

IDD academic speaks at Moscow Urban Forum

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Earlier this week (December 07-09 2011) [Adrian Campbell \(/staff/profiles/government-society/campbell-adrian.aspx\)](#) spoke at the Moscow Urban Forum. The event was held under the aegis of Moscow City Government and with an impressive array of Russian and European corporate sponsors. It was opened by Mayor Sobyenin and Deputy Prime Minister Kozak and featured a strong field of Russian federal and city policymakers, together a good number of urban specialists and politicians from Western Europe, North America and China.

The conference represented a new emphasis on Moscow as a Global City. Much has changed since Sobyenin (former head of presidential administration and previously governor of oil-rich Tyumen Region) replaced the unlamented Yuri Luzhkov who had dominated the city for two decades. The global city campaign has accompanied a shift in Russian policy towards accepting migration and 'gastarbeitery', that had previously been resisted and there is a renewed move towards increasing Moscow's role as an international centre of business.

The conference coincided with an agreement to expand Moscow's boundaries into the surrounding region. In parallel the Federal government has been promoting 'agglomerations' (i.e. city-regions), although this apparently decentralist policy is seen by some to be too 'administrative' in its approach.

The conference also coincided with the launch of a new decentralisation reform led by President Medvedev and Deputy Prime Minister Kozak on decentralisation, which will lead new legislation reminiscent of the UK Localism Bill, transferring a very large range of powers and resources to the regions, while closing several hundred federal agencies and regional offices. I had been involved in the previous round of reforms led by Kozak in the early 2000s, which reduced regional powers to a very significant extent - a move which, it had been hoped, would help empower local government, although other factors militated against this in practice. Kozak always maintained that there would be a re-decentralisation once the system had been put in order, and this is what is now intended to happen. It will be interesting to see how the combination of the city-region policy and the decentralisation to regions policy works out in practice, and how far the reforms will facilitate enhanced international competitiveness for Russia's larger cities, as hoped.

In Russian debates on global cities and city-regions the example of China casts a long shadow. As I argued in my paper to the conference the Russian debate has been hampered by a false choice between a 'bottom-up West' and a 'top-down China' - the Chinese model not being quite what it appeared to be from a Russian perspective. Far from being the centralised monolith imagined by some Russian commentators, China has long been subject to a cycle of centralisation and decentralisation, with the latter becoming increasingly the default state.

One of the conference sessions appeared to seek to pitch a 'European' view of urban development from the Netherlands against a Chinese view, from the secretary general of the Chinese Association of City Planners. The latter however denied the anticipated contrast between Eastern and Western approaches and emphasised that over the last 10 years, Chinese policy had been moving towards a combination of top-down and bottom-up principles. This was significant, given that Russian policy at the start of the last decade turned (not without justification) towards what was seen as a Chinese strategy, away from the chaos left by the attempt to introduce 'Western style' decentralisation in the 1990s. What was now becoming clear was that both China and Russia have changed since then and a different mix of policies is emerging or is likely to emerge as a result.

A summary of Adrian Campbell's speech is here <http://www.urbanforum.ru/pressroom/news/71> (<http://www.urbanforum.ru/pressroom/news/71>).

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