

Vera Sparschuh

G. S. BATYGIN, L. A. KOZLOVA, E. M. SVIDERSKI (EDS.) *SOTSIAL'NYE NAUKI V POSTSOVETSKOI ROSSII* [THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA]. SAINT PETERSBURG: AKADEMICHESKII PROEKT, 2005. 416 PP. ISBN 5-8291-0547-0.

The role of the social sciences in Russia is a matter of controversy. The wealth of publications on this subject in Russia itself indicates that there is a need for information on the state of these disciplines. Foreign observers, too, would not only like to know where Russia is going, but also to be able to gauge the role of the sciences and, in particular, the social sciences in the country's development. The editors of this volume attach great importance to the social sciences. They proceed on the assumption that the current economic and social reforms in Russia were prepared by the same "intellectual project" that caused the fall of communism. Today, they argue, Russia is faced with a choice between two sets of values: national self-reliance or participation in the universal discourse of civil societies (p. 3).

The book, which grew out of a collaboration between authors based in Russia and at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), promises insights into the ideals espoused by the social sciences, their research perspectives and topics, their generational makeup, and their funding structure. Throughout the book, it remains unclear whether the authors intended to provide such insights equally for each social scientific discipline. The cover mentions "sociological technologies," and the artwork on the inside cover resembles a coordinate system that links different social scientific disciplines (including political science and economics) with historical time, technologies, and concepts. Yet among the social sciences, the book largely reserves special attention for sociology. Sometimes it seems as if the terms "social science" and "sociology" are used synonymously (p. 294). In any case, the authors mostly seem to view the social sciences as part of the science of society (*obshchestvovedenie*). They often use the example of philosophy to illustrate their arguments, and unfortunately leave out other disciplines. The lack of information on the individual authors makes it even more difficult to find one's bearings. With a topic like this, it would have been especially important to learn about each author's disciplinary background, age, and institutional affiliation in order to put their arguments in context.

The book starts out with three long essays on "social scientists at a time of crisis" (G. S. Batygin), intellectual practices (E. M. Sviderski), and intellectuals' socio-cultural expertise (S. S. Rapoport). This is followed by biographies of Russian sociologists and "scholars of society" (N. A. Mazlumianova, I. A. Klimova), based on data that have since been used in other publications, e.g. *Sotsiologicheskii zhurnal* no. 2/2007. The next papers deal with communication networks and with Russian scholars' presence in computer networks (G. V. Gradosel'skaia and P. G. Aref'iev). The book concludes with sections on the funding of social science and citation systems (G. S. Batygin, L. A. Kozlova, N. I. Daudrikh).

Batygin approaches the changing role of philosophy and sociology from different perspectives: he discusses publications, social scientists, and, in particular, the relationship between intellectuals and those in power. This reviewer does not always find it easy to agree with Batygin; he presents the Marxist takeover of the Russian humanities as having been completed by 1930—Marxism, to him, being less an ideology than a "frame of mind" (p. 48)—and stresses that, as a corollary of this process, the authorities themselves were intellectualized.

Several questions that are vital in this regard are left undiscussed: what was the social scientific disciplines' level of development before that indoctrination set in? How many talented demographers, psychotechnicians, and other social scientists "disappeared" before the new regime really took hold? Above all, what is the present-day significance of the legacy of the Russian pre-Marxist social sciences? Batygin views the 1950s as a watershed. To him, the reinstatement of several disciplines (including sociology) was a sign of progress, in the sense that the diversification and redistribution of resources also diversified scholarship. Being forced to "position" themselves with regard to Marxism led the newcomer disciplines to question their own foundations anew. For Batygin, one of the effects of totalitarianism on social scientists was that they would write things they did not believe (p. 46). This does not mean that they were opposed to the regime, but it does mean that, in public discourse, they were unable to separate their convictions (which were genuinely Marxist at least until the 1960s generation) from their actual scholarly work (p. 46).

Sviderski, too, points to the Stalinist ideological takeover of philosophy, which, however, was later softened by convergence with the project of "reality" (p. 114). This brings us back to the 1960s generation, which has a ubiquitous presence in the book. At least in the section on biographies (Mazlumianova) it might have been useful to profile different generations in current Russian sociology, but this chapter, too, fails to add nuance. Instead, the author gets lost in long quotes from interviews. Even though each chapter is devoted to a different topic, this reader's overall impression was of a very abstract discussion that remains impenetrable to the outsider and fails to shed light on the current scholarly debate. Thus, for example, Rapoport too speaks of social science in the singular, and is interested in a hypothetical model of social science. His argument seems to be that the social sciences in Russia have developed into a highly confused structure ("spontaneous sociologizing," p. 179) that lacks clearly defined intellectual rules and whose difficulties are exacerbated by funding problems. However, I can only guess that this is actually Rapoport's thesis. The research on communication networks presented in the book, while it uses modern methods, also deals with sociology, and again with the 1960s generation. The study on international networks argues that the Internet will enrich the social sciences (p. 294), yet traditional standards of publication should not be abandoned. Does this imply that Russia's younger social scientists feel more comfortable participating in international discourse than publishing at home?

As the communist societies were dissolving, all post-communist scholarly communities engaged in controversial debate on the social sciences' political responsibility for the past. The German "solution" to this problem was to completely dissolve the old structure, contents, and elites of the East German social sciences. In East Central Europe, alignment with the EU and international scholarly standards meant that past results were evaluated by the extent to which they held their own in the new systems. (On this see Kaase, Sparschuh, and Weninger 2002 and the Knowledge Base Social Sciences Eastern Europe, www.cee-socialscience.net.) Yet almost twenty years have passed since then, and it is probably no longer possible to discuss the future of the social sciences solely by looking back. The authors of this volume do not provide an answer to the question of where Russia is going, and maybe it is still early to do so. Be that as it may, however, a sober assessment of the state of each social scientific discipline would have been a useful contribution to the search for an answer.

Authorized translation from the German by Mischa Gabowitsch

REFERENCES

- Kaase, Max, Vera Sparschuh, and Agnieszka Weninger. 2002. *Three Social Science Disciplines in Central and Eastern Europe: Handbook on Economics, Political Science and Sociology*. Book and CD. Berlin: Social Science Information Centre (IZ); Budapest: Collegium Budapest.