

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON  
School of Slavonic and East European Studies  
Department of Social Sciences

**SEESGS39 Informal Practices in Post-Communist Societies**

Professor Alena Ledeneva

MA course 2008-2009

Term 1

0.5 course unit (20 contact hours)

Form of assessment: one 5,000 words essay  
Please submit 2 copies to the office 341 by 4pm by  
12 January 2009 + ELECTRONIC COPY THROUGH TURN-IT-IN

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Aims

The course aims at enabling students to:

- DISCOVER the nature of informal practices;
- IDENTIFY them in post-communist societies;
- ANALYSE political, legal, economic and social embeddedness of informal practices;
- COMPARE informal practices in postcommunist societies.

Objectives

Students are expected to:

- LEARN about the methods of research into informal practices;
- IMPROVE skills of searching for and working with academic literature in the library and online;
- DEMONSTRATE ability to critically assess academic texts and to present their own argument in a clear and structured form;
- DEVELOP an in-depth knowledge on the topics selected for the examination essay.

Teaching and Learning Methods

The course work is organised as a SERIES OF SEMINARS, each based on four presentations by students and a group discussion to follow. Presentations will focus on the reading list provided for each discussion and further search for materials on the Internet (via electronic databases) related to informal practices in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, with comparative angle where possible.

Examination

The course is assessed 100% by coursework. ONE essay 5,000 words in length each should be written in accordance with the requirements outlined in the MA Handbook and submitted by the agreed deadlines. TWO copies have to be submitted to the office 341, and an electronic copy should be submitted through the Turnitin (see instructions below). The essays are double-marked and examined externally.

Main Texts (read before you come to the class)

Ledeneva, A. (1998) *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ledeneva, A. V. (2006) *How Russia Really Works: The Informal Practices That Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

**Class 1. Why Study Informal Practices? How to assess their importance and changes over time?**

Summary:

Introductory lecture on the shift from the acceptance of IP to the assessment of their spread/role

Format of presentations and handouts

Examination essays

Electronic tools: Search the web in order to find poll data, publications on *blat* in Russian and Western media accessible through the Eastview database, Lexus-Nexus and specifically discussions of the phenomenon; use the Google Scholar search engine and electronic journals (access via the Library catalogue). Search by keywords such as *blat*, networks, connections, informal practices, shadow economy, corrupt practices, bribery, friendship, trust, reciprocity, patronage, unwritten rules, informal institutions, social capital etc. and their equivalents in other languages.

First assignment:

1) How did the studies of *blat* develop and contribute to the studies of the postcommunist transformation? You can choose your own theme, area, discipline, and investigate in which context informal practices have been discussed in that field.

OR

2) Alternatively, you can start with exploring a range of possible disciplines, contexts and approaches to the issues of informal practices. Analyse contexts and implications of the study of *blat* in the postcommunist literature. Make an electronic summary of ten allocated sources as suggested on Moodle (see examples created by other students).

Once you ACCESS a source/ article through JSTOR or other UCL-based engines (some books are accessible through Amazon 'search inside' tool) organise your analysis in the following format:

No. in the search	
Author	
Title	
Place of publication or name of periodical	
Date of publication	
Page numbers	
Has this source had an impact (citation index)	
Abstract of the article if available	
Copy and paste paragraph(s) that mentions/uses/concludes about <i>blat</i> /informal practices/economy of favours in the source	
Define context in which the <i>blat</i>	

features in the source	
Sum up implications of blat for the argument in the article	
Which area/countries are covered in the source?	
Which discipline/method(s) are used in the source?	

### **Class 2. Is Blat a Practice, Network or Institution? What are the Patterns of Interactions between the Formal and Informal?**

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity Press. Introduction, Chapter 5

Gouldner, A., "The norm of reciprocity", in *Friends, Followers and Factions: a reader in political clientelism* (1977) ed. by Steffen W. Schmidt. Berkeley; London: University of California Press.

Granovetter, Mark (1973) 'The strength of weak ties', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.78, No. 6, pp. 1360-1380.

Granovetter, Mark (1982) 'The Strength of weak Ties: A Network Theory revisited' in Peter Marsden and Nan Lin (eds) *Social Structure and Network Analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

Lomnitz, Larissa Adler(1988) 'Informal Exchange Networks in Formal Systems: A Theoretical Model,' *American Anthropologist*, (90), pp. 42-55.

North, D. C. (1990) *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Helmke, G. and S Levitsky (2004) "Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda"- Perspectives on Politics, 2004 (available online)

Lauth, HJ (2004) "Formal and Informal Institutions: On Structuring Their Mutual Co-Existence" *The Romanian Journal of Political Sciences*, 2004

### **Class 3. Is Blat a Form of Social Capital in Postcommunist Contexts?**

Putnam, R. D. (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Tradition in Modern Italy*. Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press.

M Åberg, M Sandberg (2003) *Social Capital and Democratisation: Roots of Trust in Post-Communist Poland and Ukraine*, (book 42)

Richard Rose, in "Getting Things Done in an Anti-Modern Society: Social Capital Networks in Russia" in Partha Dasgupta and Ismail Serageldin (eds.) *Social Capital: A Multi-Faceted Perspective*

Florian Pichler and Claire Wallace, *Patterns of Formal and Informal Social Capital in Europe*, in *European Sociological Review* 2007 23(4):423-435. (112)

Charles Tilly, *Trust Networks in Transnational Migration* (113)

### **Class 4. Is Post-Communist Blat a Weapon of the Weak?**

A Rehn, S Taalas (2004) '*Znakomstva I Svyazi*'(*Acquaintances and connections*)–*Blat, the Soviet Union, and mundane*, (50)

KR Kuehnast, N Dudwick (2004) *Better a Hundred Friends Than a Hundred Rubles?: Social Networks in Transition-The Kyrgyz Republic*, (49)  
 Sarah Busse, (2001) 'Strategies of Daily Life: Social Capital and the Informal Economy in Russia', *Sociological Information*.  
 L Chelcea (2002), *The Culture of Shortage During State Socialism: Consumption Practices in a Romanian Village* *Cultural Studies*.  
 Simon Clarke, on survival strategies

**Class 5. Are *blat* and *guanxi* practices different in their implications for politics, economy and society in Russia and China?**

Ledeneva, A. (2008) 'Informal Practices in Russia and China: 'Blat and Guanxi,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50(1): 118-147.  
 W Mishler, R Rose (2005) *What Are the Political Consequences of Trust?: A Test of Cultural and Institutional Theories in Russia*, (48)  
 A Oleinik (2004) *A model of network capitalism: Basic ideas and post-Soviet evidence*, (44)  
 Michailova, Verner (2003) Personal networking in Rus and Chin: Blat and Guanxi (12)  
 Hitt, Ahlstrom, Dacin, Levitas, Svobodina (000) Institutional effects on strategic alliance partner selection in transition economies (11)  
 Fitzpatrick, S. (1998) 'Blat in Stalin's time' in Lovell, S., Ledeneva, A. & Rogachevskii, A. (eds.) *Bribery and Blat in Russia*. London: Macmillan.  
 Sun, Yan, (1999) 'Reform, State, and Corruption: Is Corruption Less Destructive in China Than in Russia?' *Comparative Politics*, October.  
 Yang, M.M. (1994) *Gifts, Favours and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.

**Class 7. In Which Sectors do Informal Practices Predominate?**

J Allina-Pisano (2007) *The Post-Soviet Potemkin Village*. Cambridge University Press.  
 Simon Clarke, *New Forms of Employment and Household Survival Strategies in Russia*  
 Ledeneva A. (2000) in Segbers, K. *Explaining Post-Soviet Patchworks*. Vol. 2. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. Chapters 2,3.  
 Sik, Endre (1994) 'Network capital in capitalist, communist and post-communist societies' in *International Contributions to Labour Studies*. No. 4, pp. 73-93.  
 Sutor, J.J., Wellman, B. and Morgan, D.L. (1997) It's about time: how, why and when networks change. *Social Networks*, Vol. 19, No. 1 and other articles in this issue.  
 Luehrmann (2004) "Mediated marriage: internet matchmaking in provincial Russia" *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2004.

**Class 8. How Important is Blat for the Entrepreneurship?**

Ruta Aidis, Saul Estrin, Tomasz Mickiewicz, "Institutions and entrepreneurship development in Russia: A comparative perspective", *Journal of Business Venturing* 23 (2008) 656–672  
 R Aidis (2007) "Female entrepreneurship in transition economies: the case of Lithuania and Ukraine", *Feminist Economics*, Volume 13, Issue 2 April 2007 , pages 157 – 183. (72)  
 B Batjargal (2006) *The dynamics of entrepreneurs' networks in a transitioning economy: the case of Russia*, (43)  
 Klaus E. Meyer and Mike W. Peng (2005), 'Probing Theoretically into Central and East Europe: Transactions, Resources and Institutions,' *Journal of International Business Studies* – 2005

EM Uslaner (2004) 'Coping and Social Capital: The Informal Sector and the Democratic Transition', in Conference on "Unlocking Human Potential: Linking the Formal ...",  
David Smallbone and Friederike Welter (2004) 'The Distinctiveness of Entrepreneurship in Transition Economies,' Small Business Economics  
Bonnell Victoria E. and Thomas B. Gold (eds.) (2002) *The New Entrepreneurs of Europe and Asia: Patterns of Business Development in Russia, Eastern Europe and China.*

### **Class 9. Is it Possible to Preserve the State Sector (Bureaucracy) from Blat and Corruption?**

Hosking, G. 'Patronage and the Russian State,' *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 2000, Vol. 78, No. 2, April, pp.301-320.

Bill Tompson, Public Administration

J Hughes, P John, G Sasse (2002) "From plan to network: Urban elites and the post-communist organisational state in Russia", *European Journal of Political Research*, 2002 (79)

Fitzpatrick S. (2000) 'Contacts and Connections' in *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Lives in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, Oxford University Press, pp. 62-66 and see Index on Patronage and Protectionism.

Kotkin, S. and Andreas Sajo (eds.) (2002) *Political Corruption in Transition: A Sceptic's Handbook*. CEU Press. Chapters on patronage and clientelism.

Rivkin-Fish, Michele (2005) *Women's Health in Post-Soviet Russia: The Politics of Intervention*. Indiana University Press. Introduction.

*Dedovshchina in the Post-Soviet Military: Hazing of Russian Army Conscripts*. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2006.

Roman ShLEI'NOV, "Blat po raschetu" *Novaia gazeta*, No.81, October 22, 2007, page(s): 2  
Oleg SAVEL'EV, "Znaniia i Den'gi. Oprosy" *Moskovskaia pravda*, No.167, August 02, 2007, page(s): 2

### **Class 10. Do Informal Practices Undermine Civil Society and Democracy?**

Darden, Keith A. 2001. "Blackmail as a Tool of State Domination: Ukraine under Kuchma." *East European Constitutional Review* 10, 2/3 (Spring/Summer), pp. 67-71.

V Gelman (2005) *The Unrule of Law*.

N Robinson (2003) *The Politics of Russia's Partial Democracy*, *Political Studies Review*, 2003 Blackwell Synergy (95)

Ledeneva A. 'Russian Hackers and Virtual Crime' pp.163-176 in Ledeneva A.V., Kurkchyan, M. (2000) *Economic Crime in Russia*. Kluwer Law International,

Wedel, Janine R. (1998) *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe 1989-1998*. St. Martin's Press.

#### **Further reading:**

Humphrey, C. (1998) 'Re-thinking bribery in contemporary Russia' in Lovell, S., Ledeneva, A. & Rogachevskii, A. (eds.) *Bribery and Blat in Russia*. London: Macmillan.

Miller, W.L., A.Grodeland and T.Koshechkina (2000) 'Victims or Accomplices: Extortion and Bribery in Eastern Europe' in Ledeneva A.V., Kurkchyan, M. (2000) *Economic Crime in Russia*. Kluwer Law International, pp.113-128.

\*Noonan, John T. Jr. (1987) *Bribes*. University of California Press. Introduction.

Rose-Ackerman, S. (1999) *Corruption and Government : Causes, Consequences, and Reform*. Cambridge University Press.

- Pleines, H. 'Large-scale Corruption and Rent-seeking in the Russian Banking Sector' in Ledeneva A.V., Kurkchyan, M. (2000) *Economic Crime in Russia*. Kluwer Law International, pp. 191-208.
- Sissener, T. K. (2001) *Anthropological perspectives on corruption*. Working paper 5, www.cmi.no (available online).
- Varese, F. 'Pervasive Corruption' in Ledeneva A.V., Kurkchyan, M. (2000) *Economic Crime in Russia*. Kluwer Law International.
- Ditton, J. (1977) *Part-time Crime: An Ethnography of Fiddling and Pilferage*. London: Macmillan.
- Mars, G. (1982) *Cheats at Work: An Anthropology of Workplace Crime*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Ries, N. (1997) *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation During Perestroika*. Cornell University Press.
- Wilson, Andrew. (2005) *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*. Princeton: Yale University Press.
- \*Lovell, S., Ledeneva, A. & Rogachevskii, A. (eds.) (1999) *Bribery and Blat in Russia*. London: Macmillan.
- Humphrey, C. and Hugh-Jones, S. (eds.) (1992) *Barter, Exchange and Value. An Anthropological Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Seabright, Paul (2000) *The Vanishing Rouble: Barter Networks and Non-Monetary Transactions in Post-Soviet Societies*, Cambridge University Press. Chapters by Humphrey, Seabright, Ledeneva.

### **Essay Titles for the 2008 Draw**

1. How does the study of blat affected (chose a field of research)?
2. Are there difference in blat practices in rural and agricultural areas?
3. Is blat, in its current form, a form of corruption?
4. Have recent years of post-socialism brought any significant changes to the
5. role of informal practices in Russian society?
6. Few specialists in Russian studies need convincing that there is plenty of informalism in Russian formal structures, but is it possible to prove it?
7. How to differentiate informal practices from corruption?
8. Is it possible to measure/assess the importance of informal practices?
9. How to assess changes in importance of informal practices over time.
10. Given the complex relations between institutions and practices in any society, it seems reasonable to guess that there are rather few practices that are straightforwardly "supportive" (or for that matter "subversive"), but can informal practices be differentiated?
11. No economy is without an informal dimension. Russians who come to live and work in Britain often comment on the importance of informal ties, such as old boys' networks. What is the difference between informal practices in Russia and the UK (prevalence, sectors, functions etc.)?
12. Examine which particular sectors of the economy have dispositions to particular ways of getting things done.
13. How exactly are networks created and reproduced? Are they different in different types of enterprise or different regions?

14. When and how did the people in charge of company accounts in the post-Soviet era learn their trade?
15. What is the relationship between business and power structures in different localities?
16. How do state-owned and private areas of the economy relate to one another?
17. Describe the relationship between blat and new consumerism.

Essay titles in 2006-2007

Why have centrally planned economies been so inextricably tied to informal practices?

How did transition affect corruption in Russia?

Informal practices and Internet in Russia

Abuse of presidential Power: prerequisites for a Scandal. Watergate and its Consequences

An exploration of the political technologies that have impacted on Russian politics and society between 1993 and 2003

The Financial Keiretsu: Model of Business in Japan based on Informal Practices

Illicit Arms Trade in Russia

The Opium Economy in Afghanistan

International Informal Networks at Work: The Case of RosUkrEnerg

The effects of Informal Practices on the Music Industry: Downloading in the UK and Piracy in China

Informal Practices and the Second Economy

What Can Soviet and Post-Soviet Fiction Tell us About the Role of Informal Practices in a Society: a comparative study of 'One Day of Ivan Denisovich', 'One Day of Denis Ivanovich', and a 'Day of Oprichnik'.

The Mafia and the State

Informal Practices-A comparison of post-Soviet Russia and Kazakhstan

Representation of Informal Practices in Mario Puzo's 'The Godfather': An Assessment.

Manipulating Elections in Russia

The Concept of Network Capital and its role on the Soviet and post-Soviet economy

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- Click 'I agree – create profile'
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- Click on 'Informal Practices in Postcommunist Societies'
- Click on the submit icon to the right of **Essay 1**
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- For your last name, enter **Smith**
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- Click on **Browse** to find the electronic copy of your essay
- Click on file and click **Open**
- Then click **Submit**
- If this is the essay you want to submit, click '**Yes, submit**'
- You can then click on **Portfolio** and log out.