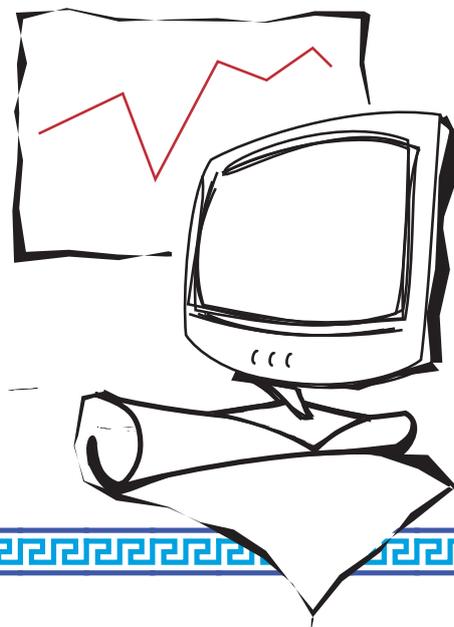


RSDA - Russian Sociological Data Archive

# Sophist

Information Bulletin



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## DOUBLE JUBILEE

This year the Russian Sociological Data Archive (RSDA) marks its double jubilee. Ten years ago with the financial support of the Ford Foundation we launched a pilot project which laid the basis of our Archive. During all these years since its creation the RSDA has become part of the world archive community, accepted its basic goals and the operating ethics. In the whole world the social sciences data archives put forward two principle aims: to preserve the primary data of the empiric research and make them accessible for the scientific and expert community. Accessibility of the information implies not only openness of the data but also acquiring of the methods of correct and adequate secondary analysis. It is not accidental that a most important element of the world archives is organization of special courses for teaching statistic analysis of the data, which are held in the form of summer schools. The RSDA was able to start this kind of job five years ago with the financial support of the MacArthur Foundation. The fifth anniversary of the summer schools is our second festive event.

We chose Snegiri settlement not far from Moscow for the summer school. A week's course, which we called «Statistics without tears: regressive modeling with the NESSTAR package» included a general outline of the most known methods of statistic analysis and also a number of particular instruments of the work with program complexes, which allow to analyze the RSDA data on-line. Approximately half the classes take are held in computer-equipped rooms, where our «pupils» put to practice the knowledge they received at the lecture. The academic class is finished with a public defense of the prepared report, based on the data of the surveys deposited in the RSDA.

Each Summer school usually welcomes 20 people. They are selected on a contest basis out of the applications we receive. The participants of the contest are usually young teachers from regional universities who have experience in teaching such subjects as «Methods of collecting sociological information», «Statistic analysis of the

data», «Methods and instruments of surveys» etc. We do our utmost in order that our students after going through the week's studies and coming back to their universities would use the information and methods they received into the materials they teach their students. Then the result of the study is multiplied by ten times — knowledge of the RSDA, its collection, methods of the secondary analysis would be known not only to our 20 students but in its turn to their students.

Within the five years about 100 young teachers familiarized themselves with the collection of the Archive, learnt how to use the «Sofist» information system, listened to a short course of theory of measuring and statistical data processing, put to practice the knowledge of methods they were taught in computer classes, refined their knowledge at the public defenses of the projects carried out when at the Summer school. They made professional contacts with their colleagues, who came from all parts of Russia: Novorossiysk, Ufa, Nizhniy Novgorod, Biysk, Saint Petersburg, Chelyabinsk, Tver, Vladikavkaz, Vladivostok, and Murmansk. A few students were from the former USSR republics: Armenia, Byelorussia, Ukraine They all appreciated the RSDA possibilities, the working atmosphere of the classes, informal and profound communication with their colleagues.



## HOW WE UNDERSTAND DEMOCRACY...

*There are also Idols formed by the intercourse and association of men with each other, which I call Idols of the Market Place, on account of the commerce and consort of men there. For it is by discourse that men associate, and words are imposed according to the apprehension of the vulgar. And therefore the ill and unfit choice of words wonderfully obstructs the understanding. Nor do the definitions or explanations wherewith in some things learned men are wont to guard and defend themselves, by any means set the matter right. But words plainly force and overrule the understanding, and throw all into confusion, and lead men away into numberless empty controversies and idle fancies.*

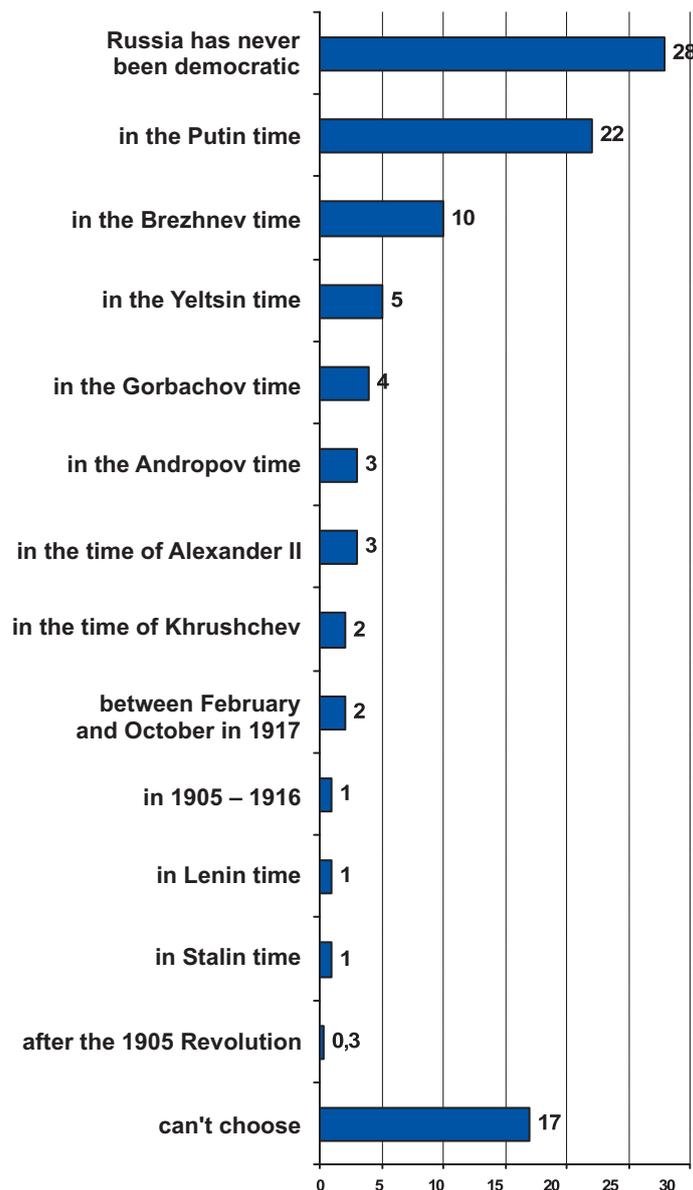
Francis Bacon

The beginning of the 90-ies in Russian society was marked by a boost of confidence in inevitability of democratic reforms. These attitudes to a certain degree were based on various surveys, carried out both by home and foreign researchers. Let us take for an example a joint Soviet-American project realized in 1990. The authors noticed «presence among the soviet citizens of a wide support of democratic values, significantly stronger than was preliminary anticipated».<sup>1</sup>

The analysis of the processes in the Russian society at present more often comes upon a phenomenon, which a number of authors call «blur in system of values». From our point of view, we would rather talk of blur in the system of awareness, understanding that determine plasticity of collective consciousness. Let us explain what we mean by the example of the results of the «Courier» survey, carried out by the ANO «Levada-Center» in March 2006<sup>2</sup> and deposited in the RSDA.

Picture 1 shows a linear distribution of answers to the question «When was political structure in Russia closer to democracy, in your opinion?» The modal answer was — Russia has never been a democratic state. Further according to the frequency of statements comes either the present time or the Brezhnev past. Also, as the analysis shows, the differences in choice are dictated by the degree of success in adaptation. Thus, among those who define as democracy the Putin regime the share of people who are confident that they will be able to cope with the circumstances is by many times larger in comparison with those who choose the Brezhnev time (See Table 1). In other words, by democracy the respondents mean the time, when they successfully managed to realize their life project. If the respondents cannot get adapted to the changes which are taking place they perceive the «democracy» in the Brezhnev time as the kind of «lost social paradise». He successful «adaptants» consider the present time «democratic» and they are not in the least embarrassed by the fact that the authorities are more and more losing any democratic pretentions quite frankly.

**Pic. 1 Linear distribution of answers to the question «When was political structure in Russia closer to democracy, in your opinion?»**



<sup>1</sup> From Totalitarian Stereotypes to Democratic Culture: Analit. overview of sociological research of mass consciousness of the modern soviet society/AN USSR, INION, Sociology Institute, Center of general human values; (Prep. By D. Gibson and others), M. INION 1991, P.65.

<sup>2</sup> The field work took place in March 24-27, 2006, the number of respondents — 1600 people. The 2006 data is chosen so as not to affect the pre-election campaign and exclude any protestation.



**Table 1.**  
(percent by the column, only comparable positions were chosen)

When was political structure in Russia closer to democracy, in your opinion?	Do you think you could change your life circumstances for the better by your own efforts?			
	yes	rather yes, than no	rather no, than yes	no
in the Brezhnev time	6	5	13	20
in the Putin time	24	23	19	18

In the Russian society there are no social groups having rationalized and formalized system of awareness, which could form a basis of the adequate understanding of group interests, become a platform of the relevant perception of what is taking place. The process of «replaced meaning» conquers not only the social periphery but also more advanced layers of society, which have resources for successful realiza-

tion of their life projects. Even in this segment of society there are no basic structures of self-understanding and means of self-identification. Mass consciousness on all the levels is non-reflective and is reproduced by the practices of everyday life. Knowledge structures are built into the contexts of everyday experience and are filled with meanings of ordinary life.

The anticipations which were born in the end of the 80-ies of restructurisation of the Soviet society, emergence of people groups with rationalized and expressed interests, who would be able in future become a basis of social and political differentiation, did not prove true. The social groups that hold «advanced» positions on the scale of social resources are able to articulate only the simplest opinions and preferences and less of all can generate universal collective ideas, generalized and abstract systems of understanding. The elite as a translator of modern ideas, values and concepts did not emerge.

*Continued from Page 1*

I am absolutely delighted at the work of the First methodology seminar «Statistics without tears: regressive modeling with the NESSTAR package». The participants got a rare possibility to acquaint themselves with the sociological data, that can be used both in scientific work and methodology. The use of the materials of the RSDA will help to raise the level of teaching the subjects, which demand use of secondary data and study of the methods of processing the information. Besides, the use of the materials of the RSDA will allow to elaborate students' scientific research work: writing scientific articles, course papers and graduation papers. I would like to thank the organizers of the seminar for the wonderful time, their attention and care.

**Volkova Olga,**  
**Saratov State University named after**  
**N.G. Chernyshevskiy, Balashoskiy brunch,**  
**Participant of the 2006 Summer school**

I thank the organizers for chance to get acquainted with the work of the RSDA and the NESSTAR system. This knowledge will help me to organize research work in the subject of my interest.

**Goncharova Svetlana,**  
**Tikhookeanskiy state economic university,**  
**Chair of philosophy and politology,**  
**Participant of the 2007 Summer school**

The seminar, held by the RSDA made the most favorable impression on me. A unique teachers stuff, the newest software, most comfortable conditions for studies and friendly atmosphere – these are the things that come to my memory after the end of studies. But before all of course the result: the experience that we got – the experience of work with the data of a new type and communication with colleagues who have similar problems and demands.





On the basis of the knowledge I got, I am planning to hold a number of seminars at the Yaroslavl state university. The received information will be especially useful for my Yaroslavl colleagues, who specialize in the field of international social, political and various cross-culture research.

I am grateful to the organizers for the irreproachable work and the possibility for widening professional horizons.

**Yeparkhina Olga,**  
**Chair of sociology of the Yaroslavl state university**  
**named after P.G. Demidov,**  
**Participant of the 2007 Summer school**

My personal experience shows, that you come to understand the importance of school after some time. Very valuable information! It helps both in research and in teaching activities. My colleagues and students whom I told about the Archive also express their gratitude. Some of them have already managed to use the data stored in it.



We are still in correspondents with many of the school participants. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the organizers of the school and all the workers of the RSDA and wish them patience and strength in their work in popularization and replenishment of the archive.

**Farakhutdinov Shamil,**  
**Assisting professor at the chair of sociology**  
**of the TumGNGU,**  
**Participant of the 2008 Summer school**

From all my heart I thank the RSDA and the Independent institute of social policy for the seminar. The Summer school turned out to be a really useful event which brought together theoretical and practical peculiarities of scientific knowledge. Special thanks for the lecture on methods of analysis of the data, which was brilliantly read by Yu.N Tolstova. On the whole, I would like to note, that the seminar allowed us to widen the scientific horizon and to get acquainted with wonderful people from all over Russia (from Stavropol and Saratov to Surgut and Omsk). I wish you further progress, and on my part, I will make maximum effort to promote RSDA in the republic of Mordovia.

**Zimin Aleksandr, research scientist of the Scientific center**  
**of social and economic monitoring of Mordovia Republic,**  
**lecturer of the chair of sociology MSU named after**  
**N.P. Ogaryov, Participant of the 2009 Summer school**



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