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Note from the editor

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Note from the editor

Dear reader,

When accepting an offer to serve as the Editor of *Economic Sociology* for the next year, it was suggested to me that I devote one of the issues to the state of the art in Russian economic sociology. Given the field is very broad, I decided to focus on one area of studies which is crucially important for the Russian economic sociology and presented by a great variety of studies carried out with divergent research tools. This is an area of *informal economy* which is confined neither to the second economy nor to illegal markets but presented as a set of divergent segment with a complex interplay of formal and informal institutions.

Before turning to the content of this issue, let me give you a very brief idea of the phases of Russian sociology re-emergence. Russian sociology was born at the end of 19th century and borrowed a lot from positivism of Auguste Comte at that time. Russian Sociological Society was established first in 1917. The first teaching department of sociology was opened by Pitirim Sorokin in 1920. Then the new Bolshevik political regime sent a number of leading sociologists out of the country on the famous "Philosophers' steamboat" in the 1920s and repressed some of them in the 1930s. Sociology was identified with the orthodox Marxist social science. Its development was largely interrupted.

Sociology was formally re-established by the late 1950s under close supervision of the Communist party. The Soviet Sociological Association was launched in 1958. The first special Institute of Concrete Sociological Studies was established in 1968. But after invasion of Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia in 1968, ideological pressures increased. The best sociological research teams were dismantled. "Sociological renaissance" was stopped.

The second phase of formal recognition came under Gorbachev's perestroika when sociology and political science were officially acknowledged. The first departments of sociology were established at universities in 1989. Defence of doctoral dissertations in sociology was allowed. The first public opinion polls started to grow on the democratic wave giving way to a new type of empirical studies. New sociological research centres and chairs at universities were mushrooming during the 1990s.

A specific feature of Soviet/Russian sociology lies in principal heterogeneity of sociologists' academic background. Scholars came to sociology from different disciplines (economics, psychology, history, and philosophy). This causes a great deal of methodological diversity reproduced over decades. It makes the field more multifaceted but at the same time puts some boundaries to professional communication within sociological community.

Methodologically, the best examples of Soviet sociology (and economic sociology in particular) presented a peculiar combination of orthodox Marxism and latent structural functionalism. Industrial sociology and studies of social structure were primary fields in which sociology initially tried to develop. "Social class" was used as a major category for critical evaluation of western societies while "work" was made a major category for describing socialist societies.

With elimination of ideological monopoly of the orthodox Marxism and legitimization of Western sociological theories, a methodological pluralism was established. Sociologists started to investigate a great variety of new topics, including private entrepreneurship, labour conflicts, unemployment, and poverty.

Having been born in Novosibirsk in the 1980s due to the efforts of the research team headed by Tatiana Zaslavskaya and Rozalina Ryvkina, the focal centre of Russian economic sociology moved to Moscow in the 1990s (with many participants of the Novosibirsk school who left Siberia for the capital city).

From the very start, much of attention was attracted to studying informal and shadow economy. It was not accidental at all given that in the 1990s most of the enterprises even having quite legal statuses were making at least some of their transactions in the shadow economy to conceal revenues from the state. Both business and households were (and still are) extensively involved into corrupt deals with the public officials for getting extra benefits or avoid sanctions for non-compliance with the contradictory formal rules. At the same time, informal economy of households was flourishing.

There was also a methodological reason derived from an increasing popularity of the research tools offered by the new institutionalism during the years of fundamental institutional change. Though importation of the new institutionalist research program was not completed giving way to “soft” and somehow eclectic versions of the new institutionalism in economic theory and economic sociology, as it was brilliantly reflected by János Kovács for post-communist societies in the previous issue of the *Newsletter*. However, more formalized theories and modelling techniques are also being applied for investigation of murky boundaries between formality and informality of rules.

Now let us turn to the current issue. It starts with a brief overview of sociological studies in the field of informal and shadow economy in Russia. Together with Svetlana Barsukova, we discuss the rise of the shadow economy in the Post-Soviet era, involving transition from fictitious and virtual economy to shadow dealings, from relationships of “blat” to business networking, and from pilfering to tax evasion. We address the institutionalised practices of corruption and use of violence in business, the maintenance of inter-family reciprocal exchanges and the progressive legalization of business activities.

In the next paper, Aryna Dzmitrieva attracts attention to the sociological turn in legal studies in Russia. Sociologists challenge the autonomy of law and examine the conditions when laws and law enforcement organizations do exist, while the rule of law is not obtained, and when informal practices prevail over formal laws. In their empirical studies of judicial decisions and judges’ community, scholars study the structure of legal institutions, their functioning, the conflicts of different social groups with the law, and the social determinants of judicial behaviour.

Leonid Kosals and Anastasia Dubova analyse blurred boundaries between the legal and illegal markets taking an example of the shadow economic activities of police officers in Russia. Being a tool for maintaining law and order, in many transformation countries the police has turned into a powerful vehicle of institutional subversion. The authors summarize publications investigating police corruption and

moonlighting in Russia as a socially embedded phenomenon. They reveal the fundamental reasons for commercialization of the police activity.

Tatiana Karabchuk addresses the question why the informal employment is so sustainable in Russia. It became a safety net for the households during the shock therapy of the 1990s and a survival strategy for enterprises in the drastically changing economic conditions. However, it continued to expand during the years of economic growth in the 2000s. The paper deals with the main approaches and definitions of informal employment, data sources and measurement, the scale and scope of the informal employment, and the reasons for its sustainable growth in Russia.

A specific form of informal employment is presented by electronic freelancers, e.g. self-employed professionals working remotely via the Internet. Andrey Shevchuk and Denis Strebkov launched Russian Freelance Survey (RFS) that brought more than 10,000 usable responses in each of two waves in 2008 and 2010, making RFS one of the largest freelance surveys in the world. Using these unique data sets, the authors describe the main groups involved in the Russian-speaking e-lance market and demonstrate how they cope with the high level of informality of institutional arrangements and opportunistic behaviour of market actors.

Finally, Alexander Nikulin introduces the new research programmes for studying rural informal economy in post-Soviet Russia, including unregistered family employment, secondary employment, and widening of interfamily exchanges. He also demonstrates how western scholars contributed to this important area of studies using the local rural statistics, participant observations, peasants’ narratives, and detailed analysis of their family budgets.

I am thankful to all contributors and hope that this issue will give you an idea of at least one important area of studies carried out in the Russian economic sociology.

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