

DEMSTAR

Democracy, the State, and Administrative Reforms

State of the State in Latvia

Appendix 1:
Background Information for Interviewers

Ole Nørgaard & Ole Hersted Hansen

with

Ilze Ostrovska
(Research Design and Implementation) &

Luise Pape Møller
(Compilation of Appendices)

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Appendix 1

Background information for interviewers

The present survey is, in addition to factual substance, an attempt to assess the reliability and validity of the interview technique in research on state capacities in post-communist systems. It will be applied in a number of other post-communist countries, somewhat modified by the experiences gained in the present survey.

The theoretical undergirding for the formulation of the questionnaire is the triad of state types described in the appendix. In particular the questions are to help us determine if the attitudes and behavior of top-level political actors and administrators are formed (and informed) by legacies of the totalitarian state, by a vision of an insulated minimalist neo-liberal state, or whether they approach a developmental state. An additional objective is to examine if social and political embeddedness (a core feature of the developmental state) reflects a positive collaborative state-society relationship or clientilistic capture (corruption, rent seeking). Hence, the present interviews have two objectives. First, we hope to obtain factual information about the real political processes in the central government of Latvia since independence. Second, we hope to learn how ministers perceive their own roles in the democratic process – whether we can interpret their perception of themselves as agents in an insulated neo-liberal state, as political entrepreneurs in a developmental state, or if they are still permeated by the habits and mentalities of the totalitarian state. In all interviews we have the dual aim of contrasting the present situation with the system before independence in order to provide a realistic picture of the point whence the present system emerged, and to introduce a time perspective on the answers provided. Our target group consists of current and former ministers and high-level administrative officials in central decision-making ministries in the Republic of Latvia since independence in 1991. We in particular focus on sectors where the state-society relationship is known to be most precarious: industry, agriculture, finance, welfare, communications, internal affairs, and foreign policy. We intend to survey 50 (+ -) former and current ministers. The interview is structured around three conceptual pillars:

Policy formulation and initiation

We here want to examine the degree of insulation/embeddedness and participation, pressure and lobbying by non-constitutional actors, including influence exerted by foreign actors, be they organizations or countries. The more we approach a developmental state, the more we expect to discover active societal participation in decision-making, without rendering state institutions subject to clientilistic capture. In addition, it is of vital interest to ascertain the degree to which international participation in decision-making occurs – and not least the character of this influence. Hence, we are in particular interested in how ministers perceive the following:

1. Who are (were) the central external actors in decision-making? (domestic, outside Latvia)?
2. To what extent is (was) bureaucracy the source of policy formulation/initiation?
3. The present and previous degree of horizontal pressure: do other ministries influence decision-making?
4. The present (and previous) scope and nature of political and societal pressure, corruption, and rent seeking.

Decision-making fora

We here want to contrast the constitutional formal decision-making fora with the 'real' fora where decisions are actually taken, as perceived by the interviewees. From the perspective of the developmental state, it is here desirable that decisions be insulated in the state organisations. Hence, we are interested in:

1. The degree of formalization, formal versus informal decision arenas.
2. The flow of information. Does the minister feel that he is sufficiently informed to make the correct decisions?
3. The degree of horizontal cooperation: does a decision require the approval of another ministry before it can take effect?

Policy implementation

The topic is here whether implementation proceeds along the lines of a top-down Weberian ideal type bureaucracy or - as in the developmental state model - in collaboration with the target group. The object is again to assess whether collaboration is based on positive embeddedness, or rather reflects clientilistic capture. Hence, we are interested in:

1. The degree of centralization, i.e. are the ministers often directly involved in supervising the process, or is the process characterized by decentralization? This relates to the question of vertical trust.
2. Does the minister receive the relevant information about the progress of implementation, and if so, does he receive it in time to correct deficiencies?
3. Societal pressure, corruption, rent seeking.

State – society relations

We conclude by asking a series of questions about attitudes to various themes associated with the relation between state and society, and especially concerning corruption and rent seeking. Our purpose is to examine the general character of these relations.