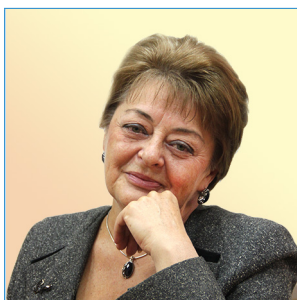


Modern Development. Towards Designating a Research Topic



Aksenova Olga Vladimirovna – Candidate of Sociological Sciences, Leading researcher, Institute of Sociology of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

E-mail: illaio@yandex.ru



Khaliy Irina Alberntovna – Doctor of Sociological Sciences, Main researcher, Head of Center for Political Science and Political Sociology, Institute of Sociology of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

E-mail: illaio@yandex.ru

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Abstract. This article examines such issues as studying the modern development of society. Its objective is to designate research problems and questions in order to analyze development in the West and in Russia. Shown are changes in the approaches toward the study of development throughout the course of a modern society's establishment, while exposing the peculiarities of industrial progress in the West from a perspective of changes occurring in the subjectness of people within manufacturing and management processes. Industrial development leads to the following results: the formation of a complex technological system which engulfs all areas of society's life, the simplification of human beings and everything associated with their (humans' and society's) reproduction, the loss of their position as a subject of action. The subject of action position is assumed by a complex system, however, it is not capable of functioning in unusual situations, and it is not capable of quickly mobilizing due to the commercial nature of its communications and interactions. Indicated are the specifics of Russian industrialization, its key difference from its Western counterpart being the fact that a person acts as a subject of progressive shifts, which are carried out consciously. The end result of development in this case is the emergence of a system within which complex labor is not completely algorithmized, the person retains freedom of action and remains its subject, people are still capable of solving unusual problems. The peculiarity of Russian progress also lies in the fact that it starts with copying Western models, which are then reworked according to Russian tradition. Noted is a need for analyzing said tradition, which, according to research conducted by Russian sociologists, contains progressive values. The internal mechanisms of development in Russia are unclear and in need of analysis: they must be searched for within the cultural sphere, since the market throughout the entire course of Russian history has always been limited. Shown is the relativity of modern Russian conservatism, its conjunction with the pursuit of progress and a person's comprehensive development. The main contradiction when it comes to Russian development is the discrepancy between Russian and Western variants of such. The following conclusions are made: first of all, it is necessary to analyze modern tendencies which are traditionally considered as benchmarks for Russian development; second, there is a need for exposing the moving mechanisms of traditional development, for evaluating the possibilities and means for joining it with modern technology.

Keywords: development, progress, globalization, technological system, complicated action, algorithm, actor, culture, tradition

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This article is of a generalized and prearranged nature. The purpose of work discussed herein was to define the key specifics of current development trends in Western countries and in Russia, to determine the area for further analysis, and to articulate the issues that require examination and discussion. It is based (in terms of developing the deliverables and work materials) on understanding the projects that we have implemented in Russia and in Western countries starting from the early 1990s, which covered looking into social self-organization, regional and local policy and government, social activism in its different manifestations, roles of professionals in the modernization, etc.¹ In addition to achieving its principal goals, each of these studies demonstrated a particular aspect of social transformations: institutional development in the field of regional and local policy and government, civil society formation, balance of traditions and innovations, citizens' attitude to the modernization, specifics of development of the technology-based management system in Western countries, emergence of the actor-based management system in Russia, and some others.

End of history and development

Social thought of the modern period was almost completely dedicated to examining the development of the society, its reasons, mechanisms, and internal logic of changes. Various concepts emerged that contradicted and supplemented each other; theoretical tools for understanding and explaining radical changes in the society were developed. In the high modern era, dialectics were replaced by the analysis of systems and functions. Static and formal by nature, it was designated for examining the existing social structure. Further changes were rather observed, documented and interpreted in some way (information society, postindustrial society, etc.). Sociologists noted the advent of the explanatory potential crisis. For instance, R. Collins attributed it to excessively narrow specializations of researchers and disunity of studies [Collins, 1989]. One may suggest that the crisis is also associated with the fact that, during the transition from the modern to the postmodern period, the essential grounds for and drivers of transformations did not undergo any radical change; the capital was becoming more complex and globalized, but in fact, it remained the self-expanding value in full accordance with the definition provided by Marx.

¹ That is, projects implemented by employees of the Sector of Socio-Cultural Development of Russian Regions, presently – Department of Analysis of Socio-Cultural Grounds for Political Processes of the Center for Political Science and Political Sociology of the Institute of Sociology of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (FCTAS RAS).

In the second half of the 20th century, development studies were separated into an extensive interdisciplinary area also covering the development sociology. It looks into all aspects of society's life in connection with social changes, their risks and consequences. One specific feature of the said studies is that they review developing countries, and their development vector was determined and stable: moving towards the “modernity”, which means the condition of the Western society at each corresponding stage.

Initially, globalization only strengthened and made sensible the development completeness, which F. Fukuyama called “the end of history” [Fukuyama, 2004]. Becoming part of global flows turned out to be more important than undergoing industrialization and achieving the developed-country level in terms of economy, healthcare, education and other areas, and the relevance of development studies dropped.

However, in recent years, the end of history has no longer been associated with the best of all possible worlds the humanity can achieve. Globalization gave rise to the burning issues that also affected developed countries: deepening inequality between the rich and the poor in the Golden Billion countries, middle class dilution, physical destruction of states, migration flows to developed countries, etc. Limited markets and resources, thresholds of economic growth, decelerated scientific progress, etc. are now the reality.

In such a context, the subject matter of the development sociology is defined as social changes that take place not only in developing countries: “Furthermore, present-day transformations in Europe remind us that the development sociology may not be narrowed down to studying “developing countries” – it needs to cover industrial countries as well” [What is development...]. However, today there are doubts even about the destination and nature of social changes themselves. May we consider any change to be a development? Should changes that are implemented as innovative and progressive, such as changes in terms of family, gender relations, nurturing and education, be deemed developments?

Transformations need not to be the movement from simple to complex; they may lead to simplification, degradation of the established entirety. However, a roll back to a condition of the society commonly referred to as “archaic” is not necessary. New forms of regress, which are by no means associated with traditions or the culture, are very likely to appear.

The difficulty about the study is that changes are too massive: they cover all aspects of societal and human life without exception. In view of this, it appears to be necessary to focus on deep transformations of the social structure that underlie many other changes. These particularly include changes in the human's position in production and management processes.

Homo sapiens in the technology-based system

Modern history allows us to follow the changes that have occurred to the human as the subject of production and management activities. The phenomenon of a worker being alienated from the labor process and results has long been known and examined. Narrow specialization has allowed a reduction in costs and an increase in labor productivity since the manufacturing era. The division of labor was deepening as the industrial progress continued, which led to the simplification of simple labor and loss of control over it. However, in the 20th century, the turn came for complex labor that required high skills. A professional was transforming into a specialist that controls a continuously decreasing area of a production or management process. All actions and interactions in the field of material production are governed by rules and regulations, the requirements to the compliance with which were becoming tougher as the specialization deepened. Such development translated into modern technologies.

Today, the phrase “high technology” is almost sacral. It often designates the development objective, means that will enable fast and stable development, as well as goods produced using it. Technology is just an algorithm of actions, a clearly defined sequence of steps, a program that may not be violated. In the present-day technology-based system, a social action is algorithmized to the maximum. A person, irrespective of his/her education, qualification and position, ceases to be its subject, or, as defined by B. Latour, his/her subjectivity becomes equal to that of means and objects of labor, and of everything else, which is either way associated with the labor process, including the algorithm of actions itself [Latour, 2005]. The discretion is almost completely excluded. Any breach of algorithm involves multiple risks: from a manufacturing defect to a man-made disaster. Furthermore, a narrowly focused specialist may not take the right decision outside the step-by-step instruction. For that, he/she just has no sufficient knowledge and skill of its unrestricted handling. In such case, the technology-based system itself becomes the subject: it is complex, flexible, self-regulated, network-connected, etc. At the same time, a worker becomes functionalized and simplified to the maximum [Aksenova, 2016].

The development of the technology-based system is accompanied by its expansion into all aspects of societal life, which are regulated and algorithmized by it. The papers by J. Habermas and J. Ellul demonstrate the mechanisms of such system expansion [Habermas, 1993; Ellul, 1980]. One of them is quite obvious: there is no longer a need to know fundamental laws of nature – a specialist is required to have good memory

and to be skilled in using standard algorithms in standard situations in a very narrow area of activities; the secondary and higher education are therefore simplified. The system becomes overwhelming; sophisticated structures and networks of entities emerge in all areas, while the culture is reduced, man-to-man interactions are functionalized and formalized, and atomization processes are accompanied by simplification of personality. However, capabilities of the collective, system mind are limited. The system is unable to resolve non-standard issues using non-standard methods, which was confirmed by the analysis of the Fukushima 1 Nuclear Power Station accident [Aksenova, 2016: 184–209]. A person reduced to a function, deprived of interests and values is unable to act independently.

The technological progress results in the increasing structural complexity of the society, while the culture is simplified to disappearance, values are narrowed down to rules and regulations, and finally, the human ceasing to be the subject of any action becomes simplified. The intellect that was formed in the course of evolution loses its significance in the standardized system environment, which presently covers almost everything: very complex structure of modern capital, management of societal life as a whole and in its certain aspects, technological cities as defined by S. Sassen [Sassen, 2005], network structures of civil society, art, etc.

Another way of development

The self-expansion of capital does not depend on the will and consciousness of people, so as does not the industrial revolution generated by it. As distinct from it, an impetus for industrial development in Russia has always been conscious: during the era of Peter I, in the course of 1860s reforms, during the Soviet industrialization period, and as part of present-day attempts of re-industrialization. Market laws were regulating the Russian industry over a short period of time – from the end of the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century, which was concluded by the revolution. The demand for progress more often emerged due to the constant military threat, the need to survive in the colonial world. For this purpose, the army was to be modernized first of all.

Each time, the development commenced with the precise copying of Western templates, which transformed into another version of progress facing with the Russian context and traditions. Its major feature was the preservation of subjectivity of the human at all stages of industrial development, notwithstanding the inevitably deepening division of labor and increasing specialization. A professional would always maintain control over

a relatively large area of a production and management process, and a certain discretion. In such a context, values performed regulatory and action control functions; they were not replaced by rules, notwithstanding their importance. Until the Unified State Examination and the Bologna System were introduced, the education had been universal and fundamental; the culture was an important component of the industrial system, as it was impossible to reproduce a worker with the necessary personal qualities and system of values without it.

The dependence of development on a certain person is often called the “manual control”, which must be replaced by the automated functioning of institutions and entities within the technology-base system. In fact, the appearance of a “hero” actor that ensures progress in general or in a particular area is the result of functioning of a system being no less complex and effective, which is capable of prompt mobilization and operation in the most extreme environment.

The internal mechanism of the three-hundred-year development in Russia in the context of limited market is scarcely investigated. Initial impulses were not dying away: healthcare, military affairs and engineering, science and art rapidly moved to the international level and were preserved in the context of social disasters, war and devastation. It appears that one should find an explanation for such progression in the culture and specific features of traditions, rather than in the economy. The sociologist A.L. Andreyev indicates the obsession of the Russian society with the scientific and technological progress and its simultaneous traditionalism. He calls the Russian modernization “traditionalistic” [Andreyev, 2013: 79]. Our studies allow making a reasonable assumption that there exists a development tradition that is maintained even during the periods of obvious strengthening of conservative trends.

The contemporary Russian conservatism is a contradictory phenomenon. Notwithstanding traditionalistic declarations and ideological reliance on the church, the government remains one of major proponents of the Western version of progress, which is quite traditional anyway. It was simply supplemented by other sources of innovation: global organizations, global corporations, etc. Residents of Russian regions maintain traditional values, the uppermost of which is still the family, as well as the progress, which they see as a combination of the scientific and technological development and personality development. The latter is verified not only by answers of respondents during interviews, but also by their aspiration to provide their children with a broad education.

Our studies demonstrated that only the innovations that correspond to the Russians’ perceptions of development are being accepted. Innovations that eliminate routine elements of operations and enable focusing on their creative components gain

approval. Everything that leads to the degradation of culture, family destruction, algorithmization of actions and loss of their subject's position is denied. The opposition to innovations of such kind is perfectly conscious, is rarely open, and is focused on the transformation of unacceptable novelties.

At the same time, Russia has been distinguished by its focus on Western countries as the ideal of progress, which needs to be caught up with by arranging life just like they did. This phenomenon also requires investigation. It has remained unchanged since the time of acrid monologues of Chatsky and somehow gets along with the above mentioned denial of real innovations supplied by the West.

Development or growth

There is one more relevant and extensively discussed aspect of contemporary development: its link with the growth. The categories of growth and development has long been inseparable. Both of them were based on the self-expanding value: its growth was simultaneously the development and growth of the industry, cities, inventions and innovations being introduced, quality of life, consumption level, etc. In other words, a simple increase in capital, firstly, manifested in increasingly complex forms and, secondly, generated the development of the society as a whole and its certain areas.

Understanding the difference between the growth and development emerged in connection with environmental problems. Explosive post-war industrial growth resulted not just in the increased level of welfare in developed countries. It made environmental effects of the modern industry functioning obvious and tangible: destruction of natural ecosystems, environmental pollution hazardous to human health, etc.

Naturally, the contradictory unity of growth and development manifests not only in connection with environmental issues. The combinations of development (sophistication) of particular components of societal life and degradation of other, as described above, may probably result from the evolution of such contradiction. Still, the said dichotomy is best-investigated and obvious in the field of environmental protection.

The public debate on the growth issues commenced after the publication of the book *Silent Spring* written by R. Carson that describes the consequences of using pesticides [Carson, 1962]. The positive interpretation of growth that had existed previously was replaced by the understanding of its ambiguity. Environmental movements became massive and succeeded to put the environmental protection issues on the political agenda. The danger of unlimited growth was documented in the report

to the Club of Rome titled “Limits of Growth” [Meadows et al., 1972]. The growth was to be replaced by the development: change, sophistication, improvement of the society subject to the minimization of its environmental impact.

Environmental movements also forced the governments to adopt tough limitations on emissions of hazardous substances. Industrial companies opposed to the simultaneous pressure of the population and the government, as environmental measures required significant expenses. During that period, the major methods of resolving the growth issues were articulated: radical change in the social structure, alteration of its value paradigm, transformation of environmental limits into a profit increase factor.

Starting approximately from the middle of 1980s, the idea becomes dominant, both in theory and in practice. Back then, the most popular environmental policy area was the environmental modernization, which was intended to replace the growth by the development, while keeping the process of value self-extension intact [Mol, 1980]. Low-cost management and organizational innovations were introduced, which enabled not only reducing pollution, but also saving resources and, therefore, increasing revenue. Even managers directly involved in such modernization had doubts about its efficiency: small investment cannot generate substantial profit. Still, the ecological modernization seemed to win: in several years, it succeeded to make cities cleaner, achieve ecological comfort of living in them, attain the use of alternative energy sources and eco-friendly materials. Technology was becoming more complex and developed without any extensive growth, and the impacts on nature were decreasing.

However, the ecological idyll emerged in developed countries for another reason. Escaping from social and environmental restrictions, companies moved to China and other East Asian countries, where no such limitations existed. The overall picture turned out to be less lovely: the Golden Billion countries cleaned up the places of their residence paying no regard to the rest of the planet, where alternative energy equipment plants were polluting the environment.

Eliminating the growth from the dichotomy, as well as finding the optimum balance between growth and development has failed. The contradiction was removed in a manner natural for capital: by its flowing to the unlimited growth area. Thereafter, the limits of growth have remained forgotten for many recent years. The 2018 report to the Club of Rome gets back to the disastrous consequences of growth. As a reason for them, the report specifies the capital’s striving for unlimited self-expansion: “Capitalists are interested in maximizing absolute profits and therefore seek to minimize absolute costs. If capital is mobile between nations, it will move to the nation with lowest

absolute costs” [Weizsäcker et al. 2018: 78]. The report’s authors criticize the world order based on the freedom of capital mobility, and global organizations (WTO, World Bank, International Monetary Fund), which do not regulate transnational capital for the common good: “Instead, they increase the power and growth of the financial sector and financial corporations by taking them out of control by national governments to the area of corporate feudalism and open access to the global commons” [Weizsäcker et al. 2018: 79]. As an example of best practice, they refer to the regulation in place within the European Union [Weizsäcker et al. 2018: 91]. Based on the results of analysis provided in the report, certain ways to achieve sustainable development in the world are proposed. Ideas of the 1980s are globally coming back to some extent, including new technology and global management.

The report was issued when several countries became close to the Golden Billion countries in terms of their economic positions, and chances for the advance in living standards in India and China appeared. This potential growth in prosperity actually poses a very serious threat to nature. On the other hand, its long-term destruction by transnational corporations in those countries has raised no questions for a long time. It is also obvious that the developed countries’ determination to maintain the high level of consumption and comfort will never be accepted by residents of the rest of the planet. Furthermore, the latter have been taught for many years that the development must be solely targeted towards the West. The optimality of the European Union as a development example raises doubts; it is evident that England, Greece and some other countries not really agree with it. Sociologists noted its unifying and indiscriminately leveling technocratic structure back at the onset of the EU creation [Lash, 1996]. Therefore, using its experience globally in the context of operation of capital increase mechanisms is not the best solution to the growth issues.

Conclusion

For many years, striving to catch up with and overtake the West and to adopt its achievements combining them with Russian traditions has really been effective: it eventually resulted in the Russian version of progress. This version requires examination; however, previous studies enable defining some of its specific features: the human remains homo sapiens able to think and resolve unconventional problems; the culture is preserved and developed, which determined a balanced direction for development of gender and family relations, in which equality is achieved without strict standardization and without losing femininity and masculinity.

At present, the country is going through another attempt to catch up with and fit into the global development trends. A fair number of innovations have been implemented in education, healthcare, and governance, which comply with the requirements of the technology-based system. During the meeting with his confidants, Russian President Vladimir Putin defined the following development objective for next six years: “We must ensure a spurt in the country’s development in all areas I’ve mentioned before and give it a boost, so that after the coming six years have passed, even if some upsets, difficulties, or unforeseen events occur in the country’s life, the momentum gained and inertia of motion are strong enough to keep Russia moving forward, no matter what. Everything that hinders such forward movement must be cleaned out, discarded”¹. The need for a spurt stems from causes similar to those existed during all great reforms: the country needs to survive in the hostile world, which has never stopped being colonial and only changed the forms of dependence.

The problem is that, as specified above, the development vector raises doubts. The present-day capitalism is distinctly different from the capitalism that existed during the protestant ethic period, industrial revolution period, which Russia was catching up with in the 19th century, and even from the 20th century modern. Is there really a need to fit into the world order, in which there is no place for the human, or, rather, the human transforms into something similar to an ant? Should we risk our values, culture and, ultimately, intellect? The collective mind is yet unable to make non-standard decisions, and the technology-based system cannot function in chaos. Still, even a perfectly operating ant colony may scarcely be considered a future, which one should strive toward. Contemporary trends should be analyzed and the development direction must be accurately determined. Perhaps, this time it should not be combined with the Western global modernity, as it is unclear whether Russian traditions are still able to remake development models being imported in accordance with the Russian context, while remaining preserved. The consequences of implementing the “automated” management, which removes the human from the subject’s position, must be investigated.

In the field of development, Russia is distinguished by the contradiction between two development options: Western and traditional Russian, rather than between development and archaic. To really move forward, rather than to a dead end or

¹ Quoted in: N. Yuryeva, 2018. Vladimir Putin in a meeting with his confidants: We must ensure a spurt in the country’s development // Website of Channel One. URL: https://www.1tv.ru/news/2018-01-30/340272-vladimir_putin_na_vstreche_s_doverennymi_litsami_my_dolzhen_obespechit_ryvok_v_razvitiy_strany [Visited on: February 19, 2018].

a steep, one must identify the drivers of traditional development and the logic of their functioning, evaluate opportunities and methods of combining them with modern technology in the field of material production, as well as understand whether there is a way to avoid algorithmization of the entire life space.

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