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Public Advocacy in Serbia: translating democratisation in a double semiperiphery

Public Advocacy in Serbia: translating democratisation in a double semiperiphery[1]

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Abstract

International development actors have promoted 'public advocacy' in post-Milošević Serbia as a form of NGO intervention that they expected to strengthen 'community' participation in local-level decisions and support the policies of 'civil society building' and 'democratisation'. The introduction of public advocacy was underpinned by the nesting model of a double semiperiphery (Serbia in relation to the West, the 'local community' in relation to the national centre), in which the centre is imagined as dynamic, active, and the source of innovations, whereas the semiperiphery is static, passive, and receiving those innovations with some delay. By analysing both the transmission of public advocacy knowledge through textbooks and training sessions and the actual unfolding of several advocacy campaigns, I show how doing advocacy in Serbia involved an active and creative process of multi-stage translation between the meanings and interests of 'communities', 'decision makers', foreign donors, and NGO workers. These findings complicate the ideological underpinnings of advocacy: the spatial model of the centre/semiperiphery, the scalar model of the local/national, and the institutionalist dichotomy of the state/society. At the same time, it is shown how the theoretical framework of 'policy translation' may benefit from a closer focus on brokers and brokerage.

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Introduction

This paper examines a set of 'public advocacy' projects conducted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Serbia as a case of development policy translation. My analysis builds especially on the recent concern with the movement of public policies across space and scales in the anthropology of policy and critical policy studies. These approaches have become increasingly critical of the model of 'policy transfer', based on the 'orthodox' view of policy as a linear or cyclical sequence of rational-bureaucratic decisions and actions taken to deliver pre-defined outcomes. The idea of transfer assumes a relatively smooth and unproblematic transposition of an essentially unchanged policy from Point A to Point B. This results in diffusionist accounts of formal similarities of policies so disseminated and a utilitarian emphasis on their 'fit' with target settings. Little attention is given to the actual transfer process and its actors and contexts, which are treated as passive points of departure and origin (Clarke et al. 2015: 14–15; Shore and Wright 2011: 4–8). In turn, the concept of 'policy translation' is embedded in an anthropological perspective on policy. Anthropologists and critical policy scholars approach policies as non-linear, politically charged and always potentially unpredictable processes that generate meanings and socio-technological assemblages and reflect as well as shape social worlds in which they are embedded (Clarke et al. 2015; Shore and Wright 2011; Wedel et al. 2005). The translation approach recentres the very movement of policies across jurisdictions and socio-cultural settings. Translation involves transformations of meaning, genre, social relationships, and "established orderings of power, knowledge and position" (Clarke et al. 2015: 49; Shore and Wright 2011: 13–14).

The first two sections of the paper situate the promotion of public advocacy in Serbia within a broader argument about a dominant relation between a (Western) 'centre' and a closely, but unequally integrated postsocialist South East European 'semiperiphery'. Accordingly, policy translation was conceived of as an import from an active and dynamic centre to a passive and static semiperiphery. Foreign development actors introduced advocacy in the form of an NGO-based process of public interest representation that they expected to further their own policies of 'democratisation' and 'civil society building'. This translation was structured by a double semiperiphery model to the extent that global advocacy knowledge was routed through 'leading' NGOs to 'local' NGOs and communities, which were thus implicitly positioned as particularly unchanging.

Following the "studying through" method (e.g., Wedel et al. 2005: 39–40), the second part of the paper shifts from broad policy frameworks to the practical dissemination of advocacy knowledge by the Balkan Community Initiatives Fund (BCIF)[3] and its foreign donors. While their stated objective in supporting local-level advocacy was to mobilise and represent 'local communities' vis-à-vis local governments, the advocating NGOs were actually led to focus on building a different kind of relations with local officials, politicians, civil servants, and other NGOs. The practice of advocacy can therefore be understood as a recursive translation of meanings and interests in multiplex brokerage networks. I will argue that these processes complicated the triple kind of models informing advocacy knowledge: the spatial model of the centre/semiperiphery, the scalar model of the local/national, and the institutionalist dichotomy of the state/society.

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[3] Renamed Trace Foundation (*Trag fondacija* in Serbian) in 2013.

While I intend to show that the concept of translation can provide valuable insights into the introduction of advocacy to Serbia, this case also leads me to raise some issues with that analytical framework. Namely, it assumes a "fluid and dynamic nature of the social world" (Clarke et al. 2015: 35), which – if taken too literally – may complicate the appreciation of limits to fluidity in particular cases. This theoretical bias originates in actor-network theory (ANT), from which anthropologists of policy and development borrowed the translation concept (Clarke et al. 2015: 36–37, 47, 51; Mosse and Lewis 2006: 13–15). ANT challenged what it presented as received sociological assumptions about an "a priori existence of social and institutional realms" (Mosse and Lewis 2006: 13). While my analysis is sympathetic to the point thus phrased, it parts with ANT in its outright rejection of the concept of society. Bruno Latour famously admonished social scientists to discard their inherited assumptions of a "third dimension" and instead "keep the social domain totally *flat*" (Latour 2005: 171, his emphasis). They should proceed as near-blind ants: trace associations and networks horizontally, documenting the vehicles that enable those connections and avoiding "jumping" to fantasies of an all-encompassing "context", "framework", or "society". I fear that elevating the methodological focus on networks to an ontological principle obscures two crucial facts: 1) most people experience social reality as (also) vertical, and 2) there are processes at levels of aggregation that are difficult to access solely by the hyper-empiricist "following around" of connections and actors (Clarke et al. 2015: 37; Mosse 2013: 232). The linguistic metaphor of translation may further privilege an undue focus on the meanings of policies (Clarke et al. 2015: 9; Shore and Wright 2011: 20). This is consistent with the roots of this approach in constructivist, interpretive, linguistic, discursive, and cultural "turns" (Clarke et al. 2015: 17, 35).

I contend that we will not get very far in understanding actually existing policies if their actors, motives, and structural conditions are not adequately specified. My own analysis, therefore, combines a concern with policy translation with a close focus on its central actors and the social relations reproduced and transformed by translation. I suggest that the anthropology of policy movement may benefit from engaging with the concepts of brokers and brokerage that have a long pedigree in political anthropology and now experience somewhat of a revival (Lindquist 2015). This notion is by no means novel. Scholars studying policy translation, including in South East Europe, have acknowledged the importance of brokers and intermediaries (Deacon et al. 2007; Lendvai and Stubbs 2009; Stubbs 2015: 81), though less prominently than anthropologists of development (e.g. Bierschenk et al. 2000; Mosse and Lewis 2006; Mosse 2013). In general, actors seem to take a back seat in relation to meanings in the anthropology of policy and continue to be specified mainly in terms of formal institutions and individuals affiliated to them, despite gestures to the importance of "informality" and the need to go beyond the confines of institutions (Clarke et al. 2015: 19; Deacon et al. 2007: 240). Janine Wedel's (2001, 2009) work on "flex actors" and "flex nets" is an important exception.

An actor-centred focus on brokers and brokerage may thus usefully complement the meaning-centred perspective of the translation approach. While Latourian frameworks may be invoked to argue that we should not privilege brokers or any other particular type of actor since translation "occurs through diffused agency in networks" (Mosse and Lewis 2006: 15), the material presented below suggests that brokers deserve special attention as important and intriguingly complex figures. They are the producers and products of societies undergoing large-scale processes of transformation, mediating between the overlapping registers of social organisation and political authority, and embodying the ensuing contradictions (James 2011; Lindquist 2015). If

anthropologists truly aim to answer questions such as "[w]hose interests does [policy] promote?" and "[w]hat are its social effects?" (Shore and Wright 2011: 8), brokers emerge as crucial objects of enquiry in their own right as well as windows on the social domains and scales between which they mediate. Understanding what brokers do can shed light on why policy translation succeeds or fails in its objectives of social transformation or brings about unintended changes. In other words, a study of brokers can elucidate fluidity as well as its limits.

Policy Translation in the Balkan Semiperiphery

Drawing on anthropological and interpretive approaches to policy, Paul Stubbs (2015) has recently called for a rethinking of policy translation in South East Europe in more critical and holistic terms than is the case in conventional political science and international relations. The latter scholarship has tended to adopt an instrumental and institutionalist vision of policy transfers as adding up to the so-called "Europeanisation" and multiple "transitions" in the region. Stubbs (2015: 71) employs the work of the Serbian sociologist Marina Blagojević (2009) to argue that the dominant models of transformation are one of "modernising" a semiperiphery that is semi-other in relation to an imagined West. This model has a basic family resemblance with all modernisation theories in that it tends to overlook or misinterpret the actual constraints, possibilities, and needs of the semiperiphery. It instead promotes policies that should help it 'catch up' with, and adjust to, the Western centre. This flawed developmental model results in a seemingly paradoxical coexistence of formal convergence with continued retraditionalisation and peripherialisation. Blagojević (2009) has used the idea of semiperiphery to critique hierarchical relationships between women's scientific knowledge production in the West and former Yugoslavia. A precursor for this line of thinking can be identified in historian Maria Todorova's (1997: 16) analysis of how the discourse of "Balkanism" frames the Balkans as an evolutionary bridge between Europe and Orient – "semideveloped, semicolonial, semicivilized, semioriental". Anthropologists have similarly critiqued the normative and teleological model of 'transition', according to which former socialist societies would make a fast and easy conversion to the West's self-image of liberal democracy and capitalism (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Buyandelgeriyn 2008; Hann 2002). In both cases, the societies marked as semi-other are framed as backward but devoid of the radical, authentic alteriority of a 'true' Orient that is, at least potentially, seen as worth of preservation and allowing for other options than a total convergence with the Western centre.

At the time of my fieldwork in Serbia in 2010–2011, the model of transition informed many of the legal and institutional 'reforms' promoted by nongovernmental organisations, foreign bilateral, multilateral, and private development actors, and parts of the state apparatus. Reformism became an order of the day after the nationalist and isolationist regime of Slobodan Milošević had been ousted and replaced with a sociopolitical coalition that pursued a hegemonic project of neoliberalisation and transnational integration (Mikuš 2015a). The uneven, contested, and seemingly endless 'reforms' that ensued were typically narrated as Serbia's progress on its "path to Europe" (*put u Evropu*). This trope, of course, referred to European Union membership as the official strategic goal of all post-Milošević governments, but it also went beyond it to encompass a broader, symbolically loaded idea of 'European' modernity, prosperity, and international status (Greenberg 2011; Mikuš 2013, 2015a; see also Jansen 2015: 174–180; Petrović 2014). In a context defined by an entire constellation of 'posts' (postsocialist, postauthoritarian, and postwar), the

actors of reforms identified the vision of Europeanness with a set of agendas seen as interconnected or even indivisible: building of a liberal democracy, internationalising and marketising the economy, and variously encouraging or enforcing 'regional cooperation'. The basic teleological structure of this model was consistent with the general framework of transition. However, it was applied with a sense of an additional 'lag' behind more successful postsocialist reformers due to what Serbian academics conceptualised as "blocked transition/transformation" under Milošević (Bolcic 2003; Lazić 2011). Serbia's perceived exceptionalism marked it as in a heightened need of foreign intervention, leading to a particularly crowded and internationalised policy space (Arandarenko and Golicin 2007; Vuković and Babović 2014), in common with most of the former Yugoslavia (Deacon and Stubbs 2007; Stubbs 2015).

Importing Public Advocacy to Serbia

In the following, I heed Stubbs's call by examining the discourse and practice of 'public advocacy' in Serbia as a case study of policy translation in the semiperiphery. Foreign, especially American, development agencies and private donors introduced advocacy to Serbia to promote 'democratisation', one of the main stated aims of Serbia's 'transition' and the international interventions therein (Brown 2006; Vetta 2013). Advocacy is generally defined in development and policy worlds as "the organized efforts and actions of people to access and influence those who make decisions that affect their lives" (Vetta 2013: 252). In Serbia specifically, it tended to be operationalised as the provision of training and funding to NGOs that were expected to use techniques such as networking, campaigning, and lobbying to achieve clearly defined formal policy changes, typically at the local level (Blair et al. 2004: 1, 7; Vetta 2013: 251–256). In other words, NGOs were entrusted with the task of representing public interests to local governments, which had been assumed to continue to govern in an unresponsive manner. At the same time, through their involvement in advocacy, "[c]itizens become aware of their rights and power and use them to successfully participate in decision-making processes" (Đorđević, Stojanović and Vesić Antić 2009: 42).[4] Overall, then, NGO advocacy was seen as making governance more accountable, representative, participative, and – ultimately – democratic (USAID/Serbia n.d.: 3; see also Nuti 2006 on advocacy in Macedonia).

Since NGOs are commonly equated with 'civil society' in Serbia and postsocialist Europe more broadly, support for advocacy lent itself easily to being presented as also conducive to 'civil society building', another major stated objective (and justification) of foreign intervention in former Yugoslavia (Brown 2006; Mikuš 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Sampson 1996, 2004; Vetta 2012, 2013). This goal followed from the widespread belief that civil society had been non-existent under socialism and had to be 'built' through purposeful interventions, which in practice tended to support donor-driven NGO sectors (see also Wedel 2001: 85–122). The assumption that civil society was something found in Western societies but absent or scarce in the former socialist world meant that civil society building was seen as yet another facet of the modernisation of the semiperiphery. And Serbia was once again seen as particularly deficient: in the words of the (mostly foreign) authors of the *Strategic Assessment of Civil Society & Political Processes for Serbia* commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "Serbia lags far behind other political systems in the CEE region in developing a pluralist civil

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[4] All translations from Serbian are my own.

society, and as these other states democratize further, the gap is sure to widen" (Blair et al. 2004: iv). Civil society building was a goal in itself but also part and parcel of the broader democratisation effort, following from the axiom in development and policy worlds and much political science that a 'vibrant civil society', due in particular to its representation and 'watchdog' roles performed, inter alia, through advocacy, is a precondition of 'mature' (read Western liberal) democracy. The perceived usefulness of advocacy in relation to these overlapping objectives can be gleaned from, for example, the recurrent pledges in USAID/Serbia strategies to support "NGO advocacy" or "civil society advocacy" – used interchangeably – to democratise governance, strengthen civil society organisations, and reduce "political instability" (Blair et al. 2004; USAID/Serbia 2005: 7–8, n.d.: 2–3). USAID/Serbia apparently found the idea of advocacy so defining of its civil society building efforts that it named its entire 2007–2013 civil society assistance programme, worth $27.5m, the Civil Society Advocacy Initiative. Some of my NGO interlocutors claimed, perhaps exaggerating a little, that public advocacy was so popular with donors that there was a sense of oversaturation in many locales by 2010–2011 and cases of advocacy being done *pro forma*, without much seriousness or achievements to speak of.

Advocacy conceived in this manner is a prime example of the hierarchical and voluntaristic practice of policy transfers in the post-Yugoslav semiperiphery. It is embedded in the European integration process (USAID/Serbia n.d.: 2), which is explicitly conducted as a "catch up" with Western norms (Mikuš 2013, 2015a). The main protagonists are international development agencies such as USAID and local NGOs that more generally engage in donor-driven processes of importing knowledge, norms, and strategies from the centre. The Serbian terms for public advocacy, *javno zastupanje* or less commonly *javno zagovaranje*, are neologisms, direct translations from English, and very much items of an NGO jargon rather than colloquial language. Advocacy textbooks published by BCIF reproduce definitions of advocacy from English language sources and present advocacy principles and techniques in largely generic, historically and geographically ostensibly neutral manner (Đorđević, Stojanović and Vesić Antić 2009; Vesić and Stojanović 2006). The language of advocacy trainers that I met was peppered with the buzzwords of the Anglo-Saxon discourse on democracy such as "accountability" or "watchdog". All of this marked advocacy as a novel and foreign import without indigenous precedents.

Foreign actors first made this global advocacy knowledge available to a small number of Serbian 'trainers of trainers', mostly individuals associated with 'leading' Belgrade NGOs,[5] who then continued to disperse to it a broader audience of NGOs and activists across the country. For instance, Vukosava Crnjanski Šabović, former liberal politician, current NGO director and one of the trainers in the BCIF advocacy programme, told me that she had started working as a coach for audiences of Serbian politicians in 2003. These were courses on political campaigning provided by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the foundation of the US Democratic Party and a major instrument of US foreign policy. Vukosava acquired some familiarity with public advocacy through this work and was first asked by the NDI to train Bosnian NGOs and party youth organisations about advocacy in 2006. She has been doing this more regularly since 2007 when the

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[5] The NGO sector in Serbia is marked by a dominant presence of a relatively small coterie of so-called 'leading' (*vodeće*) NGOs (Mikuš 2015a, 2015c). In general, they have significantly more employees and larger budgets than an average NGO in the country, both of which increase their chances of success in the competition for project grants, in particular EU grants that require an extensive 'administrative capacity' as well as some co-funding. The leading NGOs also tend to enjoy a superior access to state institutions and/or political parties. The case of public advocacy is one of many examples of their role as mediators between the foreign donors or the government and the rest of the NGO sector.

Serbian branch of the US NGO Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC), which managed and distributed the entire USAID funding for the Serbian civil society under the Civil Society Advocacy Initiative programme, started to do advocacy in Serbia and put together a team of trainers. Vukosava then met Nader Tadros, a global advocacy guru well known in Serbia (Vetta 2013: 252). BCIF started its Public Advocacy in Local Communities (PALC) programme in 2005 with funding from the major US government-funded NGO Freedom House, another pioneer of advocacy in Serbia, and developed it fully a year later with the USAID/ISC funding. This continued to be the main source of funding for the programme, but there were occasional other donors: for example, the UK Department for International Development funded the 2010–2011 cycle. Apart from BCIF, another 'leading' Belgrade NGO, the Civic Initiatives, has been also promoting advocacy in Serbia and had its own team of trainers, but BCIF's programme seemed to be the most sustained in the country.

A double centre–semiperiphery model thus structured the introduction of advocacy to Serbia at the international and national levels – from the West to Serbia, and from 'leading' NGOs in Belgrade to 'local' NGOs across the country. In the discourse used in BCIF textbooks and the training sessions that I attended, the national semiperiphery tended to be coded as the 'local community' (*lokalna zajednica*), thus superimposing a more scalar model of national/local on top of the spatial centre/periphery binary. The importance of the former idea is revealed by the very name of the BCIF public advocacy programme – Public Advocacy in Local Communities (*Javno zastupanje u lokalnim zajednicama*). Representatives of participating NGOs from across the country attended training sessions in Belgrade to learn how to do advocacy in, and on behalf of, their local communities. With the advice given to them being largely standardised, it was clearly assumed that global advocacy knowledge relayed by national NGO centres will match the conditions and needs of all these localities and help them democratise local governance. The centre was represented as active and as the source of knowledge while the semiperiphery was the relatively passive receiver of that knowledge, which was assumed to facilitate its catch-up.

This was consistent with the way in which the Serbian disseminators of public advocacy understood their work in terms of education and raising the awareness about basic principles of democracy, which they believed was lacking among decision makers, the general population, and even many 'local' NGOs. For instance, Vukosava described Serbia as a "predemocratic society" in which people do not understand what public budget or "accountability" is: "Systematic education is necessary so that we, as a society, gradually get rid of the burden of communism." She held that it was not always the case, despite the widespread conviction to the contrary, that "the state or the government don't want to do something – they just don't know". Vladimir Radojičić, a BCIF programme manager engaged on the advocacy programme, told me that one of the biggest challenges for NGOs just starting to do advocacy was that they first had to overcome the "mental barrier" against asking the state for something. He framed this as an issue of inadequate knowledge: "Neither politicians nor people understand that the [public] money is actually theirs." He then developed this point by describing a typical role-play used in the training sessions in which one person was the decision-maker and another the campaigner:

> "The level of communication (…) either it's like – I'm small and submissive, or it's like – what you wanna, man, I'm taking it head on, I'm strong, bla bla bla. And those are the two extremes of civil society in Serbia. (...) These are local communities, people of various levels

of education, various cultural moulds (...) but in general, in Serbia, it's not very popular to stand out."

Vladimir told me a story about a local youth NGO that was working on an advocacy project aimed at securing funding for some youth activities from the municipality. The people from the NGO had a meeting with the municipal president but did not muster the courage to ask him about how much money the municipality would provide, which was the main point of the meeting. The reason was that the municipality had given the NGO some space in its media, which the NGO did not want to risk losing. "That is very bad, there is no potential for social development with civil society like that," Vladimir concluded. The issue according to him was a lack of democratic awareness and appropriate public communication skills, but a broader issue was also a culture that entrenched deferential attitudes to authority, interspersed with occasional episodes of aggression. Introducing advocacy and a democratic public culture into this setting by the means of NGOs thus posed the challenge of teaching NGOs how to engage with authorities without losing their ability to critique and raise demands in the interest of the public. I will return to this critical issue below.

As this section has demonstrated, the double semiperiphery model served as a largely implicit normative framework that prescribed and justified the direction in which knowledge (and policy) should circulate. Within this model, the 'local communities' were defined as internal semiperipheries suffering from a lack of knowledge to be addressed through capacity-building and training programmes. However, the community was not conceived only as the site to which advocacy was to be introduced; it was also its main instrument and beneficiary. This is the subject to which I turn next.

'Government through Community'...

In each two-year cycle of the PALC programme, BCIF would open a call for project proposals, invite about ten NGOs to attend several training sessions, have them develop and resubmit their proposals, and fund the implementation of all or some of the projects. The very focus on education and capacity-building reflected the assumption that the introduction of advocacy and democratisation more broadly had to address the lack of knowledge in the semiperiphery. In early 2011, I attended three sessions that comprised the entire training phase of the 2011–2012 PALC cycle. The sessions took place from Friday afternoon to Sunday evening in a Belgrade hotel where non-Belgrade participants were accommodated, and one of the two trainers was Vukasova Crnjanski Šabović.

The discourse of advocacy used in the training sessions differentiated three types of relevant actors: 'community', 'civil society' (or 'nongovernmental sector'), and 'decision makers'. Community was posited as the end beneficiary and indeed the very raison d'être of advocacy. It could be a whole 'local community' or its specific subsets (often described as 'vulnerable groups') defined by characteristics such as gender, age, or disability. In the beginning of the first training session, Snežana Stojanović, the second trainer and one of the co-authors of the two BCIF advocacy textbooks that I referred to above, asked the students: "What is important for you to set in motion (*da pokrenete*)?" The students responded: "community", "the public". Stojanović said yes, it is important to achieve a policy change, but to include and mobilise community is a goal in itself.

Probably not accidently, Stojanović used the same phrase as the one used in the title of the entire series of BCIF advocacy textbooks: *Let's Set Communities in Motion* (*Pokrenimo zajednice*).

On the next day, the students were presented with a list of questions to consider when defining their goal. One of them was: "Is solving the problem a priority for the community, and why?" These questions, and community involvement, were important criteria for the on-going assessment of the projects being developed by the participating NGOs – from the initial selection of project proposals to discussions in the training sessions to the selection of projects for actual implementation to 'monitoring' visits. Vladimir Radojičić told me that the organisations should always include "beneficiaries" (*korisnici*) in their work because it would give them legitimacy to say "we represent them". The textbooks also emphasised a relevance to the community and its involvement. The advocating NGOs were expected to represent the authentic interests of the community as well as involve it in decision-making processes, thereby making local governance more representative and participative.

The emphasis on community in the public advocacy discourse is reminiscent of the technology of 'government through community'. With the rise of 'advanced liberalism', Nicoles Rose (1996) argued, the "social," the mastertrope of government in the high-modernist welfare state, is being replaced by "community" as the dominant concept of moral relations among individuals. Given that the social was conceived as a single space of the nation-state, this involves a "de-totalisation" of the territory of government (Rose 1996: 333). Community is a new "*means* of government: its ties, bonds, forces and affiliations are to be celebrated, encouraged, nurtured, shaped and instrumentalised" (Rose 1996: 335, his emphasis). Rose associated government through community with neoliberal policies of late twentieth century governments in several Western countries that sought to constitute 'communities' as autonomous and self-responsible entities. This, of course, was part of the broader argument in the so-called British governmentality literature about the characteristic advanced liberal strategy of 'responsibilisation' – of individuals, but also communities (Barry, Osborne and Rose 1996). Anthropologists too observed government through community in a variety of neoliberalising settings, for example in Indonesia and Italy (Li 2007: 230–269; Muehlebach 2012: 63).

To be sure, a concern with mobilising 'communities' as entities responsible for their own welfare could be detected in public advocacy. For example, in her guest talk in one of the training session, Lejla, head of a municipal budget department, confessed that what "fascinates" her is how superficially citizens understand the municipal budget. She linked this to the heavily publicised story about Dragan "Palma" Marković, the infamous mayor of Jagodina, and his expensive purchase of a giraffe for the local zoo. Lejla highlighted how Jagodina citizens seemed to be impressed by that farcical show of populism rather than concerned by its cost. Vladimir Radojičić intervened by commenting that the giraffe is an "image of our society" and politicians are but a mirror of the citizens. In a Q&A session that followed the talk, someone asked Lejla to what extent her department was obliged to be 'public' in its work. She responded: "Well, to the extent that you think it should be public." Vladimir appreciated this answer when I interviewed him later and added that "the state is but (...) a result of what its citizens look like."

'Community' was central to the way in which BCIF conceived its activities. The staff understood and presented their work as development and assistance to local communities, often further described with adjectives such as "active" or "sustainable", which in practice corresponded to the funding of what were believed or expected to be local, community-based, bottom-up, and

grassroots organisations. The NGO's English name up to 2013 was Balkan Community Initiatives Foundation. Its Serbian version (*Balkanski fond za lokalne inicijative*) replaced "community" with "local", which points to the overlap and slippage between the two concepts in BCIF discourse. BCIF's flagship grant programme, focused on smaller general-purpose grants, was called Active Communities (*Aktivne zajednice*). The organisation's English-language "vision" published on its website at the time of my fieldwork highlighted the focus on "community" coupled with ideas of individual and community responsibility for local development and "problem solving" (BCIF n.d.). The concern with supporting and mobilising the 'community' was also something that the workers frequently discussed among themselves. For example, in a meeting intended to introduce newcomers to the rules and principles of work with the beneficiary NGOs, Vladimir Radojičić spent some time describing the purpose of so-called 'monitoring' visits that BCIF workers paid to the grantee NGOs in their locales. Monitoring was meant to aid an assessment of the actual 'capacity' of NGOs and Vladimir gave the following advice in that respect: "Take a walk through the community (*prošetajte zajednicom*) to see how they react to them."

However, the reading of public advocacy in terms of 'government through community' and other forms of neoliberal governmentality based on responsibilisation needs to be qualified in at least two important senses. The first relates to the provenance of the focus on community. Anthropologists interpreted a wide range of efforts to promote individual and community self-responsibility and self-care as quintessentially neoliberal (Dunn 2004: 94–129; Paley 2001: 140–181; Zigon 2011). These arguments tended to reproduce the diffusionist assumption of the British governmentality school that such technologies of rule have originated in the West and were only subsequently introduced to the non-Western settings studied by anthropologists (Kipnis 2008). Neoliberalism (or advanced liberalism) is thus described as a radically new epoch in the evolution of government. However, a burgeoning literature has already started to correct this bias by offering more nuanced analyses of how pre-existing local traditions of government and public culture may combine with new exigencies and/or recently imported ideas and practices to yield hybrid formations (Collier 2011; Hemment 2009; Muehlebach 2012).

Concerns with 'community development' were prominent in the practice of major international development actors in Serbia. In particular, as one of its biggest programmes in the country, USAID implemented the $200m Community Revitalization through Democratic Action (CRDA) programme in 2001–2007 (Blair et al. 2004; Vetta 2013: 95–131). Based largely on an earlier USAID programme in Lebanon, the CRDA required the formation of Community Development Groups in the places of implementation. These councils of 'ordinary' citizens would decide democratically about the priority needs of the community and formulate these as projects to be funded by USAID, though on condition of a quarter of the total cost being shouldered by the community (Vetta 2013: 96–97). This was supposed to deliver on two major objectives at the same time: local-level democratisation and post-Milošević reconstruction. Theodora Vetta (2013: 99) has argued that the "CRDA was introducing a liberal political rationality for the formation of a new political subjectivity." However, she has qualified this pointing to the decades-old institution of Local Communities (*mesne zajednice*) – elected councils responsible for community issues at the sub-municipal level (Vetta 2013: 116–125). Some Serbians involved with the CRDA expressed an impatience with the Americans' paternalistic assumption that they dealt with a society with absolutely no traditions of local democracy (Vetta 2013: 120). At a minimum, then, a haste to interpret public advocacy in Serbia as imported neoliberalism should not lead us to forget that

broadly similar ideas about community self-government and development have been long promoted and enacted in practice by Local Communities. The entire ethos of Yugoslav 'self-management' socialism emphasised 'decentralisation' and 'de-etatisation' in all spheres of life. Accordingly, workers of BCIF and its grantee organisations did not perceive the discourse about community as necessarily foreign and novel. Advocacy articulated a vision of local democratisation that was most likely sufficiently inclusive to encompass (neo)liberal values promoted by many foreign actors as well as local norms indebted to socialist legacies.

The second reason why it is inadequate to interpret public advocacy as government through community is that its discourse and practice actually often departed from its ostensible preoccupation with community. In other words, such an interpretation would copy too closely one particular aspect of the rhetoric surrounding public advocacy (though one that is highly symbolically significant) at the expense of other aspects as well as the actual practices conducted in the name of advocacy.

... or Brokerage Networks?

The extent to which a 'government through community' line of analysis could be pursued has been compromised already in the training sessions. While community was conceived as the end beneficiary, the trainers made it clear that those that the advocating NGOs were expected to engage were primarily local 'decision makers', also described as politicians, parties, (public/municipal/state) administration, civil servants, local government, or simply 'the state'. Decision makers were thus understood as formal political or bureaucratic bodies or their individual members. The NGO workers were instructed to identify those relevant for their goals, classify them as 'allies', 'opponents', or 'neutral', and visually represent these relationships in a diagram called 'power map'. During implementation, allies were to be enrolled in the project's 'support network'. A BCIF advocacy textbook defines the network as a "group of organisations and individuals who exchange information and/or services" (Đorđević, Stojanović and Vesić Antić 2009: 55). Snežana Stojanović reproduced this definition in the final training session. She described the network of public advocacy as made up of institutions and individuals connected in various ways, including "informal" ones, working on a common goal, and trading favours in the form of information and services. The references to "informality" as something useful and legitimate are at first sight somewhat surprising – given the heavy involvement of Serbian NGOs in "anti-corruption" and "transparency" initiatives (see also Vetta 2013: 255–256).

Indeed, the training sessions were replete with references to such informal relationships and their usage in public advocacy. For instance, Hajrija presented herself in her guest talk as a local administration insider supportive of NGO initiatives and willing to help with her knowledge of how and when to present such initiatives to the mayor. Nevertheless, the attempts of the disseminators of advocacy to impose ethical limits on such informal relationships further complicated the matter. The BCIF textbook defines "view[ing] the issue from the perspective of the decision maker" and "know[ing] formal and informal processes and procedures of decision making institutions" as preconditions for successful "lobbying" in the context of advocacy. But in the same breath, it calls for an "adherence to certain values, not making concessions according to the 'friendly key' (*po 'prijateljskoj liniji'*) or so-called 'favours'" (Đorđević, Stojanović and Vesić Antić 2009: 61). This is consistent with how an advocacy trainer quoted by Vetta (2013: 255–256)

justified the reliance on informal, personal networks in NGO advocacy by saying that "[t]here is nothing to shame here (...) since we don't ask for personal favors."

The trainers took a somewhat different approach to the issue of informality than the textbook – they sought to limit legitimate informality to establishing and nurturing a personal relationship with local administration insiders. After Stojanović discussed the benefits and risks of networking, she asked the participants to answer a set of questions about whom and why they planned to network with. At one point during the presentations, Vukosava Crnjanski Šabović advised the participants to "always consider their interests". For instance, a political party may be interested to participate in order to demonstrate that its Municipal Assembly members are busy working, although the issue is not really their priority. The next NGO said they would like to enrol a party that used to help them in the past. But Vukosava was not satisfied: "A network includes those who can exert pressure on politicians, not politicians themselves. I hope I didn't confuse you when I talked about working with political parties and finding someone in parties who can be of help, but you shouldn't work with parties as such." What we encounter here is an attempt to draw a line between, on the one hand, (legitimate) pressurising of parties or influencing them through friendly insiders, and, on the other, (illegitimate) "working with" them in entirety. The concern with erecting such boundaries, in turn, points to a more fundamental contradiction between the stated aims and actual methods of advocacy. None of the three BCIF-sponsored advocacy projects that I followed more closely mobilised and involved 'community' in the (arguably naive) sense of the whole local population or its subset. Rather, the NGOs were typically content with informing the public through the media and organising one or several events theoretically open to everyone but attended mainly by local politicians, civil servants, and NGO workers. Instead of directly involving the targeted 'community' (e.g. disabled people), they tended to network with other NGOs, whose members came from that community. Workers of BCIF and the advocating NGOs, who typically did not have members from the given groups, told me in interviews that they considered it essential to have representatives of the beneficiaries on their side in order to have legitimacy to speak on their behalf and advocate their interests.

While following this general approach, the NGOs differed in the specific ways in which they related to 'decision makers'. To start with, the Niš Committee for Human Rights, a human rights NGO, aimed its advocacy at securing an allocation of 3.5m Serbian dinars (ca. €35,000) in the 2012 budget of the City of Niš for making schools accessible for persons with disabilities. This built on an earlier BCIF-funded advocacy campaign of the Committee, which resulted in an allocation of 3m dinars in the 2011 budget for removing architectural barriers in public spaces. Both campaigns relied on a support network of four local associations of persons with disabilities and centred on a fast-paced sequence of formal meetings (up to ten in each) with the heads of relevant city administration departments, party officials, and the president of the city Committee for Work with Persons with Disabilities. Three additional 'open fora' on accessibility were attended largely by the same people and the network members, who also met in regular separate meetings. The Committee published notices of all these meetings with photographs on its website. Despite his emphasis on a spate of formal meetings, Dragan Đorđević, the Committee President, made it clear to me in an interview that the support of a single institution, i.e. the city government, and in particular its member in charge of social affairs, was crucial. He also had no qualms about acknowledging the self-interested nature of this support: "They see it through [the prism of their own] political achievement."

The Centre for the Development of Civil Society in Zrenjanin likewise had a previous experience with a BCIF-funded advocacy on the same subject: the rights of disabled people. The earlier advocacy resulted in the establishment of the Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Persons with Disabilities, an advisory body on disability issues attached to the city government. Alisa Halak, programme coordinator at the Centre, became its member. Its first task was to draft a local action plan for accessibility. However, the plan seemed destined to remain a formality since no resources were earmarked for its realisation. The next advocacy campaign therefore demanded for the city to allocate actual funds for the removal of architectural barriers. Similar to the projects of the Niš Committee, the support network comprised local associations of persons with disability. However, in some other respects, the Centre took a different approach. The campaign only included three meetings: a training session on accessibility for the members of the disability committee, local civic associations, and the Centre itself; a roundtable that was attended by a similar audience and additional representatives of the city administration; and a meeting with two political parties. Unlike Dragan Đorđević of the Niš Committee, who portrayed the contacts between the NGO and the local politicians as purely formal, Alisa Halak hinted at a good deal of reliance on personal relationships. In an interview, she told me that one of their biggest allies was the head of the city parliament president's office, whom she described as "one of the people who work for the local government but are very open to various initiatives and recognise good things." Before the roundtable, she told me this woman was expected to attend and described her as their "source" in the city government who always "tells us frankly what's realistic and what isn't." However, she complained about the fact that the finance department of the city government was "very closed to us" and indicated that "we yet have to see who we can work with in the finance department, who is most accessible there", implying once again an orientation to individual relationships. Alisa added she expected the attendance of a few other people "who can and are interested in helping to arrange things with the [city] government." She mentioned a man who led the local karate club, did various activities with disabled children, and, most importantly, enjoyed support and presumably also some influence over the local government.

The advocacy campaign of the "Free" City of Vršac Civic Parliament went even further in its reliance on informal relations. The objective was to prevent further deterioration and improve the management of the City Park in Vršac, which is a natural and cultural heritage site. The park had been managed by a local utility company that was widely understood to be a de facto personal and partisan fief of Ljubisav Šljivić, the local leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia. Šljivić was a long-standing member of the local establishment held together by a thick web of clientelistic interdependencies and interlocking political and business interests. As such, the mismanagement of the park went largely unchallenged and unchecked. The original aim of the advocacy campaign was to rectify this situation by getting the municipal assembly to finally adopt a revision of the act on the protection of the park that had been drafted by the national nature conservation institute and sent to the municipality for adoption already in 2000. My Vršac interlocutors[6] believed that the adoption of the revised act was informally blocked by the head of the utility company. The Civic Parliament expected that the adoption of the act would provide an opportunity to assess whether the utility company was able and willing to implement the required protection measures, and potentially appoint a new custodian (Građanski parlament 2010: 38). This plan was seemingly

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[6] I carried out formal interviews and, in some cases, recurrent informal conservations with seven individuals variously involved with the Vršac advocacy campaign.

agreed upon at a roundtable organised by the Civic Parliament in October 2010 and attended by people from the local government, the Nature Conservation Institute of Vojvodina Province,[7] the utility company, environmental NGOs, and the media. However, even though a representative of the utility company then agreed to comply with this course of action, it soon became apparent behind the scenes that the company would again obstruct the adoption of the act and that an alternative strategy was needed.

I learned what that strategy was in a smaller, non-public meeting at the seat of the municipal government in February 2011. Notably, the utility company was not represented in the meeting, and all politicians present came from the Democratic Party, which was only one of the parties in the local ruling coalition. The director of the Province Nature Conservation Institute presented a new idea: the institute would propose to put the park under the second level of protection, instead of the third (i.e., lowest) degree of protection as per the act in force and its pending revision. The other attendees had obviously been briefed about the proposal beforehand and supported it unanimously. The proposal was clearly driven by its legal and institutional implications. Acts establishing second-class protected areas must be adopted by the national parliament or – if the area is in Vojvodina – the Vojvodina province parliament. As a lower branch of government, the municipality where the area is situated must comply. Thus, the proposal was a way of bypassing the deadlock at the local level.

The interviews revealed how this solution had been negotiated. Virdžinija Marina Guzina, the president of the Civic Parliament, told me that she used to be well-connected to the local Democrats at the time before and after the 2000 regime change. The Democrats were the backbone of the broad alliance of parties that defeated Milošević at the national level in 2000. As such, they were the senior government party through most of the 2000s. However, as many others, Virdžinija became increasingly disillusioned by their inability or unwillingness to deliver the deep and radical changes expected of them. In Vršac, she could witness their rapprochement with the *ancien régime* forces, including a tense cohabitation with Šljivić and his Socialists, who were the regime party under Milošević. However, despite her loss of confidence in the party, Virdžinija still had some ties to the local Democrats that she was able to activate. She turned to her long-time friend Stevica Nazarčić, the Democrat president of the municipal assembly who attended the February meeting. The Democrats were able to lift the issue of the park to the provincial government in which they were the senior party and whose member in charge of environment was a Democrat. This solution was a win-win strategy from their perspective. As Nazarčić told me, they knew from a recent survey that many local citizens were concerned about the mismanagement of the park. Several of my interlocutors told me, and hints to the same effect were given also in the February meeting, that the Democrats supported the new solution because it allowed them to push through a popular policy against the will of their long-standing Socialist foes, reap the benefits in the upcoming local elections, and shift the costs to the provincial government.

As this shows, advocacy in Serbia was translated by what can be described as transnational, multi-level, and inter-institutional brokerage networks. There were several distinct but overlapping steps in the iterative translation process: between the abstract policies of global development actors and the national intervention context; between the latter and the 'local community'; and between

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[7] Vršac is located in Serbia's northern Autonomous Province of Vojvodina that has a degree of self-governance and a set of its own institutions, including the Province Nature Conservation Institute. The 2000 revision of the protection act of the City Park in Vršac was drafted by the national nature conservation institute because the Province Institute did not exist at the time.

the 'localised' brand of advocacy taught by BCIF and the actually existing local political arenas. Subtle and sometimes not so subtle shifts of norms and forms of knowledge occurred along this trajectory: from the spatial model of semiperiphery that served to conceptualise the national context to the more scalar models of the 'local' and 'community', as well as from the abstract norms of democracy and civil society to the ambiguous (more hands-on but still normative) knowledge production in the training sessions and textbooks to the instrumental strategies of actually doing advocacy. This case thus confirms the key insights of the policy translation approach: that policy is remade and resignified as it moves across space and scales, and that the implied models of space and scale themselves are reconstructed through discourse and practice of translation (Clarke et al. 2015: 20–30). At the same time, it illustrates vividly the tendency of policies to simplify the complexity of social relations and processes by imposing ideological discourses such as democratisation and questionable dichotomous frameworks such as the "state" versus "(civil) society" or disinterested public interest representation versus the pursuit of private interests (Wedel et al. 2005: 43).

Such tendencies are manifest especially in policy discourse but often undermined by the more ambiguous practice of implementation. For instance, the spatial model of a confined local community was challenged by the fact that those doing advocacy worked in transnational networks, focused on political and administrative elites rather than broad community mobilisation, and sometimes allied with other networks extending beyond the assumed community, as was particularly apparent in the Vršac case. Further, the abstract, global advocacy knowledge presumes a 'three-sector model' in which the state, civil society, and market are clearly separated and their relations "confined to cooperation with the overall goal to achieve social cohesion" (Vetta 2013: 252). However, the advocacy trainers seemed to have made some concessions to the widely assumed importance of informal relationships that straddle institutions and domains and influence formal processes, including those of public interest representation and civic involvement in local decision-making (Mikuš 2015c; Vetta 2012; Vuković and Babović 2014). They also appeared to recognise what is widely described as 'particracy' (*partokratija*), believed to be the 'actually existing' system of rule in Serbia with a highly dominant, undemocratic and non-transparent role of parties organised as machines for the clientelistic distribution of public resources (Jansen 2015: 181–229; Mikuš 2016). Such relations can be traced back to Milošević's "political capitalism" (Gould and Sickner 2008; Sörensen 2009: 167–182) and NGO workers understood themselves as working under, and often against, their on-going dominance. In acknowledging the reality of particracy, the trainers acted as translators who adjusted abstract advocacy models to the possibilities and constrains of the target context in an effort to make such interventions more likely to succeed. And yet, they also endeavoured to reconcile such translations with the dominant norms of 'civil society' and advocacy. Most importantly, the emphasis on community involvement made it possible to insist on the NGO representation of authentic public interest as the source of democratic legitimacy. Limiting potential informal cooperation with bureaucratic or political insiders to friendly, and apparently disinterested, individuals allowed maintaining a relatively clear separation between the NGO sector, as representatives of the community, and the state and institutional politics. By reproducing representations of advocacy consistent with the discourse of the original donors, BCIF and its grantees achieved a (semblance of) coherence of the whole network and its official ideology (Mosse and Lewis 2006: 14). However, actual implementation as another stage in the translation process pushed this tendency to relax norms and blur purportedly

clear distinctions even further. The transformation of advocacy itself by the features of the intervention contexts it was supposed to transform reveals the importance of pre-existing structural constraints that tend to be dismissed as sociological fictions by the orthodox ANT perspective on translation and assemblage.

The case of advocacy provides a fascinating ethnographic commentary on the possibility of a domestication of the concept of policy translation. The national-level disseminators of advocacy explicitly instructed the prospective advocates to do just that – translate between the interests of 'communities' and 'decision-makers', as well as between their own interests and those of foreign donors promoting 'democratisation'. While the practitioners do not (yet) talk about translation, 'networks' have become a commonplace in their discourse and networking is a method that they are taught to use. In the 'support networks', the advocating NGOs are expected to mediate constructions of meaning and resource flows between 'communities' (or, more precisely, other NGOs meant to represent them), donors, and local governments and politicians. Advocacy is thus global as much as it is local, and based on the "rapid, deterritorialized point-to-point forms of connection (and disconnection)" (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 994) characteristic of NGO-mediated transnational governmentality. Indeed, advocacy feeds into the processes of neoliberalisation and transnationalisation of governance in which the previously seemingly clear boundaries of the state, society and market, as well as the dichotomies of global/national and national/local are increasingly eroded and called into question (Clarke et al. 2015: 20–30; Mosse 2013: 236–237; Shore and Wright 2011: 15–17). Such transformations may be superficial and fleeting, limited to one-off decisions with little follow-up. However, advocacy does conjure new connections and institutional forms that may have a more lasting existence. For one, by enrolling other civic associations into the support network as representatives of the beneficiary 'community', the advocating of NGO positions itself as the nodal point of a hierarchically organised network. The latter may be reactivated in the future as the NGO comes to occupy the position of a broker between the 'community', on the one hand, and the local government, donors, and other actors, on the other hand, thus creating a new structure of representation. In addition, new hybrid institutions of the local government come into being, bringing together representatives of local parties, administration, and the NGO sector. The Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Persons with Disabilities in Zrenjanin was not the only example of such an outcome that I encountered. Proaktiv, an organisation based in Niš that also participated in one of BCIF's advocacy programmes, had earlier carried out an advocacy campaign funded by the Civic Initiatives, another 'leading' Serbian NGO. The advocacy was concerned with the insufficiency and non-transparency of city government funding for youth programmes and resulted in the decision of the mayor to initiate the drafting of a local action plan and strategy for youth. In an almost identical manner to the Zrenjanin case, a Proaktiv worker was invited to sit on the newly created 'coordinating body' for the drafting of these documents. This gave Proaktiv an institutionalised process to refer to and seek to push further in its future BCIF-funded advocacy campaigns on local youth policies. In general, these new institutions have limited (mostly advisory and coordinating) competencies and resources, but they formalise the involvement of local NGOs in decision-making and provide a springboard for future, more ambitious objectives.

A final important point concerns the motivations of the advocate/broker. In general, anthropologists defined the broker as a "human actor who gains something from the mediation of valued resources that he or she does not directly control" (Lindquist 2015: 870). As Johan

Lindquist (2015: 871) recently reminded us, the proponents of transactionalism in anthropology, such as F.G. Bailey or Jeremy Boissevain, focused attention more directly on the formal properties of brokerage, which allowed for "bringing the economic and the political into a common frame" and "highlighting the entrepreneurial aspects of politics". In a similar vein, Deborah James (2011) argued that the brokers of South African land reform derived material benefits as well as political following from their role. This seems to me a useful general approximation of the constellation of interests of the various brokers of advocacy in Serbia, though the picture needs some refining.

As I argued elsewhere, the Serbian NGO sector is mainly populated by a specific faction of middle classes that concentrates educational, cultural, and social capital rather than economic resources of their own or a significant political clout (Mikuš 2015b). These people have found refuge in NGOs amid the economic disruption and downward social mobility under Milošević as well as the limited recovery and scarcity of relevant kinds of employment after Milošević. From the mid-2000s up to now, they have also faced an increasing precarity of funding due to the on-going departure of foreign donors from the country. In such a context, many NGOs are forced to respond flexibly to the changing priorities of donors, leading to the familiar problem of donor-driven agenda-hopping. The economic benefits of advocacy should therefore not be dismissed, but they are hardly all that is there to look at. Most NGO workers I have met are genuinely committed to the idea of social progress as an intrinsic and non-material value of their work. The attraction of advocacy, apart from the fact that it has become increasingly popular with donors, thus lies precisely in its promises of democratisation and good governance as well as an increased political influence of NGOs. Attending to such non-economic benefits of advocacy is important for avoiding a slippage into the kind of easy moralising that has often accompanied writing about brokers (James 2011: 335).

It also helps to distinguish between the different forms of brokerage that the various members of advocacy networks perform. While 'leading' national NGOs such as BCIF mediate access to material, political, and symbolic resources alike, the advocating NGOs keep the economic resources (in the form of project honoraria and a reimbursement of organisational expenses) for themselves; neither the members of the support network nor the allies of advocacy in the local government benefit from their involvement in direct material terms. Rather, the local NGOs mediate the political benefits of advocacy: e.g., better electoral performance for local politicians, who throw their weight behind what they identify as popular agendas, or an improved access of civic associations to the local government.

Concluding Remarks

Public advocacy in general leads the advocating NGOs to broker between the interests, perspectives, and resources of 'communities', donors, and local politicians. It tends to encounter resilient structures of patron-client and 'partitocratic' relationships that necessitate an informal mode of brokerage attuned to the particular constraints and opportunities of local politics. In the campaigns whose unfolding I sketched, this involved personalistic contacts with political and administrative insiders and some concessions to the self-interest of political parties. Advocacy activists in Vršac further mobilised personal and partisan ties to form alliances with nonlocal actors whose leverage helped overcome the local deadlock.

The empirical material presented in this paper reveals the limitations of the scholarly and practitioner models of centre/periphery and the 'local' for an understanding of the movement of policies in spaces and across scales. The dissemination of advocacy knowledge largely followed such hierarchical and essentialist models, but some adjustments of the abstract advocacy knowledge to the specificities of the Serbian context occurred already at this step. The practice of advocacy was therefore a far cry from the presumed modernisation of a passive semiperiphery through smooth imports of innovations from the active centre. The advocates instead granted an active role to the 'target' context in as much as they adjusted the methods of advocacy to its requirements (the established relational idioms and interests of local political actors) in an on-going, partly improvised manner. In that sense, the advocates chose to avoid challenging the underlying relationships and operative logics of local politics (as 'democratisation' would require) in favour of focusing on the much narrower project goals. At the same time, to the extent that the Vršac process unfolded through the mobilisation of translocal networks, it departed from the naive model of the self-contained 'local (community)' as the territory and the subject of government.

In addition to challenging these spatial models, the concept of translation is useful for considering the rolling, provisional manner in which the actors constructed heterogeneous assemblages of resources, agencies, and interests to make the advocacy projects possible and at least somewhat successful. Despite the more or less pronounced transformations that the model of advocacy underwent in the process, enough of it remained in the end to warrant a conclusion that what occurred was translation rather than complete rewriting (to follow with the linguistic metaphor). Modest improvements in local governance and some public interest representation in decision-making took place. The concept of translation seems to both enable and call for a non-dogmatic but critical engagement with such actually existing ways of getting things done and the uneasy, but potentially productive compromises they entail.

Yet, this case study might be also used to reflect on some of the potential weaknesses and limitations of the translation approach to policy, related not least to the broader intellectual context of governmentality and actor-network theories in which it is embedded. First, while there is no doubt that the recent anthropological scholarship on policy is acutely aware of the political nature of translation, it tends to follow the governmentality approach in assuming that policies themselves 'render technical' – screen out political and structural considerations from their analyses of real-world issues, thereby making them amenable to technical interventions (Clarke et al. 2015: 34; Li 2007; Shore and Wright 2011: 16). However, the case at hand serves to remind us that policies may as well attempt to 'render political'. In the case at hand, advocacy knowledge defines issues as political in a particular selective sense and hence amenable to specific forms of political intervention. It overestimates the extent to which political transformations may be achieved through formal and 'good informal' relationships, NGO interventions, or the mobilisation of purely 'local' or 'community' resources. Therefore, rather than assuming that policy (or governmentality) necessarily operates through reconstituting the political as the technical, which assumes a clear ontological distinction between the two, we could allow for the possibility that it rather works by manipulating the boundaries of the political and the technical and/or generating hybrids. As an implication, politics is not inevitably a challenge to policy from the outside (Li 2007) but something potentially folded into it through forms of technicisation.

Second, and approaching the same issue from quite the opposite direction, this case illustrates some common limitations of Foucauldian governmentality approaches and Latourian ANT

derivatives for the analysis of the politics of policy translation. Briefly, although Foucault did acknowledge the fact of "resistance", he largely conceived it as dispersed and paired with power in a kind of universal dialectic, an almost mechanical relationship (Abu-Lughod 1990; Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 6, 32). As Tania Li (2007: 25) observed, this offers little guidance on "how and why particular, situated subjects mobilize to contest their oppression" (see also Shore and Wright 2011: 17–19). A similar problem arises even more prominently in the work of Latour with his refusal of the ideas of society, structure, and context. Regarding policy translation, Latourian flat ontologies effectively limit the analysis to contestations and struggles that arise within the narrow remits of the policy process, leaving the broader field of forces invisible or, more radically, declaring it non-existent. Li (2007: 25) turns to the Gramscian concept of 'hegemony' to think about how governmental schemes intersect with the production and reproduction of relationships of domination and how they are lived in particular times and places. For similar reasons, I have found the idea of hegemony productive for my doctoral project from which this study originates. At the very least, addressing the ahistorical tendencies of Foucauldian and Latourian frameworks pushes anthropologists toward analyses that are more attentive to large-scale historical processes, spatial relations, and social formations. In the present case, this involves an awareness of the actually existing dominant idioms of political relations ('particracy', clientelism), for which insights from anthropologists, but also historians, sociologists, and political economists, are useful. A lack of such awareness would make it difficult to understand how the NGO workers themselves imagined, assessed, and attempted to manipulate broader fields of forces in which they operated. The obvious theoretical and methodological implication is that we cannot quite proceed as Latour's "blind ants".

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