



NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY  
HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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# **ON EXPERTOCRACY IN RUSSIA**

BASIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

WORKING PAPERS

SERIES: LAW  
WP BRP 27/LAW/2013

This Working Paper is an output of a research project implemented at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE). Any opinions or claims contained in this Working Paper do not necessarily reflect the views of HSE.

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## **On expertocracy in Russia<sup>2</sup>**

Annotation: This paper examines the meaning of the words “expertocracy” and “expertocrat”, and, based on the general theory of expertise, shows that the activity of expertocrats has nothing in common with the activity of experts, and that expertocrats adopted the word “expertise” from jurisprudence without the required understanding of the nature of expertise as a social phenomenon.

Keywords. Expertocracy, expertocrat, expert, expertise, general theory of expertise, expertics.

JEL Classification: K10

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<sup>2</sup> This scientific study uses results obtained during the course of project № 11-01-0014, implemented as part of the “Scientific Fund NRU HSE” program in 2012-2013

## **Introduction**

This work aims to study the new meaning of the word “expertocracy”, which, according to some authors, reflects a new social phenomenon connected with the power of the so-called “experts”.

## **Theoretical background**

New words continue to appear based on the word “expert”, including “expertocracy” and “expertology”, as well as new meanings of the word itself. Some groups of people attempt to exploit the word in conjunction with “narrative” – another fashionable lexeme.

According to Wikipedia, “A narrative is a historically and culturally motivated interpretation of an aspect of the world from a certain position. The term was adopted from historiography, where it appeared in the course of elaboration of the ‘narrative history’ concept, which regards historical events not as consequences of natural historic processes, but believes that they appeared within the context of the account of those events, being inseparably linked with their interpretation.”

Both words were picked up by the media from the professional arena, distorting and acquiring their own meaning in political science – a meaning that is symbolic and based on a trivial, mundane understanding. Unfortunately, lawmakers and rule-making officials started using the words “expert” and “expertise” in a trivial sense.

The democratization of Russian society, television, and certain popular mass media has allowed certain people to call themselves “experts”. Afterwards, the mass media started using this word when inviting such people to various talk shows, game shows, and so forth. Then so-called “narrative experts” appeared, who described certain social events and gave their subjective evaluations, which often were quite different from reality.

### On expertocracy

Ashkerov, who is the self-proclaimed inventor of the word “expertocrat”, which he linked with knowledge management, wrote, “The new book Expertocracy: Managing Knowledge was published, in which I explain the term “expertocrat”, which I invented”.<sup>3</sup> He believes that in politics an expert may act as a scientist and a judge. He points out that an “expert” has a political and legal role in cognitive activity, but he still believes that an expert is a person that judges what knowledge is and what it is not.

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<sup>3</sup> URL:<http://ashkerov.livejournal.com/154431.html>.

It is hard to agree with such an opinion, since one needs to ascertain how the author understands knowledge in order to perform the role of expert and judge and to discourse about knowledge – a fortiori to manage knowledge.

When discussing knowledge, one should distinguish between data, information, and knowledge. If this is not done, the discussion of the nature of expertise is meaningless, since, when studying the object of the expertise, the expert produces expert data, but not knowledge. When an expert produces his or her expert product, he or she uses his special knowledge – first of all professional skills, as well as professional declarative and procedural data.

When political scientists act as political technologists and call themselves experts, it is a different thing. This is a confusion of terms; in particular it is exploitation and profanation of the concept of expert. Then the “expert” narrative appears, which is very distant from the nature of expertise.

Historically, experts have neither taken nor given power. But power-wielding authorities has been known to listen to expertocrats – political scientists for whom the truth was less important than increasing the probability of achieving the goals of authorities. This is the main difference between an expert and an expertocrat, not whether an expert’s study is done within a framework of institutional connections or paid for on the basis of an agreement for rendering expert services. Thus, clans of expertocrats appeared that started fighting each other for the opportunity to advise authorities.

Besides private advice, authorities need public advice, which it prefers in the form of pseudoscientific proof of its ideas and which would most efficiently affect the mood of the people (the electors). The second attribute – that of manipulating the mass consciousness – is most important for authorities. It is therefore the first thing that is required of expertocratic political scientists and which naturally is completely absent from the profession of expert.

In this connection, expertocrats are not experts, and their product cannot be considered expertise in any way. These are consultations, evaluations, and opinions expressed publicly in the media. The more efficient the effect on the mass consciousness, the better the expertocrat is and the more expensive his or her product is.

Thus, the word “expertocracy” may be said to signify not the authority of experts, but the authorities that listens to political scientists who call themselves experts.

#### On expertocrats

By the word “expertocrat”, Ashkerov actually gave a scientific name to a person that unwarrantedly calls himself an “expert”. From now on, so-called experts may be called expertocrats and thus be distinguished from persons who act as juridical experts.

In his blog, Ashkerov gives the following definition of an expertocrat: “Who is an expertocrat anyway? An expertocrat is a hoarder of dead and stale knowledge that has turned into *capital*. Expertocratic knowledge is impartial, but this impartiality is guaranteed by the fact that the expertocrat is completely alien to the research. This is the very condition of his authority, which is based not on alienation from research, but rather on alienation from research-related labor. Expertocrats are masters of extracting *value added from such labor*. His success is conditioned by discrediting research as an activity, by understating its symbolic and economic value – mainly symbolic value, of course. For the expertocrat, a researcher is worse than a hobo – someone a bit unhinged and with no clear occupation (a “normal” occupation being the extraction of value added, of course).”<sup>4</sup>

Not all political scientists agree with Ashkerov.: Yevstifeev most notably engaged in an argument with him.<sup>5</sup> Let us point out a couple theses on Ashkerov’s book.: “The transformation of information into capital as a result of establishing a media infrastructure produces expertocracy as a special kind of symbolic power. The power of expertocracy, which is based on profiteering the openness of information, changes the entire structure of the circulation of information and turns education and research activity into service-type activities. The roles and functions of traditional institutions of knowledge transfer are changed.”

We agree with such criticism, since objective history has no examples of expertocratic authority. The authority of expertocrats is a myth created by the political scientists that will never come true, as the requirements for those who come to power are completely different from the requirements for those who possess special knowledge and are appointed as experts.

#### From the history of expertocracy

Sociologists started using the word “expert” long ago. For example, Beckwith, an American sociologist, foretold in early 1970s that, in the last stages of political evolution (including post-socialism), democracy would be replaced by the rule of experts and that such rule would be more efficient than rule through representatives elected by the people, since experts are more talented, better educated, and more experienced in special matters.<sup>6</sup> Still, the efficiency of the rule of experts has not yet been proven; the world is on the verge of a global crisis and expertocrats, in all appearances, are at a loss of what to do.

Galbraith was one of the first to explain that the scientific and academic community (government, university, and private research institutions) should service society, and not

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<sup>4</sup>URL:<http://ashkerov.ru/2009/02/08/%d1%84%d0%b8%d0%bb%d0%be%d1%81%d0%be%d1%84%versus%d1%8d%d0%ba%d1%81%d0%bf%d0%b5%d1%80%d1%82%d0%be%d0%ba%d1%80%d0%b0%d1%82/>

<sup>5</sup> Yevstifeev R. Sovereign expertocracy, or dreams of something greater // 60th parallel – No. 2 (33)/ - 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Beckwith B. The rule of experts. - 1972.

particular customers.<sup>7</sup> The role of science in industry started growing. Indeed, when a scientifically founded evaluation of anything was needed in the USSR, scientists of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR were engaged.

Bell wrote on this problem and is one of the first to develop the idea of a postindustrial society whose economy began to develop services together with material goods.<sup>8</sup> Industrial resources now include so-called information and knowledge. Innovation became the main propellant of the economy.

However, the fact that information resources have increased in importance and reached the same level as that of material and energy resources did not diminish the significance of the latter resources, since the very existence of information is impossible without them. The term “knowledge-based society” is no more than a metaphor, in which even the scientifically explained significance of information is not determined. Our opinion regarding the falseness of the premises on which the hypothesis of a knowledge-based society was based is given in the publication.<sup>9</sup>

Knowledge is carried by people, and special knowledge is carried by people who act as consultants, advisers, or experts on narrow and specialized questions. But there are no historical examples of consultants who become persons of power. In our opinion, so-called experts will never rule states, since this is not provided for by the public role of the expert in the general theory of expertise. And the claim that experts are more intelligent, more professional, and more talented holds no water, since the role has no such attributes.

Unfortunately, the authors of certain publications do not understand the nature of expertise as a public phenomenon, and they construct terms, such as so-called expertise and expert that begin adversely affecting our reality.

So it happens that the expert narrative acts as a mythological description, as well as the instrument of expert “myth-making” and a construction of a new reality that is erected on the basis of so-called expert community opinion.

The general theory of expertise opposes such an expert narrative with a different viewpoint.<sup>10</sup> Expertise is an instrument, with which experts may study the objective qualities of an object and discover its attributes that were intentionally constructed or accidentally incorporated.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Galbraith J. The New Industrial State. - 1965.

<sup>8</sup> Bell D. The coming of postindustrial society. - 1973.

<sup>9</sup> Nesterov A.V. Six myths of knowledge-based society // Russia: tendencies and trends of development, 2008. No. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Nesterov A.V. Basics of the expert research activity. – M.: HSE Publishing House, 2009. – p. 163.

<sup>11</sup> Nesterov A.V. Expertise. – Rostov-on-Don: Kniga, 2003 – 352 p.

In all this, the expert's role should be of a juridical nature: the expert must be independent (uninterested in the matter) and bear responsibility fixed by law.

In this connection, a person acting juridically as an expert in principle cannot take any part in the adoption of a decision. In other words, he or she cannot be the person who makes imperative decisions – even more so juridical decisions. Therefore, no one may be appointed as an expert, but only a person meeting certain requirements, and such a person will never get any power, since it is persons with power who appoint them. If the competencies of an expert and a person with power to make imperative decisions need to meet on at least two points, then their competencies must in principle not meet on any single point. Otherwise a conflict of interests arises. The general theory of expertise may help to ascertain the imitation of expertise and experts in the form of so-called expertise and experts.

### The expert's knowledge

The expertocracy myth is based on another myth – that of the expert's knowledge (sometimes called the expert's wisdom). The publication by Scherbinina on who the experts are, namely “persons with authority and who are vested with power”, is among the latest.<sup>12</sup> She claims that an expert is different from a person that simply has an opinion on a matter in the following two ways: First, the expert's activity involves generalization and presentation of that which was generalized, and, second, he or she is the most legitimate producer of opinions. In other words, he or she is a person with authority and who is vested with power. The expert speaks on a matter on behalf of a “professional majority” and a “guild of specialists” and expresses not a personal position, but a viewpoint of a group of persons with authority. An expert's competency and authority is composed of knowledge on the matter, information needed for making a decision, and a methodology of evaluation for making judgments.

Such opinion is difficult to agree with. An expert's activity is always an expert's special study. But not all special studies are expert studies or expertise. A special researcher does not have to be an authority or be called expert, and still less does he or she have to claim special authority. And he or she certainly does not speak on behalf of any group, as he or she is personally liable for the expert conclusion. One should distinguish an expert's legal competence from his or her special competence. Thus, authority as a category of morality cannot be mixed with knowledge as an ability, with declarative data and procedural data (methods). Note that the activity of professional experts is a special pragmatic form of practical activity.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Expertocracy: Artisanhip and trade // Neva. – 2012. – No. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Nesterov A.V. Theoretical and practical problems of expertics // Expert criminalist. – 2011. No. 2.

If a person has a special professional education and wishes to conduct professional expert activity, then this person requires special expert training, which includes an obligatory juridical component.

However, any person possessing any special knowledge may take the public role of a scholar and publicly demonstrate his special skills. For example, Anatoly Vasserman, a famous scholar, often speaks in public media, giving his particular opinion on a variety of questions, including political ones. But he does not call himself a professional expert and does not act as a political scientist or expertocrat.

Thus, the activity of expertocrats is not artisanship or trade or scientific research. Rather it is the activity of political scientists, of intellectual cognition, of public situations, and of pronouncing evaluative subjective opinions on the current and/or future status of the studied object. As a rule, expertocrats lobby the interests of those who pay them.

#### On lobbyist expertocrats

There are yet other publications on expertocracy as a lobbying instrument. In particular, Raykov points out that the search for an additional intellectual resource for improving public and corporate governance within the scope of globalization stimulated the development of “think tanks”, expert networks and professional communities, centers of expertise, and analytics.<sup>14</sup> There are approximately 6,000 such centers in the world, over 100 of them are in Russia, and approximately 1,800 are in the United States.

Authorities and businesses evaluate the products of such centers differently. This publication gives information to that regard: in particular, the American president employs the services of several hundred expert and analytic centers; in France, the activity of experts is regarded rather as an opportunity to obtain background information; the communities of experts in Great Britain are involved in collaborations; in Germany, they are seen as competent assistants; while in Austria they are seen as social partners. In Europe, the experience of lobbying respective interests by business gave rise to various forms of public-private expert interaction. This means that the term “center of expertise and analytics” has yet to receive an unambiguous definition.

The absence of an advanced theory of expertise caused the words “expert” and “expertise” to be widely exploited in all spheres of human life. The democratization and humanitarization of society have greatly increased the role of sociologists, political scientists, and psychologists in both the activity field, as well as in the media.

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<sup>14</sup> Raykov A.N. “Expertocracy as a lobbying instrument” // Presidential control. – 2010. – No. 3. – pp. 26 – 30.



Business wishes to lobby and is financially capable of lobbying its interests and of creating a positive image for itself, which produces the necessity to finance the activity of so-called centers of expertise and analytics.

On the other hand, the reason that motivates a person of power to approach such centers for external advice is known. Specifically, it is the political, social, and/or economic situation in the globalized world, which is ever growing in complexity.

However, there is no reason for advice to be called expertise and for advisers to be called experts. This is especially true in regard to those advisers who do not extract expert data from the object of an expert's study, but only interpret available information in the way that the client needs and in the form that is acceptable for voters.

“Open government” is another important concept related to experts.

#### On “open government” as an expert portal

Statesmen have lately started bringing so-called “public independent experts” in addition to trusted expertocrats to discuss draft laws by forming so-called “open governments”, which are Internet forums for the opinions of such experts.<sup>15</sup>

However, the activity of expertocrats, as well as of public independent experts, is not regulated or governed. Furthermore, there are some opinions that this needs no governing. In particular, A.N.Raykov thinks that “expert activity in the political field is not regulated as strictly as in, say, industrial logistics. The peculiarity of political activity in no way facilitates the implementation of regulations and management. The higher the level of authority, the more diffused the regulations. Chaotic, irrational factors are of far greater significance in the upholding of political order.”

However, non-regulation and non-governing of expert activity means monopolism, voluntarism, and myth-making. If the state is interested in “open government”, then it should create conditions for a so-called community of experts, as well as regulate and govern its operations. Legislative regulation should include legal guarantees that public authorities will listen to and take into account useful opinions of citizens.

Regulation should take into account the legally significant mechanisms of analyzing true interests of “public independent experts” and of discovering persons whose interests are covered by that label (institutional, private, or civil). There are good reasons to fear that “open government” will imitate the activity of public expert by actions of representatives of institutions and private groups, and profane “open government” itself.

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<sup>15</sup> Nesterov A.V. Will the “Open government” help the development of Russia? (Pre-print – May of 2012) URL: <http://pravo.hse.ru/expertika/announcements/59426056.html>

It is worth remembering an Oriental saying here, which says that a wise ruler listens to all wise men, acknowledges his mistakes, and seeks to find balance. But if authorities only listen to monopolistic advisers and only hear what they want to hear, then such advice is not only expertise but also recommendation.

Those who make decisions rely on various types of data provided by three categories of advisers.

Strategic consultations require trusted, creative, and informed consultants, whose activity is highly paid. This category of advice takes into account the opinions of the creative minority, which should represent the interests of citizens, business, and institutions.

Technological consultations require technologist advisers, technologies of voting, and accounting for voter opinion. This category of advice studies the opinions of the active majority. Each voter is a single adviser, who usually studies the situation before voting.

Meta consultations require consultants who analyze the true interests of so-called independent experts from the so-called expert community, which publicly voice their expert opinions. This category of consulting permits one to find out who is who in the expert community and whose interests are protected by certain experts (interests of institutions, business, or citizens).

Taking into account the fact that consulting data is composed of subjective opinions and is based on intellectual methods of research, such data needs to be checked for veracity. The main question is whether consulting data can be trusted enough to provide a basis for making decisions.<sup>16</sup>

There are many known cases when rulers believed “experts”. The most odious case is the declaration by Nikita Khrushchev that communism would be built in 20 years, which was based on advice from academic experts.

In the most recent history, we remember the example when, on the verge of the crisis of 2008, Vladimir Putin, on the basis of data supplied by such “experts”, claimed that there would be no crisis and that Russia’s economy would develop smoothly.

Fundamental managing consistencies should be taken into account in order to harmonize all advantages and disadvantages of regulating expert activity in the political sphere.

The higher the level of power, the more complex its system, and this is no paradox since the theory of systems has long been known to show that a proportionate increase of a system’s elements leads to a square increase of its complexity. If a system consists of ten levels, the upper level hardly governs the lower level at all. Therefore, the governance from above needs to be

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<sup>16</sup> Nesterov A.V. On “intelligent” regulation and lobbying (Pre-print – April of 2012) URL: <http://www.hse.ru/org/persons/68747>

combined with local self-governance. Furthermore, there are three main categories of governance: subordination, coordination, and reordination. However, the last category has only started to be employed recently.<sup>17, 18</sup>

Raykov also pointed out that the requirements for the quality of expert activity also grew together with the growth of the level of governance. But it is hard to agree with his opinion that “in all cases, impartial understanding and a sense of real local life, which are impossible to obtain from any other sources of information, are the most recognized qualities of the experts.”

Any local resident has a sense of real local life, but objective (true) data obtained as a result of studying a real object and not of its manifestation, is what is wanted from an expert. An adviser, however, may rely on his own understanding and senses.

Perception and intellectual awareness of reality are subjective, and thus the clans of expertocrats appeared and engaged in the so-called war of experts.

### Wars of experts

Penskaya is convinced that the cause for the wars of experts (a struggle between different clans of experts) is the driving away of official academic science in the Russian Academy of Sciences from authorities by “independent expert centers”.<sup>19</sup> This process was named “the revolution of candidates”, when people with a degree of candidate of science – and often people without any academic degree at all – pushed the academicians aside [Yurevich, 2004, p. 18].

She points out that a “surveillance of the latest wars of experts, which were provoked by different causes but with similar effects and results, supplies material for the construction of such navigation. Besides this, the conflict included interference from various layers and pools of experts and facilitates access to an understanding of an expert’s new attributes that are implemented in the epic narrative of war, which is largely constructed by the media.”

In our opinion, there are no wars of experts, nor is there any community of experts in Russia, but only a multi-billion-ruble commercial field of so-called expert services, which lack any competition between so-called experts. Services may be purchased from “independent experts” who are independent enough, and from expertocrats in this field for private structures, as well as for public needs.

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<sup>17</sup> Nesterov A.V. Is there experts’ community in Russia? // Scientific, expert and analytical and information support of the national strategic planning, priority and national projects and programs. – Moscow: INIION, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Nesterov A.V., Andreeva E.I. Regulations: theory and practice. – M.: RTA, 2008. – 154 p.

<sup>19</sup> Penskaya E.N. The culture of narration and the new media (on the problem of interpretation of the wars of experts 2010-X) URL: <http://www.hse.ru/data/2012/05/31/1252375977/%D0%9F%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F%D0%9A%D1%83%D0%BB%D1%8C%D1%82%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B0.pdf>

## Expertocrat

An expertocrat is a temporary public role played first and foremost by a creative person who calls himself an “expert” and, on this basis, directly or indirectly influences authorities via the mass media or society by producing an expertocratic product. Here, an expertocratic product could be advice on the current or assumed state of political, social, or economic affairs, which requires special knowledge and, as a rule, political information. Such a product also includes the creation of myths based on the authority of experts, as the expertocrat hopes that not only will he advise authorities, but that he will also actually gain admittance to the power structure himself. The expertocrat’s role is not similar to the role of an expert, which historically is a juridical role. An expert’s functions include only studying actual objects and producing an exclusively objective product in a categorical form, while the expertocrat’s functions include voicing a subjective opinion based on senses and intuition.

Expertocrats are special in the sense that by default they represent certain groups of people whose interests they protect. This is done by interpreting the information they have and extracting it from the data in order to increase the probability of achieving the goals of the group. Unlike the attributes of experts, such as independence as impartiality to certain decisions, the properties of the expertocrat’s role include that of adviser as well as that of lobbyist and image-maker. In this connection, expertocrats form the myth about so-called “independent experts”, who are in fact independent from both law and right.

In the middle of the last century, jurisprudence disproved the idea of an expert as a “scientific judge”. Now the time has come to show that “expertocracy” is another myth related to the word “expert” and that so-called independent expert is a science-mocking centaur that invaded Russia’s legal field and is being exploited by dishonest persons in the interests of institutions or certain individuals. They may act under the label of “independent expertise”, since society does not check their independence, the reliability of their products, or the real interests that they protect, and meanwhile lawmakers adopt laws including the words “independent expertise”.

Today’s Russian expertocrats also possess a special ability to produce and use myths about experts to pose as experts and act as an expert on anything.

In the Russian language there is a word “znatok”, roughly meaning connoisseur. A “znatok”, unlike an expert, may rely on intuition or other senses and even make guesses, but professional experts base their categorical answers only on the quantifiable means of research. Even if organoleptic methods are used, they employ statistically significant results from a special competence check by a group of experts.

Professional experts do not employ intellectual methods – so-called expert methods – in juridically significant situations because the veracity of those methods is unknown.

When making decisions, wise persons would rather believe their own intuition, rather those of an adviser. The adviser's "sense of real local life" may be untrustworthy, and the person who makes the empowered decision is responsible for the decision.

## **Conclusion**

The word "expertocracy" is used to designate a social phenomenon in political activity when a rise of political advisers and other separate advisers imitate the word "expert". And the meaning of "expert service" is attributed to the word "expertise", which does not belong to expertise as a social phenomenon. In our opinion, expertocracy as an objective phenomenon does not exist, and what exists are only trivial and subjective interpretations of the attributes of expert and expertise by the authors of certain publications who create myths about experts, like the myth of the "expert-judge".

The special mission of expertocrats is public declaration in the media space, with the purpose of manipulating public opinion. However, expertocrats may also act anonymously when a specific private opinion is needed during a competition – even a scientific one. Here the anonymous expertocrats act as authoritative judges who exploit so-called authoritative criterion that lacks scientific proof. Due to their anonymity, such expertocrats do not risk their scientific reputation and bear no responsibility for juridically significant decisions that are adopted.

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