

Collective Co-Production in Russian Schools

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Abstract. The growing demand for quality education services together with the financial constraints faced by educational institutions produce the need for the active involvement of parents and other representatives of local communities in the educational process so as to provide schools with additional resources. As a form of such involvement, non-profit organizations (NPOs) can be established to support educational institutions. In this paper, we assess the level of collective co-production in Russian school education and look for correlations between institutional characteristics of schools and their cooperation with NPOs. The data for the research was obtained from the Unified State Register of Legal Entities (through the SPARK System), websites of local departments of education, and publicly available sources of infor-

mation about activities of NPOs supporting schools. We reveal considerable cross-regional differences in the development of collective co-production in school education. The process is more active in provincial towns than in megalopolises: the proportion of schools supported by specifically founded NPOs is higher in many regional centers than in the capital cities. At the same time, a lot of regions have no such NPOs at all. As it turns out, NPOs are more likely to be created to support schools with a special status (gymnasiums, lyceums and specialized schools), where the parental demand for quality education services is higher. Meanwhile, we found no correlation between autonomous status of educational institutions and their participation in collective co-production. Thus, the increased degree of independence did not induce cooperation with NPOs for the purpose of raising extra-budgetary funds in this case.

Keywords: school, co-production, non-profit organization, demand for education services, autonomous educational institution, gymnasium, lyceum, specialized school.

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The public sector has been interacting more and more with the private one over the last few decades. Various parties including non-governmental organizations make their contribution in providing public services to the population. Management of such services often builds upon a long-term partnership of mutual responsibilities [Osborne 2010]. This interaction between citizens and government results in the development of co-production, i. e. engagement of con-

sumers in the delivery of public services. Collective co-production, which suggests involvement of citizen groups including non-profit organizations (NPOs), is gaining ground. Decades of research have shown that NPOs are among the most active co-producers today [Pestoff 2006].

This paper presents the results of empirical research on the process of co-production in school education. Co-production is not a new term for education: teacher-student interaction forms the basis of the learning process. Moreover, a specific feature of school education is that it requires the engagement of not only children as direct service recipients but their parents too. Today's development of the education sector also necessitates active participation of a wide range of citizens to fuel the process with additional resources, both financial and temporal [Ostrom 1996]. This necessity is largely due to the fact that public sector educational institutions are lagging behind the evolution of public needs and the severe financial constraints faced by the public sector all over the world. For this reason, many countries create and develop techniques of engaging citizens in the delivery of public services, education in particular [OECD2011]. This engagement may be individual or collective, when parents and other members of the public organize themselves to establish NPOs. The number of NPOs founded to support schools in the US increased from 3,500 in 1995 to 11,500 in 2010 [Nelson, Gazley 2014]. Funds that American schools receive from nonprofit organizations allow them to cope with the lack of public funding and increase the quality of educational services [Hansen et al. 2015].

The following questions are raised in the article:

1. What is the current level of collective co-production in Russian school education?
2. Is school interaction with NPOs affected by institutional characteristics of schools, such as status or type of business entity?

The object of research includes registered groups of school parents and other citizens—school boards, foundations, public and private nonprofit organizations—established to support and develop specific schools, as well as schools themselves.

The data for the research was obtained from the Unified State Register of Legal Entities (through the SPARK System), websites of local departments of education, and publicly available sources of information about activities of school-supporting NPOs.

**Co-Production:
Basic Concepts**

In simple terms, “co-production” suggests the involvement of consumers in the creation of a public good. In this case, a public good is produced jointly by the “regular” producer, who creates a product for sale, and the “consumer” producer. The latter assumes some of the

production costs, thus becoming a co-producer, or a sort of partner for the professional producer [Ostrom 1996; Bovaird 2007]. Co-production provides an opportunity to increase product quality and productive efficiency [Kiser, Percy 1980; Parks et al. 1981]. Quality of services is often assessed subjectively, so the services sector is where consumer involvement can be of the most benefit to a higher quality. The co-production conception is most actively integrated into the public services sector, which is often non-market, financed by taxpayers, and governed by monopoly providers. The addition of service recipients' efforts to the work of paid officials or even substitution of the former for the latter is able to increase both the quality and the effectiveness of public services [Brudney, England 1983: 59]. Co-production can be additive or substituting: in the former case, the efforts of citizens and communities provide additional support to professional producers, while in the latter consumers perform some of the professionals' functions, including being involved in the provision of resources for production [Löffler, Watt 2010: 4].

An important benefit of co-production is the opportunity to reduce budget funds by means of attracting resources from service consumers. The cost-effectiveness ratio is improved when the volume and quality of services are preserved with lower budgetary costs or increase with the same amount of funding [Brudney 1984; Löffler, Watt 2010]. We believe that collective co-production provides the best opportunities for improving effectiveness in the public services sector.

The specific characteristics of public services shape the forms of co-production. National and local government institutions provide services that may have features of both private good, including significant positive externalities, and public good. There can be more than one direct consumer of such services, concerned about their quality and effectiveness. Besides, positive externalities of consuming educational or social services, for instance, may be a catalyst for citizen co-productive efforts. This way, a consumer of a service may participate in its creation by joining their efforts with other individuals interested in receiving this service or providing its adequate quality. For example, Bovaird regards not only service recipients but also volunteers and other members of local communities as co-producers [Bovaird 2007]. Consequently, there are also group co-production (joint efforts of a specific group of people or organization) and collective co-production (involving members of the whole community) [Kiser, Percy 1980; Rich 1981; Brudney, England 1983]. Group co-production may be organized informally or formally, in the form of registered non-profit organizations [Sundeen, 1985].

**Collective
Co-Production in
School Education**

Specific aspects of education as a sector create conditions whereby co-production seems natural and justified [Parks et al. 1981; Pestoff, 2006; Porter 2012]. Quality education is clearly impossible if a

student does not invest any effort to digest new knowledge or acquire new skills and competencies. However, school education is a special case, because co-producers include not only students as direct consumers but also their representatives: parents, other relatives, or guardians. Engagement of most diverse community groups in co-production is made possible by the complex nature of educational services, which imply not only teaching, but also parenting and providing favorable conditions for these two processes. Despite not being professionals in this field, parents and other relatives can be engaged in the educational process, providing various components of it.

Studies demonstrate that parents assign a lot of importance to all of these components when assessing school effectiveness [Avraamova, Klyachko, Loginov 2014], which means they could be expected to invest their money and effort to improve the educational process. And because provision of educational services generates considerable external benefits, the quality of such services may be a matter of concern for other members of local communities. They are also consumers of this 'product' to some extent and are thus motivated to invest in the support of educational institutions, too.

Porter discriminates between required co-production—a student's proper effort—and contingent co-production—involvement of other participants, such as parents, peers, or local communities [Porter 2012: 151]. The latter type is optional, the level of effort and quality varying largely across communities. It may take an individual form, as in a contribution from individual parents, or a collective form, as when parents pool their resources for joint actions.

Just like in other sectors, collective forms of co-production in school education can be divided into informal—parent committees, which can be found in most schools, or school boards with no corporate status—and formal, i. e. registered NPOs. Internationally, there are different types of institutions providing support to schools in some way. Hansen and her colleagues made a list of various nongovernmental organizations providing private financing to public schools, including some specific ones: parent and alumni associations, booster clubs, school foundations, etc. [Hansen et al. 2015: 387].

First of all, such organizations provide financing to educational institutions. Besides, schools receive volunteer support and other donations from them [Ibid: 337]. "School-affiliated" NPOs facilitate the attraction of parental resources through collective agreements on the size of donations. While elaborating such agreements, these organizations arrive at negotiating the common objectives and building a consensus [Brunner, Sonstelie, 2003:2161]. Furthermore, Eric Brunner and Jon Sonstelie regard voluntary contributions and government revenue as commensurable sources of revenue, even though the latter are targeted for specific purposes [Ibid: 2162].

Factors Affecting the Development of Collective Co-Production

Apart from political and sociological theories, emergence of nongovernmental organizations is theoretically underpinned by economic theories of supply and demand.

According to the theories of supply (social entrepreneurship [Rose-Ackerman 1997], stakeholder control [Ben-Ner, van Hooissen 1991]), citizens create NPOs on their own initiative, including for service provision purposes. This requires sufficient resources, i. e. an adequate standard of living and a relevant economic activity rate. Thus, for instance, the higher per-capita income and lower unemployment rate, the more chances of nonprofit emergence and the more schools can have “their own” nonprofits. Besides, an important role is played by the poverty threshold, which deters the development of nonprofits [Corbin 1999].

The theory of government failure explains the demand for services provided by nonprofits by the fact that public producers are not always able to meet citizens’ requirements for both the volume and the quality of services. Nonprofits thus fill the emerging gaps [Weisbrod 1988]. Unmet demands in the quality and volume of educational services for their children inspires parents to invest additionally even in a relatively strong economic environment, let alone in a down economy [Nelson, Gazley 2014]. One research into the cooperation between American schools and their nonprofit partners has shown that the intensity of such interaction is influenced by both unsatisfied preferences about educational services, on the one hand, and financial and other resources required to establish nonprofit organizations, on the other hand [Paarlberg, Gen 2009].

In this study, we analyze the influence of demand-side factors on the development of collective co-production. We believe that Russian parents’ need for a higher quality of educational services for their children is manifested in the pretty high demand for advanced types of schools, like gymnasiums, lyceums, or specialized schools. This being so, parents of students attending such educational institutions will more likely be involved in co-production by way of participating in activities of nonprofit organizations. Therefore, we expect that “status” schools will more often have affiliated nonprofit organizations.

Another demand-side factor that we believe affects the development of collective co-production is the school’s type of business entity. Robert Bifulco and Helen F. Ladd investigated the engagement of American parents in school activities to find that the level of engagement was higher in charter schools than in regular public schools. This is explained by the small size of charter schools and some of their institutional characteristics, such as a higher degree of autonomy and the opportunity for parents to select such schools for their children [Bifulco, Ladd 2006]. Parts of some national and local public institutions in Russia have been granted autonomy since 2008, gaining more freedom “in disposing of the property made over to them and implementing the goals set before them and stipulated by the school

charter.”¹ We suppose that this higher degree of independence from their founders should make autonomous schools more interested in attracting additional resources, particularly charitable contributions. Hence, we can presume that this type of business entity may act as a supplementary catalyst of intensive long-term interactions among school staff, parents and other members of local communities in the form of nonprofit organizations.

**Research
Methods and
Sampling**

We used the SPARK (Verification, analysis and monitoring of companies) system and websites of regional departments of education to analyze the level of collective co-production in secondary school. By the beginning of 2015, we had prepared two samples of institutions located in regional capitals: (i) registered nonprofit organizations affiliated with public specialized schools, lyceums and gymnasiums; (ii) schools of the abovementioned types. As for middle and elementary schools, progymnasiums, high schools, night, boarding, cadet and special schools, they were not included in order to provide a homogeneous sample. Because these types of educational institutions differ from specialized schools, lyceums and gymnasiums in terms of study, characteristics of student population, and specific aspects of the teaching and educating processes, we believe that parental attitudes towards providing consistent support to school may also be different. Accordingly, we did not consider the NPOs affiliated with those schools.

Homogeneity was also ensured by restricting the sample to regional capitals, which made it possible to draw more well-founded conclusions about the factors affecting the development of co-production in secondary school. In most regions, NPOs supporting specific schools are concentrated in the capital cities. It was only in Krasnodar Krai, Irkutsk Oblast and Kemerovo Oblast that the number of NPOs in regional capitals was lower than in the rest of the regional cities and towns put together.

The NPOs were sampled based on their names: we used indication of a specific school, gymnasium or lyceum in the nonprofit's name as a sampling criterion, leaving out institutions promoting education as a whole. This sampling strategy had a limitation: NPOs affiliated with schools but containing no relevant indication in their names probably fell off the radar. Activities of school-supporting NPOs were analyzed using the publicly available information on the web. A search among Perm organizations proved that information on NPOs is mainly presented in their pages on affiliated schools' websites.

¹ Explanatory note to the draft of Federal Law “On Autonomous Institutions”: http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/arhiv/a_dz_4.nsf/BYID/3C2418F2105CDB-0F432571BB005C2180?OpenDocument

To find out whether NPOs were created more often to support schools of advanced types (specialized schools, gymnasiums and lyceums) and autonomous educational institutions, we used a chi-squared test, which allowed for comparing observed incidence rates with expected ones. We compared the number of schools supported by with the number of unsupported schools for “status” and autonomous educational institutions. In addition, we assessed the period of time between the date of gaining autonomy and the nonprofit registration date for the subsample of autonomous schools supported by nonprofits.

The total number of observations in all cities in the sample included 6,449 public educational institutions and 893 NPOs. Meanwhile, we found only 880 schools supported by NPOs. The reason for this discrepancy is that some educational institutions have two NPOs established in different years, according to the Unified State Register of Legal Entities. It can be two autonomous NPOs, two foundations, a foundation and a nonprofit, etc. This situation is most typical of Novosibirsk and Moscow. We believe that part of the formal organizations in fact are “hibernating” or out of business. As formal liquidation of NPOs comes at a price, it is sometimes easier to create a new organization, probably with new founders.

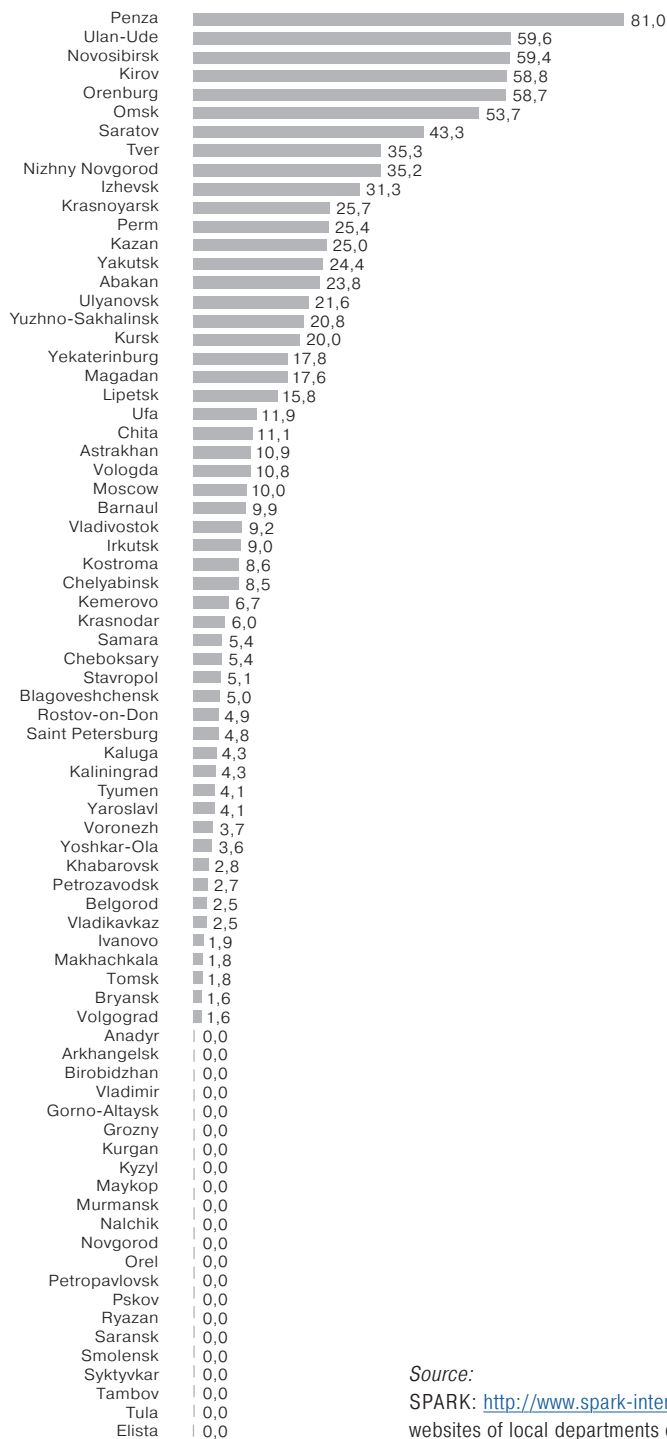
**Testing the
Hypotheses on the
Influence of
School’s
Institutional
Characteristics on
Co-Production
Development**

Foundations and nongovernmental organizations are the most widespread types of business entity for NPOs in Russia. Autonomous nonprofit organizations and voluntary associations are slightly less common. School boards, which Article 26 of Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation” defines as governing boards of educational institutions, are most often registered as NGOs or voluntary associations, less often as autonomous NPOs, and rarely as foundations.

Based upon what can be ascertained about the nonprofits’ activities on their websites (e. g. extracts from their Charters), all of them aim to attract charitable funds and provide financial support to educational institutions. This support may include participation in the procurement of facilities and resources (purchasing supplies and equipment, expanding school libraries), ensuring a safe and comfortable learning environment (maintenance of school buildings and classrooms, financing of security guards), and arrangement of extracurricular activities. Many organizations provide various financial incentives for students: scholarships, prizes for competition winners and participants, etc. Another activity of a number of NPOs is involvement in the organization of the learning process as such (engaging parents in their children’s school life, negotiating elective courses with school administrators) and even in school administration (distributing incentive bonuses for teachers).

The proportion of schools supported by NPOs in the capital cities varies significantly from region to region (Fig. 1). Such institutions

Figure 1. **Proportion of schools supported by NPOs in Russian regional capitals (%)**



Source:
SPARK: <http://www.spark-interfax.ru/>; official websites of local departments of education.

Table 1. Regional differences in the proportion of schools officially supported by NPOs

Federal district	Mean	Median	Coefficient of variation (%)
Central	6.1	2.5	154.0
North West	2.7	0	141.8
Volga	28.7	23.3	84.7
Ural	7.6	6.3	100.5
South	3.9	3.2	109.4
Northern Caucasus	1.3	0	145.8
Siberia	21.7	10.5	106.5
Far East	9.2	5	110.7

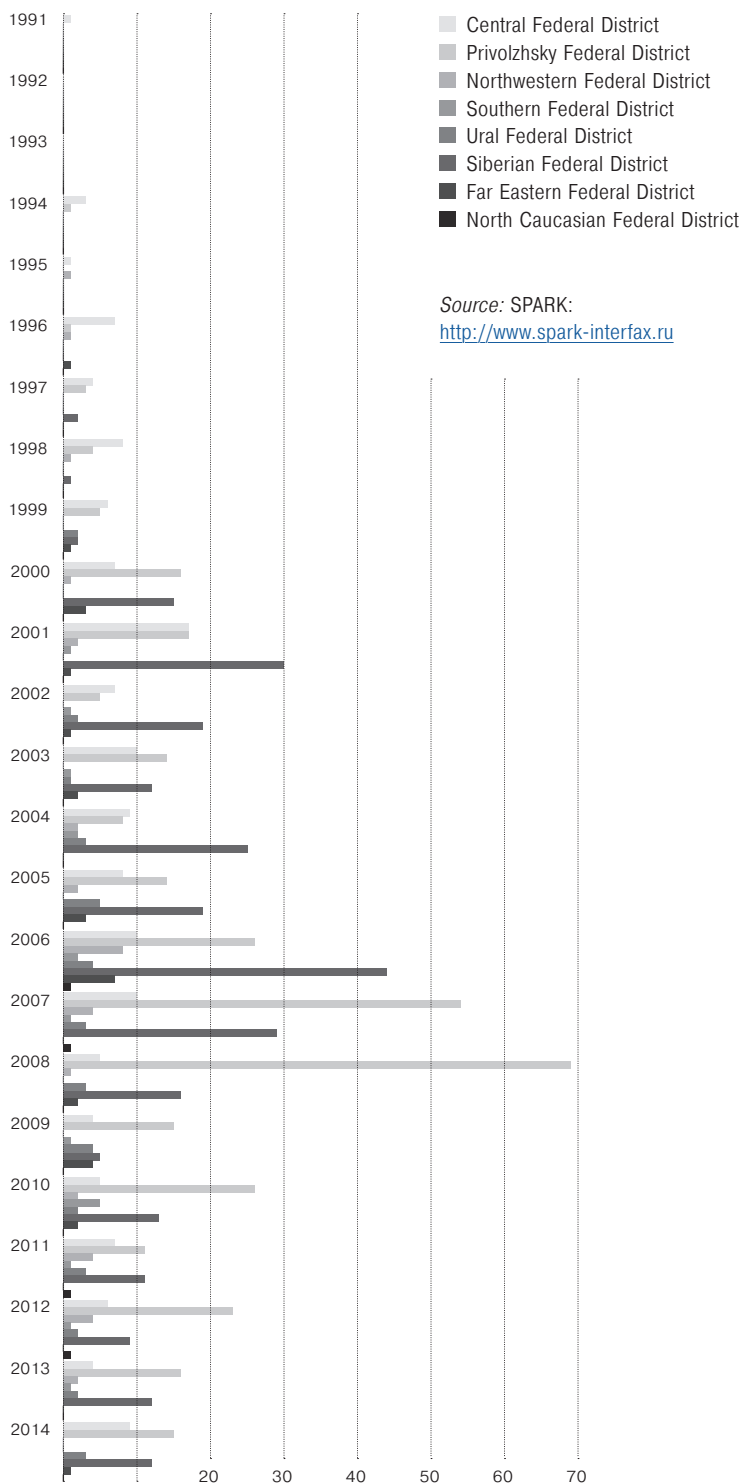
Source: SPARK: <http://www.spark-interfax.ru/>; official websites of local departments of education.

are a feature of 54 regional capitals only, according to the Unified State Register of Legal Entities, being confined to the capitals in most regions. The maximum absolute number of schools in cooperation with NPOs was revealed in Novosibirsk (107), followed by Moscow (86), with Saint Petersburg ranked as low as 15th place (27).

A comparison of data across federal districts reveals considerable gaps both within the districts and between them (Table 1). The Privolzhsky (Volga) and Siberian Federal Districts boast the highest proportions of schools supported by NPOs. Thirteen of the 15 cities with the highest absolute number of such educational institutions are regional capitals of these districts. Coefficient of variation (CV) of the proportion of such schools determines the degree of difference among cities and towns within the same district. The CV is extremely high in all districts (several times higher than the threshold value of 33.3%: when it is exceeded, the sample cannot be considered homogeneous), which means that our samples are highly heterogeneous. The lowest CV was found in the Privolzhsky Federal District: the proportion of schools supported by NPOs is the least dispersed there, i. e. there are fewer differences between the cities than in other districts. The Central Federal District is the most heterogeneous of all in this regard, combining relatively high proportions of schools supported by NPOs in some of the regions with zero values in six regions.

As we systematized the information on nonprofit registration dates, we found out that the very first school-supporting organizations had emerged in the early 1990s (the earliest nonprofit in the sample was registered in Moscow in 1991), and most of them were established in the 2000s (Fig. 2), with the peaks in 2006, 2007 and 2008 (102, 102

Figure 2. Dynamics of nonprofit registration



Source: SPARK:
<http://www.spark-interfax.ru>

Table 2. Incidence of NPOs affiliated with “status” and autonomous schools, compared with the incidence of NPOs supporting schools of other types

		Gymnasiums, lyc- eums, specialized schools	Other types of secondary schools	Autonomous schools	State-owned educational institutions
Privolzhsky FD	Schools supported by NPOs	181	166	71	276
	Other schools	275	621	132	764
	χ^2 test	49.64		6.01	
	p -value	0.000		0.014	
Central FD	Schools supported by NPOs	75	64	4	135
	Other schools	399	1616	46	1969
	χ^2 test	88.38		0.203	
	p -value	0.000		0.652	
Siberian FD	Schools supported by NPOs	104	165	40	229
	Other schools	124	452	82	494
	χ^2 test	27.32		0.06	
	p -value	0.000		0.807	
Northwestern FD	Schools supported by NPOs	21	11	3	29
	Other schools	318	527	98	747
	χ^2 test	10.19		0.15	
	p -value	0.001		0.699	
Far Eastern FD	Schools supported by NPOs	23	6	7	22
	Other schools	56	199	32	223
	χ^2 test	42.65		2.95	
	p -value	0.000		0.086	
Ural FD	Schools supported by NPOs	26	17	16	27
	Other schools	77	279	159	197
	χ^2 test	30.22		0.87	
	p -value	0.000		0.352	
Southern FD	Schools supported by NPOs	9	8	1	16
	Other schools	88	299	19	368
	χ^2 test	8.14		0.03	
	p -value	0.004		0.856	
North Caucasian FD	Schools supported by NPOs	4	0	0	4
	Other schools	71	168	3	236
	χ^2 test	9.11		0.05	
	p -value	0.003		0.822	

Source: SPARK: <http://www.spark-interfax.ru/>; official websites of local departments of education.

and 96 NPOs, respectively). At the same time, the dynamics of non-profit registration differs a lot across federal districts. The largest number of school-supporting NPOs was registered in 2001 in the Central Federal District, in 2008 in Volga, and in 2006 in Siberia.

Correlations between NPOs in co-production and demand-side factors were analyzed using subsamples of specific federal districts. We used a chi-squared test to compare the incidence of NPOs affiliated with “status” and autonomous schools with the incidence of NPOs supporting other types of schools (Table 2). In all districts, NPOs were created more often to support gymnasiums, lyceums and specialized schools, which confirms our hypothesis. As for correlations between NPOs and the type of business entity, it was only in the Privolzhsky District that autonomous institutions proved to be supported by NPOs more often than other schools. Otherwise, no relationship between school autonomy and support from NPOs was revealed even in Ural, where autonomous schools account for a little less than half of all secondary education institutions (44%).

Bearing in mind that schools can have autonomy and an advanced status at the same time, we analyzed the resulting data again to shed more light on the relationship between the type of business entity and affiliation with a nonprofit organization. In our sample, 713 educational institutions (11% of the sample) are autonomous, of which only 142 (20%) are supported by affiliated NPOs. Analysis of the dates of registration and obtaining autonomy showed that NPOs had been created before schools were granted autonomy in the majority (83%) of cases (although the interval did not exceed one or two months in four cases). Of these 142 autonomous institutions supported (at least formally) by NPOs, 101 qualify as gymnasiums, lyceums or specialized schools, and only 41 as “regular” schools. In the latter group, only nine schools became autonomous before any affiliated NGO, voluntary association or foundation was registered to support them. This allows us to conclude that changes in the type of business entity were not a catalyst of public support formalization and institutionalization.

Conclusion Analysis of the constitutional documents of school-supporting NPOs shows that one of their goals is the partial substitution of their own and their raised funds for public funding: co-producers assume defraying part of the maintenance and procurement expenses. Thus, NPOs combine additive and substituting co-production.

Collective co-production in school education develops unevenly in different regions of Russia. The process is relatively more active in provincial towns: the proportion of schools supported by specifically founded NPOs is higher in many regional centers than in the capital cities, the highest being in the Privolzhsky and Siberian Federal Districts. Perhaps, the reason for this is the more acute need of provincial educational institutions for extrabudgetary funds. In a number of

regions, this type of co-production remains at the level of informal organizations, such as parental committees or school boards that are not registered as legal entities. NPOs exist in only three regions of the Northern Caucasus (four organizations). Such geographical distribution may have to do with institutional conditions—like availability of an adequate environment for the third sector development—and with the regional level of socioeconomic development.

As judged by the dynamics of registration of school-supporting NPOs, the snowballing phase is over for this segment of the Russian nonprofit sector. The overall number of new school-supporting NPOs has been decreasing annually in Russia since 2009, and affiliated schools account for as little as 13.6% of the total number of sampled secondary schools in regional capitals. Again, the reasons are likely to be found in regional institutional conditions, such as the attitude of education authorities toward increasing the engagement of parents and other community members in schools' activities.

We have seen that NPOs are more often created to support secondary schools of advanced types (gymnasiums, lyceums, and specialized schools). It validates our hypothesis that a higher parental demand for quality educational services will promote formal collective co-production. Meanwhile, the absence of any correlation between school autonomy and school participation in such co-production demonstrates, to our mind, that these educational institutions do not use their full potential in attracting non-budgetary funds and other public resources.

We believe that creation of nonprofit organizations may be inhibited by the attitude of school administrators. Studies show that some school principals have an authoritarian leadership style, preventing any meaningful engagement with parents or other community members [Farkhatdinov et al. 2015]. In addition, the decision about creating a nonprofit organization can be affected by perceived costs of formal registration (the need to open a bank account, register an organization with the statistical authorities, the local tax office, and the Ministry of Justice, etc.) and accounting (bookkeeping, financial reporting).

We should admit that our research had a limitation: it did not control the actual activities of NPOs, only the fact of their formal registration. The studies on activities of Russian NPOs conducted by the Center for Studies of Civil Society and the Nonprofit Sector of the Higher school of Economics demonstrate that genuinely functioning NPOs are much less numerous than formal ones in Russia [Mersiyanova, Yakobson 2007; Mersiyanova, Korneeva 2011]. Some of them are “hibernating”, while others never engaged in any activity after registration. Nevertheless, the very creation of nonprofit organizations can be regarded as an intention of proactive parents to participate in co-production. As for the level of co-production in the cities of Russia, we believe that our findings can serve as the basis for a compar-

ative analysis in order to identify the differences and investigate the reasons behind them.

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