



# INTRODUCTION

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Like any other academic journal, *Laboratorium* is in the business of publishing the findings of new research. We are happy to offer a venue for authors to publicize their studies—and, as a result, to help advance their careers. However, just as important for the journal is to make itself a platform for scholarly dialogue, where researchers from different institutions and different countries, speaking different languages and working in different disciplines, can enter into conversations about noteworthy books or important social issues.

This task of facilitating academic exchanges is particularly important to the journal's editors because we strive to overcome what we perceive as the isolation of Russian humanistic social sciences that has existed—and persisted—since the Soviet times. This isolation was, at least in part, a product of Marxism-Leninism as *the* theoretical framework and methodological toolkit of social sciences and humanities; it might be hard to believe now, but “Marxist-Leninist sociology” was taught as a required course to sociology majors through the early 1990s. However, as political ideology, Soviet Marxism-Leninism did not entirely quarantine the country from the “bourgeois West,” as the two studies published in this issue of the journal show. In fact, there were not only some overlaps in policy between the Soviet Union and at least some Western countries but also active knowledge transfer from the West, necessitated and fostered by the modernizing impetus of Soviet Marxism.

Transfer of technology from the West to the Soviet Union during the Cold War is the subject of Elena Kochetkova's study “Modernization of Soviet Pulp and Paper Industry and Technology Transfer in 1953–1964: The Case of Enso/Svetogorsk.” A historian by training, Kochetkova has combed through archives on either side of the Russian-Finnish border to reveal just how essential Finland was to the modernization of the Soviet pulp industry in the post-Stalin era when the USSR was trying to “catch up and overtake” the West, in the words of the country's new leader. By comparing the handover of two different technological processes—cellulose bleaching and wood waste recycling—the article concludes that in the former case the technological transfer was more successful because it was much more comprehensive—transferred were the know-how, the machinery, even the workforce. Ironically though, what led

to this success also made the technological process—which was strategically important for the Soviet Union’s prevailing in the Cold War—more dependent on its ideological “frenemies” like the politically neutral yet “capitalist” Finland.

The second research article of the issue, “Giving Up on Great Plans? Transforming Representations of Space in City Plans in Russia and Sweden” by sociologists Lisa Kings and Zhanna Kravchenko, also explores links, albeit of a different kind, between Russia, during both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, and social democratic Sweden. Here, the authors find more similarities than differences in the ideas behind urban planning in Saint Petersburg and Stockholm in, respectively, 1950s–1960s and then in early 2000s. While specific objectives and means of implementation differed for the two cities’ earlier plans, they shared the overarching understanding that city planning was a tool of social equalization and was done, primarily, to improve the welfare of residents. While it is not entirely surprising that the goals of urban planning in Russia have shifted with the end of socialism, it is perhaps less expected to see similarly dramatic changes in representations of space—and in a very similar direction toward a commodified, business-friendly, and unplannable “global city,” symptomatic, according to the authors, of a spreading neoliberalism—in a country that has not undergone drastic political and economic transformations such as Russia did in the 1990s.

The two book reviews appearing in this issue of the journal might be good companion pieces for Kings and Kravchenko’s article. On the one hand, one of the core concepts explored in Michel Foucault’s 1978–1979 lectures at the Collège de France (the volume known as *The Birth of Biopolitics*, translated and published in Russian in 2010, and reviewed here by Greg Yudin) is the notion of neoliberalism. Yudin highlights Foucault’s distinct interpretation of neoliberalism as the projection of the principles of the market economy on to “a general art of government”—the sense of which we get from observing early twenty-first century transformations in conceptualizations of space in Saint Petersburg and Stockholm. On the other hand, Yves Cohen’s *The Bosses’ Century* (or, in the original French, *Le siècle des chefs: Une histoire transnationale du commandement et de l’autorité [1890–1940]*), is itself a complex comparative study. Showcasing, according to the reviewer Galina Kaninskaia, Foucault’s notion of governmentality, Cohen studies leaders and leadership (*commandement, руководство, Führung*) in the United States, France, the Soviet Union, and Germany in the first half of the twentieth century, when these countries were dominated by vastly different ideologies, bringing about divergent constellations of management (governmentality) and democracy.

Katerina Guba’s review essay “How Journals Select Articles: The Manuscript Review Process in American Sociology” returns to another topic of *Laboratorium’s* continuing interest—academic publishing practices. Guba tells the story of how and why in the 1970s American sociology journals en masse adopted practices of double-blind peer review—and how that changed the discipline. Reviewing classic studies in the field, she shows that reliance on peer review was driven by journals’ aspirations for “objective” evaluation of manuscripts due to an increasing “publish or perish” paradigm in the American academy. But such an “unbiased” process has had, as Guba

claims, several important unintended consequences: not only have academics become overworked and overburdened because nearly every manuscript now has to be read and assessed by two, and sometimes three, reviewers, but, even more regrettably to the author, the originality of scholarship published in journals has seriously diminished. On the one hand, many “star” authors, especially those with tenure, have no incentive to endure lengthy and sometimes uneasy processes of peer review and revisions and, therefore, switch either to publishing in less rigorous journals or to writing books. On the other hand, it is easier to achieve reviewers’ affirmative consensus—a precondition for manuscript acceptance—on merely “competent” rather than “groundbreaking” work. While peer-reviewed publications serve well the careers of those who get published, they don’t necessarily attract the strongest submissions—a woe for their editors—nor do they necessarily publish the most interesting articles—a woe for readers; a provocative conclusion that may or may not apply to Russia where double-blind peer review, like many international academic practices, is too new to know with certainty its effects on the quality of scholarship.

The second half of the issue consists of two discussion blocks, providing an arena for cross-disciplinary and cross-national debates—one on penitentiaries and the Internet and the other on Russian skinheads. The first forum is centered around themes that, even separately, provoke much interest among academics and laymen alike. The contributors, Dina Gusejnova, Judith Pallot, and Yvonne Jewkes, reflect on what consequences on prisoners’ lives the “Internetization” of prisons might possibly have, in Russia and in the West, and how the Internet as a medium of information about and from prisons changes perceptions of those “on the outside” about inmates and prison life. Gusejnova, an intellectual and cultural historian and a newcomer to research on prisons, sets up the discussion with an account of the Internet’s inroads into Russian correctional institutions, from online shopping to videoconferencing, and interrogates the conventional, almost knee-jerk belief that these online services are indisputably to the inmates’ benefit: in her view, the Internet is not only a space of resistance but also a means of violence, not just an instrument of revelation but also a form of concealment. Geographer Pallot and criminologist Jewkes, more seasoned experts on penal systems in Russia and in the West respectively, offer their views, sometimes disagreeing with each other, on the effects of the growing commodification, commercialization, and privatization of prison life facilitated by the spread of the Internet. The intention of this section is not to give definitive answers to these questions but rather to spark further research about the nature of punishment and the status of inmates in the Information Age.

The other discussion, in the book reviews section, is dedicated to the 2010 volume *Russia’s Skinheads: Exploring and Rethinking Subcultural Lives*, coauthored by Hilary Pilkington, Elena Omel’chenko, and Al’bina Garifzianova. We invited half a dozen sociologists and anthropologists from Russia, Europe, and the United States to review this important study in youth subcultures and neo-Nazi movements. The perspectives of the discussants are as varied as the topics of sports, masculinity, youth, deviance, and so on, that the book raises—everyone sees what is closer to

their own research interests and expertise. And this is the main purpose of such forums: whether we have already read this book or not, our experience of it is no longer informed exclusively by our own disciplinary or cultural preconceptions and is now infinitely enriched by the analyses of a cultural sociologist from Russia, a Czech anthropologist of youth cultures, and a British-American scholar of Russian right-wing movements. Social sciences is a collaborative enterprise, and not only in conducting and writing up research but now, thanks to book discussions like this one, in reading about it too.

Comparison and collaboration are the two themes of this issue of *Laboratorium*—and of our overall publishing mission.