



## The Culture of Subversion and Russian Media Landscape

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This paper provides a conceptual framework for analyzing parallel (or subversive) media activities in Russia that enable Russian media consumers to act independently from official institutionalized sets of rules and constantly violate both traditional rules (based on great state pressure on content) and the globalized capitalist media economy based on commercial interests. These alternative sets of activities can be interpreted either like an entire parallel public sphere where alternative debate is articulated, or like separate parallel activities recompensing supply and demand failures. Two hypotheses are posed by author. The first states that accessibility of media production in general in Russia is a key element of a contemporary social contract. The second hypothesis relates parallel media practices with certain acts of political activism among narrow groups of the population that could not find places for self-expression in the institutionalized media field and use alternative media outlets (especially blogs and another new media) that ultimately constitute the parallel public sphere.

### **Parallel Public Sphere and Parallel Activity: Theoretical Framework for Analysis**

To explore the concept of the parallel public sphere, this discussion proposes at least two theoretical bases—namely, the Habermasian and post-Habermasian theory of the public sphere and institutional theory, particularly the concept of formal and non-formal institutions. Habermas' concept of the public sphere stemmed from the political debate that organized mediation between the bourgeois civil society and elective authorities through different public channels, such as the periodical press (and especially mass press), debate clubs, and saloons (Habermas, 1991). According to Habermas, one of the foundations for public sphere was the literary public sphere, which consisted in debating literature and different art productions in particular periodicals, libraries, and literary clubs. As such, not only could mass communication channels diffusing political opinion be interpreted as parts of a public sphere, but also any

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cultural production based on a transfer of symbolic forms (Thompson, 2007, p. 10). In the last 40 years, a great part of such production has been recorded on different media.<sup>1</sup>

In the original Habermasian concept, the public sphere figures also like non-perfect debate. Habermas refers to the public sphere as "bourgeois" to designate that the debate that benefits such social organization is much more publicized. He characterizes French and German public spheres (the country-model of the bourgeois public sphere was in the UK) as having limited participation. Based on such categories, Bernard Miège—in his recent book on public sphere—indicated that certain elements of public spheres are present even in non-democratic or semi-democratic countries; thus, this notion cannot be regarded as a peculiarity for only democratic political systems (Miège, 2010, p. 36). In other words, Habermas is considering the concept of public sphere as an ideal type. Such ideas were developed by Habermas' assistant, and a scholar of the late Frankfurt school, O. Negt, who proposed studying forms of resistance and the auto-organization of alternative debates facing the dominant bourgeois public sphere (for example, the proletarian public sphere). Negt called such forms "counter-public spheres" (Negt, 2007).

Meanwhile, the original concept of the parallel public sphere was proposed by Tristan Mattelart, who analyzed the role of non-authorized media practices, such as listening to Western radio broadcasts and engaging in the illegal traffic of non-authorized literature and Western cultural products during the anti-Soviet emancipation of Central and Eastern Europe (including the USSR; Mattelart, 1995). Such parallel media consumption during Soviet times generated a political debate parallel to the official public sphere, which—according to this scholar—contributed to anti-Soviet political activities (i.e., dissident activities) in such countries, as well as to destruction of the official public sphere. The same struggle between alternative and main public spheres has been argued by Negt and Kluge (1972). As it comes from the French scholar's argument, the parallel public sphere deals with imperfections of political debate within the official public sphere. But the political debate in the Habermasian concept is in continuity with economic role of the public sphere, which also serves to help the bourgeois class to negotiate rules on the market. According to Christian Fuchs, among all the dimensions of alternative media which really create an alternative public sphere (or counter-public sphere), the organizational one is also important. It means that, really, the alternative public sphere is independent from the commercial mode of production, and its products that generate alternative debate are self-produced and distributed according to non-commercial rules. He relates such production to any and all media content, including recorded media content. For example, according to his definition, independent cinema, underground cinema, and avant-garde film represent a kind of alternative media generating alternative debate (Fuchs, 2010, p. 187).

The second theoretical contribution to the concept of the parallel public sphere stems from institutional theory and the institutional approach to the non-formal economy, which considers the non-formal economy to be an important element of any formal economy, as the non-formal economy

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to exclude certain computer software that, in general, represents different pragmatic tools (systems, word processors, etc.) and cannot be interpreted as symbolic production. However, some categories of software (e.g., computer and console games) can also be regarded as cultural production, because they are based on fiction and sometimes literary topics.

reproduces a set of rules (institutions) that cannot be reproduced by formal economic regulations (Tamasz, 2002). The same situation is possible when the formal set of regulations is not perfect or not corresponding to the social contract (beliefs, habits, etc.; Gerchuni, 1999). According to Douglas North (1990), efficient institutions (here, humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction) should be grounded in social life. In this case, formal institutions (regulation frameworks, contractual rules, etc.) correspond to non-formal institutions (practices of everyday life, rites, conventions, etc.). However, in the case of the adoption of new formal institutions (e.g., in importing institutions), it could generate a conflict between formal and non-formal institutions that could, itself, lead to the rise of opposing practices going beyond new formal institutions. Institutional theory also shapes the connectivity between economic rules and political rules. Development of widespread non-estate based political rules opens the doors for concurrence within political life, which leads to perfection of exchange rules, and consequently, to economic growth (North, Wallis, & Weingast, 2009).

From this point of view, the author proposes explaining the rise of informal activities in the USSR through extremely tough regulations of social life, and of the same phenomena in post-Soviet Russia through incompatibility between formal and non-formal traditional rules. In other words, Russian authorities could not eradicate non-formal activities (in particular, piracy) because it takes time to change non-formal institutions both in the political (tradition of parallel media flows consumption) and economic (orientation toward accessibility of cultural products) fields.

Ultimately, the parallel public sphere represents a set of interconnected media consumption and media production practices that constitute an alternative debate to the dominant one existing in the official public sphere and also opposing the traditional organization forms of such production. Parallel activity, according to such a theoretical framework, represents a set of settled practices that smooth over institutional imperfections related to the main activity.

### **Social Tradition of Non-Formal Institutions in Russia**

A long tradition of non-formal institutions and parallel economic activity exists in Russia. Such a tradition was likely grounded in society long before the Soviet period, and it has been structured by factors such as the position of resources in the network (Barsukova, 2000), the climate, and the character of labor—all elements that have significantly influenced the Russian economic mentality (Balabanova, 2001). However, the Soviet period and state-predator that pretended to be completely dominant within social life created a total network of parallel activity that has often been illegal. Thus, the hidden social activity (not only in terms of consuming, but also in the field of self-expression) during the Soviet period has been a response to the state's overregulated and often disproportional official economy, politics, etc.

Several hidden (or parallel) activities were specific to the Soviet period:

- Distribution of goods, especially provisions during the last Soviet period of economic shortage (deficit).

- Non-formal relations between middle management and workers in the system of distribution of bonus payments (Clarke, 1995).
- Parallel mechanism of enterprise control in the late Soviet-period (i.e., the Gorbachev period), when directors of enterprises created parallel networks of non-formal relations with ministries and other enterprises and became non-formal owners of enterprises (Kabalina & Clarke, 1996).
- Hidden exchange of prohibited goods. This has been probably the biggest segment of parallel activity. Official authorities prohibited the circulation of a large range of goods, a policy which provoked such a response in the society.

The period of transition (i.e., perestroika) was based on the reforming initiatives of the current power and its leader, Gorbachev (Castells, 1999). Such reforms, to a certain degree, imported elements of Western political and economic orders (for the first time), such as the freedom of speech, free initiatives in the field of business, a free electoral process and real political alternatives, and self-repayment of state enterprises, as well as (for the second time) private property, prices determined by the market, real exchange rates, and proportional electoral systems. Such elements required the complete importation of Western (or "globally dominant") formal institutions which did not correspond to the cultural basis (i.e., non-formal institutions). Grounded non-formal institutions conflicted with global official institutions that provoked some kind of mix between imported formal and grounded non-formal rules. Such rules work as compensatory practices for the defects of formal orders (Ledeneva, 2006). For example, to a great extent, the privatization of state property involved the quasi-free distribution of property among those politically loyal to the power oligarchs (Nureev, 2003), thereby completely transforming the political system into a pseudo-democratic system. Meanwhile, "free prices" determined by the market were artificially "fixed" prices for particular privileged industries (evident, for example, in the market price and "taxed price" for real estate). Instead of laying off workers from ineffective enterprises, the state engaged in the non-repayment of salary (which provoked the "gray" employment of those "officially employed" in other firms; Sinyavskaya, 2005). In other words, market and political reforms did not lead to a market economy and democratic political system, but to the strange mix of what Castells (1999) referred to as statism and capitalism.

Such institutional conflict provoked the installation of parallel activities in seemingly all spheres of social life, including the importation of goods, money laundering, barter exchange (Yakovlev, 2006), double accounting, shadow bartering, manipulative campaigning within political life (Ledeneva, 2006), informal medical services (Shishkin, 2003), non-formal labor (Sinyavskaya, 2005), and the non-formal preparation of doctoral works (Kalimullin, 2005). Thus, the parallel sphere was omnipresent in social life, and in everyday life, people could migrate between the official and hidden spheres.

According to this historical and institutional basis, this article analyzes media consumption in Russia. To do so, the author proposes distinguishing two key characteristics or dimensions that structure hidden practices in post-Soviet media consumption. The first dimension, accessibility of media, considers piracy and hidden practices from only an economic point of view, such as the mechanism of maintaining

low prices or even making some cultural products free of payment. The second dimension is the protest activity within the public sphere generated by opposition media, which identifies hidden practices as a political response to official rules.

**Archaeology of Accessibility**  
***Accessibility of Culture and Soviet Normativity***

The historical orientation of Soviet (Russian) people to the accessibility of any cultural and mass communication product is based on the Soviet propagandist function. To ensure this function, the Soviet mass communication apparatus had to first build an audience (i.e., to ensure that the masses were literate), and second, to make products of mass communication accessible to people.

The propagandist function has been crucial to the Soviet identity, which was constructed under the principle of double identity—the national identity and the Soviet identity—as the basis of a new culture and ideology (Castells, 1999). The communication of the new ideology was the biggest challenge for the Bolshevik authorities, who had to develop effective mass communications forms consistently, and who tended to limit personal communications (telephone communications, transportation means, etc., that did not serve point-to-point personal communication functions). This centralized form of communication administration is called communicational control (Kiriya, 2004, 2007). The USSR constructed a centralized system of cable radio and a unique system of television broadcasting in real time across 11 time zones, in addition to building a gargantuan newspaper industry, with a total circulation of 230 million copies in 1989 (Ovsepien, 1999).

In this context, propaganda should make products of mass communication and culture accessible to people; without such access, the Soviet identity could not be maintained, and communication control could not be ensured. Television and radio were offered free of charge and without advertising. Newspapers were paid communication forms, but the majority of the population received a free subscription from Communist Party cells in their workplaces. Sometimes, the Communist Party cells in big enterprises also distributed free tickets to movie theaters. Every large Soviet structure had its own cultural club, where theatrical or cinema productions were offered to employees.

From another point of view, such accessibility of official content conflicted with the Soviet policy (here, we could find some intersections between the economic and political dimensions) of controlling the incoming flows of communication. Only the authorized (and mainly, locally produced) content framing and feeding into the state propaganda could be accessible. The selective isolation of the Soviet cultural sphere provoked the existence of a parallel flow of disallowed content that, in the Soviet system, was categorized as illegal practice (shadow activity). Thus, accessible content was installed in the non-formal hidden system of circulation of non-allowed content ("samizdat," illegally listening to Western radio, illegally trafficking in Western music, etc.) under other rules of exchange, albeit for a very narrow group of the population.

Ultimately, the Soviet system was based on controlling access to cultural and informational products, and for a majority of the population, such a system became a normal and uniquely possible

institution for the diffusion of information and culture. In a centralized and planned economy, the state apparatus economically supported culture, which was not made for profit. Yet the parallel hidden communication system was recompensing bottlenecks (primarily in the field of content) in the official communication system. Thus, the dissemination of Western and global content was a kind of non-formal institution based on general interest in foreign (limited in access) culture, generating a demand for Western content in the "hidden market." This means that parallel media circulation during the Soviet period could also be interpreted within a framework of a market failure problem within an authorized media market.

### ***Accessibility's Likeness to Subversion of the Market Exchange during the Post-Soviet Period***

During the transition period, the state imported global market economic institutions (such as market-driven prices, private property, etc.), yet it also maintained the old social contracts under pressure from the population. It structured the industry to be more accessible for people by subverting some commercial mechanisms.

First, the state adopted strategies to ensure accessibility to traditional mass media—namely, television, radio, and print media. The state television chose the only possible model of financing: commercial advertising. This was the only possible alternative, given the shortage of state funding, as well as the non-readiness of the population to pay for it. Thus, classic paid public TV (financed by both the state and people) could not exist, thereby provoking the structural dualism of Russian state television—the biggest players in the advertising market (state television channel Rossia and the 51% state-owned Channel One, which had a collective daily share of about 40%) accounted for about 50% of television advertising revenues in the market (Kiriya & Degtereva, 2010), while also ensuring the public content of broadcasting.

In 2015, Russia will completely shift to digital terrestrial broadcasting (DTB), which was announced as a big governmental project. However, without forcing the population to buy new equipment (i.e., set-top boxes), the Russian government cannot accomplish this task. Experiences in some Russian regions (where DTB was launched as a pilot test) demonstrate that the government is ready to make such equipment more accessible for people and distribute set-top boxes (seemingly) for free (Kachkaeva, 2008).

With the development of television (free for customers) and the crucial drop-off of people's revenues to spend on print media, pay media (very developed during Soviet times) became less popular, which led first to a drop-off in paid circulations, and ultimately to the practical disappearance of subscriptions. This situation provoked a very tough reaction from the state to ensure the public's access to the newspaper. First, Gaidar's liberal government, in parallel to shock therapy and significant inflation, distributed unprecedented support for the biggest newspapers (fixed prices for paper, some subventions from state, exempt VAT payments, etc.; Zassursky, 2001). The entire system of financial state support for the press was implemented, which made the press financially and politically subordinate to local and federal authorities. Among the supporting mechanisms, the state uses the subvention of subscription, which means that the state pays the subscription fees for some kinds of newspapers (primarily state-run

ones). The difficult economic situation has led the majority of print outlets to be sold and financed either by the state (local authorities, city authorities, federal authorities, regional governors, etc.), or by large industrial groups that also represent one of the means for making such outlets accessible to people (even if their objectives are purely propagandist).

One of the structural mechanisms that made the press more independent from readers' payment was the tolerance of a parallel form of financing media. A more developed mechanism is information coverage contracts (from big companies or authorities), which are also known as purchasing loyalty contracts. Research conducted by the author in 15 regions in 2009–2010 shows that this parallel market is bigger in some regions than the official advertising one (Kiriya, 2011b).<sup>2</sup> Such a need to ensure accessibility sometimes pushes the state to distribute some kind of cultural and informational goods under non-market conditions (as gifts or donations). For example, in sports (mainly in soccer), broadcasting rights do not represent a real market; state companies (e.g., Gazprom,) are the main owners and sponsors of soccer teams, and they are sometimes forced to sell broadcasting rights to state-owned television channels at low prices. In 2007, President Putin publicly announced that sports—soccer in particular—should be accessible for free, which forced the Russian Soccer Federation to cancel the deal with pay television platform NTV+, and to give the rights to state-owned broadcasters for a non-disclosed price.

For a long time, the desire to ensure accessibility meant opposing the changing of tariffs for private, fixed telephonic communications (before the mid 2000s, local telephone calls were semi-free, because the monthly payment did not correspond to the total duration of telephone line use—namely, unlimited access for quite a low price, as financed by the state). For example, in Moscow, the passage of an hourly tariff has been postponed three times due to social pressure from the population and different associations. In 2009, according to the Ministry of Communications, the total income from fixed telephone services collected by state-owned companies was about 102 billion rubles (US\$3.3 billion), equating to an income averaging 1,000 rubles (US\$33) per person, per year (Ministry of Telecommunication and Mass Communication, 2009). Thus, this sector is also supported by the state to ensure accessibility.

In the field of cultural products, only one segment has drastically dropped off: the book publishing sector. According to the Russian Center for Public Opinion Study (VCIOM), in 2009, 36% of Russians were not reading books (in 1996, this number was only 20%; VCIOM, 2010). In other spheres of cultural industry (the cinema industry, the software industry, the music industry, etc.), the shift to commercial financing (and, consequently, the price growth for such products) has been accompanied by piracy practices that continued the accessibility of such products for people.

During the first years of Gorbachev's reforms and the "new Russia," piracy was a quasi-legal practice tolerated by the state. State enterprises and Komsomol (the political organization of young Communists) organized a widespread network of video saloons (a movie theater, of sorts) that primarily

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<sup>2</sup> The two years of financed research were made possible by the Laboratory for Media Research at the Higher School of Economics using the deep interview method with 60 media owners and media managers in 16 regions of Russia. The survey was entitled "Media capital in Russian regions."

showed pirated films and cartoons (Interactive Research Group [IRG], 2001). Videocassettes with two recorded films (usually Western productions), a unique distribution method, became the most popular form of home video. The state tolerates the existence of the "Gorbushka" market, a known location where pirated videos, computer software, music, etc., are sold. In 1991, in response to blatant piracy in Russia, Jack Valenti (the then-president of the MPAA) initiated the boycott of the Russian legal market by major players in American cinema, which led the market to absolutely uncontrollable piracy (Beumers, 1999). Prior to 1995 (when Russia joined the Bern convention), piracy was a non-regulated business; thus, this non-formal sector represented a practice which was not covered by any norms and, consequently, was omnipresent.

After joining the Bern convention in 1995 and installing a Business Software Alliance (BSA) office in 1997, Russian authorities engaged in what could be characterized like a spectacular struggle against piracy. Authorities tolerated home piracy, non-formal exchanges (Internet and home Ethernet networks became the major instrument of such exchanges), and even the existence of some privileged sales points (such as Gorbushka, which obtained a new building near the park where pirates had previously traded), although police sometimes engaged in enforcement actions and pursued pirates in the center of cities. Such a policy moved piracy from being an activity not covered by the rules to being a shadow activity that was even more tolerated by the state.

The state changed the structure of legal home videos for Russian films considerably. Before 2000, the Russian cinema sector was quite small; however, after the growth of state oil revenues, Russian authorities became increasingly important players in the cinema industry. In 2008, the total movie-making budget in Russia was estimated to be 6.07 billion rubles (about US\$209.11 million), but the market income (income from box office) was about 5.77 billion rubles (Ivanov, 2009a). The total volume of state support for filmmaking the same year, according to an official report from the Ministry of Culture (2011), was about 1.6 billion rubles. By supporting filmmaking in Russia, authorities considerably changed the balance of forces in the entire DVD market. Russian producers who had already obtained money from the state could significantly decrease the prices for their legal discs, bringing their price closer to the price for pirated DVDs. This changed the balance in the legitimate market to favor Russian cinema, ultimately bringing foreign movies into the pirate segment. Indeed, today only 18% of pirated films are Russian films (Ivanov, 2009b). In general, this intersection between parallel and legal markets makes the prices for media goods higher and the variety of accessible goods lower, due to the high degree of monopolization by multi-national companies (Sezneva & Karaganis, 2011, p. 151), but also by some local majors sponsored by state companies.

Based on this discussion, the entire tradition of accessibility is socially grounded and represents a kind of social contract in which the state ensures the accessibility of cultural products exchanged against the state's emphasis on content. During Soviet times, accessibility represented a kind of non-formal institution that still perfectly corresponded to the official institutional field based on culture, such as propagandist productions ensured and paid for by the state. After the Soviet period, the global model of a market economy of culture was implemented as the official set of rules, thereby provoking a conflict between formal institutions and non-formal institutions that led to an increase in parallel activities among social actors maintaining a social contract (accessibility) within a new globalized set of rules. Ultimately,

the state's identified strategies to maintain such a contract resulted in the Russian media and communication sector becoming non-commercially oriented.

### **Hidden Practices as a Parallel Public Sphere**

Media consumption cannot be perceived only as a passive activity of absorbing symbolic forms, but also as some kind of possible resistance to dominant symbolic forms or as the protection of specific cultural forms. Thus, by consuming some kinds of symbolic forms (independently from their medium and distribution), people affirm their cultural identities, which is partly connected with their political orientation, ethnicity, etc. (Hoggart, 1998; Morley & Brunson, 1999), and which contributes to organizing them according to different social groups with particular forms of debate. This provides the possibility to examine some parallel forms of media consumption, such as the parallel public sphere. However, it seems necessary to examine free-of-charge and quasi-free-of-charge mass media practices of the public sphere (television, radio, Internet-based media, newspapers, etc.) and customer-paid mass media (the book sector, the recorded media sector, the music sector, the film sector, etc.) separately, due to different models of their valuation. In the first case, the demand is entirely based on content choice and depends less on prices (Picard, 1989). In the second, which is the customer-paid model, the value is unpredictable (Huet, Miège, & Peron, 1984), and demand could depend on the price level, which means that the consumer choice could be determined either by content choice or pure supply and demand (which has been pointed out precisely in the previous section).

### ***Mass Media in the Parallel Public Sphere***

The parallel public sphere should be examined with a connection to the official one. In the 19th century (when the English public sphere flourished; Habermas, 1991), 90% of the Russian population (dominated by serfs) had neither political rights nor special needs in information, due to their literacy level (very low, as previously discussed). Consequently, the Russian public sphere in the 19th century was extremely narrow. Russian intellectuals discussed actual political problems and possible paths of social development in the printed media (primarily in literary journals), but these discussions were understood and read by a limited range of audiences, which, in Habermasian theory, is a stage of the literary public sphere.

During Soviet times, due to ideological filters limiting access to Western mass media content, parallel or protest media activity flourished. In the field of mass media, this activity was primarily the widespread practice of listening to Western radio. According to Mattelart (1995), by broadcasting alternatives to the official Soviet public sphere of news and Western music, such radio stations (Liberty, Voice of America, BBC World Service) contributed to increasing the parallel alternative political debate that became part of the parallel public sphere, in which certain anti-Soviet groups constructed their own press, mechanisms of self-expression, and parallel power, and in so doing, contributed to the transformation of the official public sphere into a ritual public sphere in which ideology was not really shared, but became a simple habit. At the same time, the audience for such stations in the USSR (unlike the politically active Western Europe) remained quite narrow (reproducing the pre-Soviet situation with the public sphere). Using the KGB's post Soviet-period revelations and figures about the Soviet middle-class, the author has determined that the audience did not exceed 20% of the population (Kiriya, 2007). Thus, it is possible to

identify some main peculiarities of the parallel public sphere in Russia—namely, the very narrow character of protest activity and the parallel flow of information due to social passivity and social structure.

Interactions between Communist authorities' decisions concerning media industries and consumption of this parallel flow are particularly interesting. Under the pressure of such parallel practices (listening to Western radio and the illegal trafficking of music and videos), the Communist Party progressively authorized entertainment in the official media sphere. The Soviet government launched the first radio station that broadcasted music, *Mayak*. After a few years of non-successful struggles against videos, the Kremlin authorized a state-run video industry (Mattelart, 1995). This reaction by the state to social pressures is quite similar to providing accessibility in the actual dominant economical system (see above, "Archaeology of Accessibility").

In contemporary Russia, the parallel public sphere is still present. Its existence is due to the quite restrictive character of the official public sphere, where the large, widespread media (mostly government itself or state-owned companies) are subordinate to censorship and filtering of their content (Koltsova, 2006). Such dualist public activity correlates well with two major attitudes of the population toward media. The majority of the Russian population relies more on media and expects some kind of support from it (Klimov, 2007). Research on television audiences' attitudes (Kachkaeva & Kiriya, 2007) shows that, for the majority of Russians, media is a state institute that explains all external realities for them. The remaining Russian population is more pragmatic regarding media functions. These people use media both to be more informed, and to make their own decisions and their own interpretations of reality. Such people rely on themselves (Klimov, 2007).

The large, widespread media and official public sphere serve the needs of the greater part of the population, providing them with enlightening content that maintains social stability and ensures the reproduction of the power elite. Such media have the largest share of the audience (Channel One, *Rossia*, and *NTV* account for approximately 50% of daily audience shares on television, which is the main consumed media in Russia) and the advertising market (state-owned Channel One and *Rossia* account for 50% of the entire television advertising market; Kiriya & Degtereva, 2010). These media are primarily owned by the state or close to the state power elite groups.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, some niche media outlets may be more critical, as they have a news agenda that differs from that of the official media. Such media serve the informational needs of a very narrow group of socially active people, whose needs are also catered to by Internet use. These media are the *Ren-TV* television channel, *Echo Moskvy* radio broadcast, and *Novaya Gazeta* print media. Online media also play a role in this field<sup>4</sup> (Etling, Alexanyan, Kelly, Faris, et al., 2010). Yet all these media outlets are

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<sup>3</sup> Channel One is 51% owned by the state, and 25% of its stock is owned by Yuri Kovaltchuk and his bank *Rossia*, which are known to be very close to Prime Minister Putin. The media *Rossia*, *Kultura* (*Rossia K*), *Rossia 2*, and *Rossia 24* are directly owned and operated by the state. *NTV* and *TNT* (entertainment channels) are owned by *Gazprom*, which is a state-owned company.

<sup>4</sup> In his interview to three of the biggest TV channels in December 2010, President Dmitry Medvedev stated that "the television agenda is crucially different from Internet news agenda."

institutionalized within the system of state-related ownership: *Ren-TV* is owned by the bank *Rossia*, which is close to Prime Minister Putin (owned by his old colleague Kovalchuk), *Echo Moskvy* belongs to Gazprom, and *Novaya Gazeta* belongs to the deputy of the State Duma (the lower chamber of Parliament) and the businessman Lebedev. Such media do not play the role of mediators (the basic function of the public sphere, according to Habermas), but rather, they ensure the isolation and marginalization of the opposition and other critically thinking people. Consequently, such media can be called “information ghettos” (Kiriya, 2007; Kiriya & Degtereva, 2010). Such ghettos reproduce the old Russian culture of a narrow public sphere from the 19th century and the late Soviet period. The use of a parallel public sphere represents the subversion of the traditional public sphere, but it does not play an important role in the subversion of the entire social order.

In parallel to such an institutionalized parallel public sphere, another public sphere has appeared within social networks on the Internet. According to Etling et al. (2010), public discourse within social networks in Russia has its own peculiarities—namely, quasi-exclusive fields for public discourse for isolated clusters of the population, such as democratic opposition and nationalists. As such, the parallel public sphere is represented in its institutionalized form, as well as in a non-institutionalized form (see Table 1). Sometimes, public discourse from blogs (i.e., the non-institutionalized sphere) can migrate into the institutionalized parallel public sphere (Internet media or some another “ghetto”), but it does, though rarely, sometimes appear in the official public sphere, as evident in some police corruption affairs (e.g., the Dymovsky case or revelations of illegal actions of traffic police), the scandal over improper quality of social security in nursing homes in the Pskov region, the scandal involving the Tver region’s governor Zelenin,<sup>5</sup> etc.

**Table 1. Main and Parallel Public Spheres in Russia.**

Main public sphere	Parallel public sphere	
	Institutionalized	Non-Institutionalized
Widespread television channels, radio, and some political print media	Opposition television channels ( <i>Ren-TV</i> ) and media outlets ( <i>Echo Moskvy</i> ) controlled by elite groups close to the state and online-media	Blogs and social networks

The question now is how the state will react to the non-institutionalized public sphere. Recent initiatives of regulation indicate that the state will either legalize this field and force bloggers to be more responsible for the content they create (the most recent initiative proposed registering every blogger account as separate media) or create a non-institutionalized main public sphere in which the state will—through loyal bloggers—organize public discourse. As such, in the field of public protest activity, such a parallel public sphere is still quite narrow, which reproduces the old cultural tradition of the narrow political debate. Another peculiarity of this parallel debate is the inclusion of actors in both the production and consumption of symbolic forms. The same situation was observed in the 19th century in the literary

<sup>5</sup> Zelenin published a photo of a worm on his plate at an official Kremlin dinner via his Twitter account.

public sphere (literary men were themselves reading) and during the Soviet period, when the consumption of Western content was actively debated (Firsov, 2008).

### ***Cultural Goods in the Parallel Public Sphere***

During the Soviet era, the cultural industry in general was not a business, and consequently, it played a dirigiste role (see above, "Archaeology of Accessibility"). In such a tradition, literary content was politically and ideologically charged, which considerably reduced the offer in this field, particularly by limiting and filtering global content. It further provoked (as in the mass media field) an increase in parallel practices that contributed to establishing a parallel public sphere. Such practices included exchanges of Western music in the early post-war period (e.g., the Beatles' first albums were prohibited in the official phonographic industry), auto-publication and circulation of prohibited literature (from both Western and dissident authors), and the illegal exchange of videos (Western films often recorded from foreign television broadcasts in nearby border zones, such as the Baltic countries). The traffic of such prohibited recorded cultural goods was based not only on consuming, but also on producing activities.

Samizdat was an illegal activity of auto-edition, where some groups of dissidents not only circulated prohibited literary works, but also contributed to their diffusion, copying and producing them for others. The field of music was the same: Music lovers purchased (generally from visiting foreign citizens) Western vinyl discs and then reproduced them on old X-ray photographs (Rafikova, 2010). In other words, some parallel media activities during Soviet times represented not so much consumer practices as protest activities (traffic of Western music was more popular among the "Soviet fops" social movement). Consequently, some such activities (e.g., auto-publication of samizdat and non-formal exchange of prohibited books, music, and video programs) were based on non-monetary exchanges (Lisjutkina, 1993). Such separate organizational structures of production (quite similar to artisanal models) and differentiated from industrial mass-produced books, music, and movies corresponds in this case to "alternative debate" defined by Fuchs (2010).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, its ideological barriers were destroyed, which is why it is still not possible to simply apply the same reasons in structuring the Soviet parallel circulation of cultural products to post-Soviet piracy. However, at the same time, the lack of financial accessibility to cultural goods and the population's limited income could not be the only reasons. Between 2000 and 2008, the average salary per habitant increased 8 times (from 2,223.4 to 17,290.1 rubles; Federal Statistic Bureau, 2011), but the level of piracy in the music field did not drop significantly (from 75% to 67% of the total music market volume between 2000 and 2006), while the total pirate market volume doubled (from US\$200 to 450 million; IFPI, 2006). Thus, other strategies exist beyond piracy.

During Soviet times, the hidden flow of information had no lucrative motivation (i.e., for users, the primary motivation was an added value that such products represented compared to their official prototypes). The significant amount of piracy in modern period could be explained by several non-lucrative motivations identified through the deep analysis of 100 Internet blogs on piracy (Kiriya, 2011a). The first such motivation is a trial function, where users download free pirated films to make decisions about consuming them officially (through movie theaters or by purchasing legal DVDs). Such a motivation is also

identified in a survey by Sezneva and Karaganis (2011). The second motivation is access to the non-commercial culture; such movies (art house or other non-mass-produced products) could not be purchased through official channels because localized versions were not available, and in general, they are not distributed commercially. The final motivation is access to locally produced films for those who live abroad or in some very distant regions where the official market is very poor. As such, piracy partly represents a reaction to the imperfect content of a market-driven cultural economy. In other words, piracy is, to a certain degree, more oriented to narrow markets' demands than to that of the official mass cultural market, and in that sense, it is a parallel reaction to institutional conflict between a formal set of rules (driven by the global market economy of big distributors) and a non-formal set of rules based on the tradition of an alternative cultural consumption.

Yet even if some consumers' motivations for accessing pirated cultural goods have no relation to financial motivation (and, consequently, to accessibility), they could be interpreted not as a parallel public sphere, but just as an result of the market's failure (non-correspondence of monopolized, majors-dominated supply to local market demand and the particular interests of users). Unlike the Soviet situation, in which the consumption of Western music, movies, etc. both has been connected with alternative mass media practices (such as listening to Western media) and contributed to the creation of an alternative debate, the actual parallel activities of sharing media content for free have no connection with alternative debate and represent, instead, some kind of non-organized anti-market protest.

The state policy in the field of filtering cultural content has no connection with Soviet practices. Indeed, practically all cultural content is accessible and not prohibited because, universally, Russia's most important media channel is free television. Other media (due to their character of paid consumption) are consumed by quite a limited range of the population, a segment whose opinion does not represent the most important target for Kremlin propagandists. Consequently, cultural content is not filtered, and pirating cannot have serious political motivations. Moreover, the organizational structure of piracy corresponds perfectly to the industrial production proper to the legal cultural market production, a situation which does not respond to criterions of Fuchs' alternative debate.

Thus, in the field of mass communication, from a political point of view, a path dependence exists among imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet traditions of mass communication control. The dirigiste model and significant intrusion of the state into social life (and in the field of content), as well as broad social passivity, have all led to a low degree of pluralism and limitedness of range for the official debate within the public sphere. It subsequently provoked the existence of very narrow politically active groups that organized their own means of self-expression beyond the institutionalized set of rules; such interconnected practices constitute the parallel public sphere. Nevertheless, the institutional difference between Soviet times and post-Soviet times is obvious. The Soviet Union never pretended to be a democratic country connected to global political and economic systems. Thus, the grounded non-formal tradition of dirigisme corresponded perfectly to political order. Post-Soviet Russia implemented Western democratic institutions with pluralism and freedom of press and speech; thus, again, formal Western-imported institutions were in conflict with grounded non-formal ones.

Both systems of rules (formal during Soviet times and non-formal during the current period) provoked the existence of parallel public spheres characterized by narrowness and social atomization, thereby not leading to considerable reforms in the official public sphere. In other words, this parallel flow simply reproduced the dominant social order.

The political dimension in the field of cultural industries and recorded content is quite similar. After the Soviet era, the formal system of institutions opened doors for the quasi-non-controllable import of any global entertainment content (with very rare exceptions), but in this case, the state bureaucratic filter was replaced by market policies filter of global players in the field of content, which also provoked a lack of some kind of value being added for cultural products and contributed to the creation of parallel pirated practices. However, such practices could be interpreted not as a parallel public sphere, but (much more likely) as market failure.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this article highlights that a kind of subversive media culture has long been grounded in the entire social tradition in Russia, and that it is strongly connected with the official set of rules and represents a kind of social response to their imperfection. The significant pressure that the Russian state historically applied to manage social reforms led to escapism among the population, ultimately yielding attempts to delve into parallel and alternative practices. Such practices had two historical dimensions: the economical dimension, based on the grounded social tradition of media accessibility, and the political dimension, based on different kinds of alternative debate practices that could be interpreted as a parallel public sphere.

Indeed, the accessibility of media products likely represents a main driver configuring the Russian media system, which—under pressure from such historical traditions exhibited by users, as well as from the political power (continuing to ensure accessibility to propagandist content)—became only partly market-oriented. Accessibility became a form of grounded cultural tradition structuring non-formal practices opposing the global market media economy implemented under the commercial model. The state apparatus should maintain such functions as upholding the elements of social contracts, considering them when applying media policy. Piracy, according to such a dimension, is a reaction to the institutional conflict between imported global institutions and the grounded tradition of accessibility (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Transformation of Formal and Non-Formal Institutions Structuring Media Piracy Practices Within Economic and Political Dimensions.**

	Soviet Times		Post-Soviet Times	
	Economical dimension	Political dimension	Economical dimension	Political dimension
Formal institutions	State-financed media and culture	State monopoly of mass-media and communication control	Market economy of media and culture, commercial media and cultural industries	Formal independence of media outlets, pluralism, non-regulation of recorded content importation
Non-formal institutions	Accessibility (low prices, open access, free consumption)	State-dirigiste tradition	Accessibility	State-dirigiste tradition
Parallel compensatory activities in the mass media field		Foreign radio listening	Advertising-paid model of financing media with state financing	Parallel debate within Internet, particularly in social media (parallel public sphere).
Parallel compensatory activities in recorded cultural industries field		Illegal traffic of Western and prohibited music, literature (samizdat), video	Audiovisual piracy tolerated by the state	Free circulation of cultural products

The second dimension of subversive practices in the media field concerns the parallel public sphere and the alternative flow of information, as the parallel practice of informal exchange of cultural goods for some narrow groups of the population was represented by politically motivated protest activity. During the Soviet era, such protest parallel activity was driven by an exchange of prohibited literature, as well as by the practice of listening to prohibited music and foreign radio, etc. Traffic of such goods was sometimes organized through non-commercial (gift-based) exchanges and represented a real alternative debate driver. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the importing of Western democratic institutions, combined with the strong tradition of the state intruding into social life, provoked the new conflict of institutions, which, in turn, led to hidden state control practices and a dirigiste tradition in the field of mass media, ultimately resulting in the creation of a parallel public sphere (see Table 2). Historically, the Russian parallel public sphere of this kind was narrow and involved an insignificant number of people. Actually, two parallel public spheres in the mass media field can be distinguished: the institutionalized

public sphere, represented by very limited opposition media, but controlled by the state to manage the alternative discourse, and the not-yet-institutionalized public sphere, which acts via Internet blogs. To manage the isolation of opposition communities within parallel "information ghettos," the Russian state should operate as a "switcher" (Castells, 2009, p. 45) and ensure non-connectivity between the large-scale official public sphere (the exclusive field of the state propaganda, where the state prefers to act like a programmer) and the narrow opposition communities on the Internet. However, in the field of cultural industries, the strategy of the state is not to filter the content. This means that piracy does not represent alternative political debate, but merely consumers' reaction to the imperfection of the market-based cultural economy.

Finally, a conflict exists between formal and non-formal institutions of economy and politics. The state uses an advertising-based model (which is an imported global element) for mass media to ensure accessibility, yet it maintains a strong affiliation with mass media outlets and uses the *dotation* state-paid model to continue playing the dirigiste role in the official public sphere. As a result, the imported formal institutions of commercial media are in conflict with non-formal institutions of the state bureaucracy's communication control. Ultimately, the subversive parallel media practices—even if some represent a reaction to the imperfect rules of the institutionalized media environment—are based on a historical and cultural framework that also determines state policy in this field. Such practices are complementing and inciting official state policy in media to maintain and reproduce social order.

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