeavour explicitly based on strict typologies. Altogether, the book is more successful as a descriptive than an explanatory study.

Governance in Russian regions will be difficult to read for anyone who is not deeply familiar with and interested in the very specific issues at hand. It comes across as the condensed result of an enormous and thorough field work based on complex theoretical foundations. Given this substantial complexity, one may regret that the text was not proofread more thoroughly by a native English speaker. The authors laudably admit to the numerous caveats, limited scope and inconclusive findings; their methodical rigorousness is remarkable but highlights the difficulty to extract any general and ‘easy’ takeaways from this labour-intensive and ambitious yet fragmentary micro-analysis. This poses the question of the larger applicability of the study. The book presents itself as an original contribution to a very narrow field of research – that of network meta-governance in hybrid or authoritarian regimes – but leaves an

enormous number of regions, aspects and policy areas unaddressed. It is commendable for its idiosyncratic takeaways about the perception of certain policy issues and the collaboration culture between state and non-state actors in certain parts of

Russia, but the prospective reader should be warned that this is not an easy read (Morgane Fert-Malka, independent political analyst, CuriousArctic, Copenhagen, Denmark/Moscow, Russia (morgane.fertmalka@gmail.com)).

The polar adventures of a rich American dame. A life of Louise Arner Boyd. Joanna Kafarowski. 2017. Toronto: Dundurn. 368 p, softcover. ISBN 978-1-45973-970-3. \$24.99.
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Louise Arner Boyd was the first woman to set foot on Northbrook Island, Jan Mayen (1926), to fly across the North Pole (1955), and to map an area on the east coast of Greenland that carries her name today. Joanna Kafarowski's work is the first book-length biography of this American adventurer who 'overcame the social constraints imposed on women of her class and her time and who defined what it meant to be a polar explorer' (p 311). The research into the life of one of the first women to break the 'ice ceiling' in polar exploration has been admirably done. Anyone interested in polar adventures in the first half of the twentieth century will definitely find an interesting quote or two in the book. However, it is the frequency of these often quite lengthy quotations combined with the lack of (analytical) engagement with the social and political surroundings of the life and achievements of Boyd that make the work seem more like a first draft than a final polished product.

Part I of the book describes the family background and early years of its protagonist. The photographs of Louise and her family embedded in the text illustrate the rapid social, political and economic changes that the United States was undergoing during Louise's childhood and early adulthood. There is, however, no discussion of these changes in the text. Kafarowski describes how Louise was born as the third child to a successful American gold rush pioneer in San Rafael, California in 1886. After the devastating deaths of her two brothers in 1901 and 1902 Louise became the sole heir to her father's fortune. She inherited this fortune the same year that women gained the legal right to vote in the United States – one of the many significant social and political developments that Kafarowski fails to connect in developing the story of her 'unlikely heroine' (p 21). After the death of her parents, Louise continued to live as an unmarried heiress and social philanthropist. Following the trend of her social class of Americans in the 'roaring twenties' she also visited Europe, travelling all the way up to Spitzbergen in 1924. After these more standard pleasure trips, she executed 'the first Arctic sea voyage planned, organized and financed by a woman' at the age of 39 (p 72).

The destination of the first Louise A. Boyd (LAB) expedition was Franz Josef Land, in the summer of 1926. The vessel that Louise leased for the occasion was the Norwegian polar ship *Hobby* under the command of the Spanish mariner Francis J. de Gisbert. On board were the crew and three of Louise's personal friends. The trip was a success. The ship reached Franz Josef Land and Louise got to practise her photography. Additional excitement for the expedition participants came from each of the two women onboard getting to shoot a polar bear. Louise celebrated this achievement by having her photograph taken with her kill and her weapon (p 79). This memento of one of her

'trophies' from her first self-organised and self-funded trip is one example of the many ways in which Louise's Arctic explorations and ambitions not only defied (because of her gender) but also mirrored those of her white male contemporaries. In the light of Kafarowski's account of the second LAB expedition this is another intriguing aspect about Louise and her breaking the 'ice ceiling' in polar exploration that this biography leaves unexplored.

Part II, *The Call of Adventure*, reviews the next five LAB expeditions, which took place in 1928, 1931, 1933 and 1937. The second LAB adventure of 1928 originally aimed to explore the east coast of Greenland. After Roald Amundsen went missing while searching for Umberto Nobile, Boyd volunteered her resources to the international search effort for the Norwegian polar hero. The condition for this gift was that Louise, a female friend and the friend's husband could tag along. The description of this mission is one of the more pleasing chapters of the book.

The participants in the search for Amundsen were all seasoned and well-known international polar explorers. They did not hide their initial displeasure with Louise's presence, with her make-up, 'well-shampooed and waived hair', and well-tailored suits (p 105). When the two American women dressed more sensibly in heavy jackets and leather caps when helping out on the deck, they did not stand out so patently in the crowd. When Louise learnt of their treatment as 'two of the boys', she took extra effort to highlight that they were not only women, but ladies who wore Chanel No. 5 on board *Hobby*, during the second LAB mission (pp 111–113). How their onboard appearances were deceptive of their general conformity to the social and class norms of their time was further highlighted when – to the surprise of Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, who visited *Hobby* during the search for Amundsen – Louise and her friend Julia returned to Oslo in 1928 to receive a Royal Norwegian Order of St Olav wearing the latest Parisian fashions: 'This is what we have sailed with for the last three months in the open northern ice???'', Riiser-Larsen wrote in his diary about the reunion with the two women (p 120).

Kafarowski alludes to how Louise's participation in the Amundsen search mission in the summer of 1928 not only introduced her to 'travails onboard of a polar vessel' and gave her 'glimpses of a life usually hidden from those in her sophisticated circle' (p 125). It also opened the doors for her into networks of polar explorers previously inaccessible to a woman seeking to make her own mark in polar history. As with the lack of contextual analysis relating to how at the same time as Boyd was organising her expeditions, women were entering and pursuing educational paths previously unavailable to them, Kafarowski does not go into any depth when discussing the meaningfulness of these connections for the development of Louise's future polar aspirations and achievements. In short, beyond a few direct quotes from newspapers that in 1937 reported how 'women do about everything that men try to do these days' (p 199), she neglects to provide a richer texture to Boyd's story, through failing to weave her protagonist's achievements into the zeitgeist of the progress of women's liberation.