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THE PITFALLS OF PUBLICNESS MAY BE OVERCOME

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Let me say right away that I will talk about sociology in the broad sense of the term: studies of contemporary society and people who carry out these studies. I do not wish to comment publicly on sociology in a "departmental" sense of the term. I do not consider myself a sociologist in that sense, and I am among those who believe in the possibility of sociology's imminent death. To put it less bleakly, I believe that the entire field of professional knowledge about society is about to be reshaped. I am less concerned with the current turf battles in the field that is called sociology than with the place of social research in society. This is why the topic of public sociology is dear to me, and I am pleased that the new journal opens with a debate on this topic.

1. Michael Burawoy distinguishes between professional, critical, policy, and public sociology, based on the main tasks and publics of sociological knowledge. Is this typology helpful in understanding the current state of Russian sociology? How are these four types correlated in Russia?

I am happy to adopt Burawoy's typology, which works very well and may help us understand many things. But there are important terminological issues that affect its use in Russian, and it is important to reflect on these issues before we begin to apply the typology to the Russian case. "Professional" and "academic" are not precisely synonymous; what is meant here, apparently, is "addressed to professionals." If we are to free critical, policy, and public sociology from standards of scholarly professionalism, we may just as well give up any hope for the future of social research in Russia. In that case, sociology will remain an activity based in offices and libraries. We would give a stamp of approval to a journalistic style in critical and public sociology, and make academic sociology so speculative that theoretical work would be divorced from "practical reason."

2. What encourages and what hinders the development of sociology and, more broadly, the social sciences in Russia? Are these factors peculiarly Russian?

This question cannot be answered briefly. I would like to stress two inter-related factors, among other issues, that may be fatal to the social sciences in contemporary Russia: the lack of social demand for independent sociology, and the underdevelopment of public debate.

3. Based on your view of the main professional tasks of sociologists in present-day Russian society, how do you see the tasks and limits of public sociology in Russia today? How do these tasks correlate with the "public" versions of neighboring disciplines such as political science, economics, anthropology, or history?

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One of the mandatory tasks of any sociological work is to develop "social vision." I would define this as the only task that is always required and always possible to achieve. It is a priority for public sociology, and its main addressee (or, if you will, its client) is civil society. The addressee of academic sociology is the professional community, that of policy sociology is its specific client, and the addressee of critical sociology is the political elite. Given its tasks and boundaries, public sociology may be defined as the self-reflection of civil society.

4. Some scholars explain the lack of public sociology in Russia by pointing to the inadequate institutionalization and professionalization of social science. Do you agree?

I do. Society must feel the need for social research, and sociologists have yet to realize how vital a requirement that is for their work. If we want social research in Russia to develop and to make a contribution to global social thought, we need to create a more solid connection with Russia's social life worlds and develop "understanding" research tools; but understanding requires dialogue. Let's leave the alternatives to mystics.

5. Could you name any Russian sociologists or organizations who vividly personify each of the types of sociology that Michael Burawoy identifies, or perhaps several types at once? What kind of sociology does your own work represent, and if it belongs to several types, how do you combine these types in your work?

Academic sociology: Alexander Filippov, Inna Deviatko, Leonid Ionin. Critical sociology: Boris Dubin, Lev Gudkov (and, in general, the Levada Center's longitudinal studies), Elena Zdravomyslova, Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova, Pavel Romanov. Policy sociology: the VTsIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center) and the Public Opinion Foundation. In each case, I could have added "and others": each list could be extended, and in the case of policy sociology it could be endless. Public sociology is best viewed as a field that features irregular appearances by the "critics" as well as some "academics"—thanks to non-academic humanities journals such as *Otechestvennye zapiski*, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, or *Neprikosnovenny zapas*. Endeavors by sociologists proper to develop public sociology include the Public Opinion Foundation's journal *Sotsial'naia real'nost'* (*Social Reality*). But Russia has a sufficient pool of good researchers and authors for public sociology to be institutionalized in online and print journals, book series, and TV broadcasts. Among exemplars of public sociology, I would mention Ilya Utekhin's book *Everyday Life in Communal Apartments* (Utekhin 2004) as well as a number of articles by sociologists from the Center for Independent Social Research, the Center for Social Policy and Gender Studies in Saratov, and the Region Center in Ulyanovsk. Our own institution, the Center for Independent Social Research and Education, has espoused public sociology from its very inception. Our team first came together to work on an almanac on local communities in the region (Rozhanskii 2002). Every author tried to develop "social vision" in his or her own way, and our main addressee was the local community. Working on the second almanac (Rozhanskii 2007), we continued to pursue the same objective. Instead of the usual lyrical texts about local history, we offered the inhabitants of cities, towns, and villages in our region a sociological take on their everyday life as social history that is driven by the inhabitants themselves. The first book garnered great public success. The response of the professional community is especially interesting—it reached from a condescending "That's just local history!" to an enthusiastic "Finally! That's what we need in other regions, too!" In the vast majority of cases, this was a response to the way we approached our sources and to our focus on the region, rather than to our experience of public sociology. Our experience of dialogue with the local community proved to be of no interest to Russian colleagues (unlike West European ones), and that was the first lesson from our project. The second lesson for public sociology in Russia has to do with the pitfalls of "loving the people." Sociology grew out of ethnography, a colonial discipline, and bears its legacy. An "understanding" sociology may turn people and their everyday lives into objects no less than its positivist counterpart does—except that they become objects of admiration. Working on our second almanac, we were mindful of this danger. This leads me to the third lesson, which testifies to the methodological need for a public sociology. Public sociology is a

chance to overcome a key methodological difficulty—how to live in a social world and study that world at the same time. I am not inclined to exaggerate the significance of our experience, but I am convinced that making public sociological activities a regular part of what we do will require sociologists to enhance their professional skills, as it presents a specific set of methodological challenges.

6. Are there any lessons to be learned for public sociology from the closure of the old VTsIOM (the Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion) in 2003, the student revolt at Moscow State University's sociology department in 2007–8, or the closure of the European University at Saint Petersburg in February–March 2008?

All these events (as well as the public response to them) demonstrate the lack of social demand for an independent and professional sociology. Only a few members of the professional community discussed the closure of the VTsIOM and the student revolt in terms of independence and professionalism; most of their colleagues were indifferent or blamed the students. In the first two cases, the result is that the debate was dominated by political commentary. In the case of the European University, the situation was different—primarily because the university is embedded in strong social networks: the Saint Petersburg intelligentsia, its own alumni, and European academic networks. But the fact is that the closure was provoked by a project that involved sociologists passing on their tools to other actors of civil society, and that project was sacrificed to reach a compromise with the authorities. This is indicative of the difficulties facing public sociology in Russia. At the same time, the appearance of a "street university" during those events is a sign that there is an audience for public sociology in Russia.

7. Do you believe that the current state of Russian sociology differs radically from configurations in other countries—not just global centers such as the United States or France, but also countries of the Global South or other post-Soviet states? Can sociology remain national at a time when both academia and society are becoming increasingly globalized, and many Russian sociologists participate in comparative research projects and/or publish their work abroad?

I cannot take the idea of a "national sociology" seriously. However, the development of sociology is affected by certain conditions peculiar to Russia (for example, the prevalence of an ethnic understanding of the nation, the concentration of sociology in the two main cities, the lack of university autonomy), its civil society, and much else. All this does create a "configuration," but there are locally specific configurations in every country, no matter how small or large it is or where it is located. The study of global processes cannot be successful if it is limited to transnational projects. The development of research in Russia requires a decolonization of social science, and thus what Michael Burawoy calls public sociology.

Authorized translation from the Russian by Mischa Gabowitsch

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