

**International Scientific Conference  
'Civilizational Dynamics of Contemporary Societies'**

**Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia, Saint-Petersburg, 23–24 September 2011**

Civilizational Dynamics of Contemporary Societies had become a theme of International Scientific Conference held by Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Russia, Saint-Petersburg) on 23–24 September. In the first day the conference offered 6 plenary speakers, whose summaries follow below:

Jóhann P. Árnason (La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia; Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic) in his 'Making Sense of Civilizational Dynamics' began with reflections on the basic aims and assumptions of civilizational analysis, moved on from there to the question of its relevance to the modern world, and concluded with a brief reconsideration of civilizational factors in the constitution and the dynamics of contemporary societies. Referring to Eisenstadt's definition of the civilizational dimension of human societies, Árnason regarded civilizational formations as contingent combinations of interpretive and institutional patterns. This approach goes far beyond the mainstream sociological focus on cultural values and social norms, as well as more familiar ways of thinking about civilizations as holistic socio-cultural or social-historical units. Árnason took also note of additional insights into the civilizational dimension that can be found in the works of classical and post-classical authors. Durkheim and Mauss defined civilizations as 'families of societies', i. e. large-scale and long-term groupings of societies with specific patterns of interaction, integration and differentiation. Brau-

del's historical analyses suggested comparative perspectives on economic forms of life that are still one of the notably underdeveloped themes of civilizational analysis. The speaker mentioned some other themes complementary to and partly overlapping with civilizational analysis, including three subjects of comparative history – religions, empires, and 'economic worlds'. In regards to the relevance of the civilizational paradigm to the theory and comparative analysis of modernity, Árnason noted some of the misunderstandings which often arose in the debate on multiple modernities. First of all, the very idea of multiple modernities is not reducible to arguments around civilizational legacies and their long-term impact on modernizing processes. There are other factors of the multiplication of modernity. The most obvious of them include geopolitical, geo-economic and geocultural constellations of the global or regional kind; social struggles and alliances within particular societies; contingent historical situations. In addition, Árnason referred to Eisenstadt's idea of modernity as a new and distinctive (type of) civilization based on a massively upgraded vision of human autonomy. This new cultural orientation is complex enough to sustain divergent interpretations culminating in the 'antinomies of modernity'. The diversification of modern cultures and societies, thus, happens due to the complexity of the new civilizational pattern as well as due to the variety of its combinations with other sources.

In his paper 'The Soviet Model of Modernity in Contemporary Historical Sociology' Mikhail Maslovskiy (Nizhny Novgorod State University, Russia) made a comparative overview of different theoretical approaches to the analysis of the Soviet model. It is noted in the paper that Immanuel Wallerstein regarded the USSR as

a military power that emerged on the semi-periphery of the world-system and followed the path of catching-up modernization. But accentuation of the USSR's semi-peripheral position contradicts to the evidence of the role which this state played in the world politics. On the whole Wallerstein tended to undervalue the impact of the political and cultural spheres on the processes of social change. Michael Mann discussed Stalin's regime and German National Socialism as examples of 'continuous revolutions' that were driven by the idea of profound social reconstitution and went through similar stages. However, the conservative stage of Stalin's regime since the end of the 1930s cannot be explained by the presented dynamic model. What is lacking in Mann's approach is appreciation of the cultural context and the role of ideology in Stalinism. Maslovskiy criticizes Anthony Giddens's interpretation of the Soviet state as neglecting the USSR's imperial character. He argues that the Soviet system which did not possess capitalist economy as one of the four institutional dimensions of modernity did not fit well into Giddens's theory. At the same time the theory of multiple modernities can be regarded as an important alternative to the interpretations mentioned above. Shmuel Eisenstadt referred to Soviet-type societies as 'failed modernity' and emphasized the impact of historical experience and traditions on the formation of communist regimes in Russia, China and South-East Asia. In his paper Maslovskiy devotes particular attention to Jóhann Árnason's civilizational analysis as representing a fruitful theoretical perspective on the Soviet model as a distinct version of modernity. Árnason discussed the character of the imperial modernisation in Russia and argued that the origins and later transformation of the totalitarian project could only be understood with reference to

that background. In Árnason's view, the Soviet model incorporated the legacy of imperial transformation from above and the revolutionary vision of a new society, which resulted in a rearticulated tradition that structured a specific version of modernity. Maslovskiy emphasizes that a wide discussion of civilizational analysis and its application to social transformations in the USSR can make a substantial contribution to the study of the Soviet model in contemporary Russian sociology.

In the presentation titled 'Civilizational Analysis in Global Context' Björn Wittrock (Uppsala University, SCAS, Sweden) reviewed the evolution of social sciences and the emergence and the history of civilizational analysis. The interest in civilizational analysis, its rise in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and its waning in the late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the very meaning of "civilization" in singular or in plural were tightly bound to the processes which affected the world. The rediscovery of civilizational analysis in 1970' happened in the world which was profoundly different from the one in which it came into being, in the world dramatically changed by the two World Wars and the decline of European dominance and power. Civilizational analysis came back to the academic scene with the idea of Axiality and the concept of the Axial Age coined by K. Jaspers, with a particular focus on the periods of deep critical transformation and cultural crystallization in human history and the notions of cultural and institutional programs (S. Eisenstadt) opposed to the previous view on civilizations as monolithic blocks. Then Wittrock discussed relationship between civilizational analysis and comparative-historical analysis. The rediscovery of civilizational analysis happened in the context of the rise of historical analysis in social sciences represented for

instance by the speech act theory, the linguistic turn and by historical institutionalism. Since historical institutionalism and globalization theory depict the relationship between the center and the periphery as static and not having an articulated analysis of agency they have a limited explanatory capacity as they cannot explain what S. Eisenstadt called the cultural program of modernity and contradict the historical evidence of the dynamic character of the relationship between the center and the periphery. The relevance of civilizational analysis of contemporary societies is highlighted by the theory of multiple modernities, which in some sense continues the tradition of comparative analysis started by Max Weber, but also faces the related problems, addresses the analysis of evaluative and interpretative aspects of culture and links historical analysis with agency. The analysis of institutional programs and the changes of macro-societies should incorporate a reflection of deep changes in interpretative dimensions. Sociology should focus on the very moments of change and transformation since today we observe crises of political and economic systems, of arenas where explanatory discourses emerge and interpretative discursive practices take place. According to Wittrock, since relationship between the center and the periphery is not a static one it has a very important implication for the way we think about the academic and university policies.

Kuanyshebek Muzdybaev (Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint-Petersburg, Russia) in his 'The Idea of the Wisdom in the Dead, Ancient and Contemporary Civilizations' reviewed the principles of two theories of wisdom – the theory of balance and the collectivist theory – and the components of wisdom in models of three ancient civilizations. He showed that in the Sumerian

civilization more attention is given to the possession of contextual knowledge, to the ability to consider the problem from all sides. In the Ancient Egyptian civilization, more attention is paid to understanding injustice and human dignity. The model of Old Russian wisdom is the consolidation model in a greater degree, directed on solidarity strengthening between members of the society, on training of mutual loyalty and mutual aid.

Maxim Khomaykov (Ural State University, Russia) in his presented paper 'Towards a Critical Theory of Monolithic Modernity' focused on the critical analysis of modernization in the modernist vision of modernity. The presentation began with the question of 'What the ideal and the destination point or *τέλος* of modernity are?' and 'How they are depicted in various theories?' A peculiar 'metonymic' logic of the connection between different discourses and narratives of the 'monolithic modernity' is demonstrated and the involvement of the imperial civilization discourse is analyzed. Some principal breaches in this logic and internal contradictions of the monolithic modernity open up an interpretative space for the development of the theories of plural modernity and rethinking of modernity as a specific constellation of different discourses and practices. It was suggested that a systematic reflection and a critical theory of monolithic modernity are required.

Vladimir Kozlovsky (Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Saint Petersburg State University, Russia) in his 'Civilizational Order as a Process of Socio-Cultural Self-Regulation of Contemporary Societies' focused on civilizational transformations of contemporary societies and post-Soviet Russia. He argued that civilizational order is a way of self-regulation of different forms of modernities,

namely actions, practices, relations, institutions.

Civilizational order was defined as a combination of different social forms (elements) on civilizational process of societal formation and regulation of cultural practices. The constitution of contemporary societies is based on different forms of integration, social and cultural control, and regulation of violence. Civilizational changes in Russian society of the early 2000's have two clearly marked tendencies. Firstly, civilizational changes in Russian society have become the leading form of transformation of the social and cultural order. Development of economic and political institutions in Russia has slowed down and stepped to the background, despite its much acclaimed public priority. Secondly, civilizational processes have become a way of embedding different social groups into the global environment. The search and design of civilizational identity at societal, group and individual levels are becoming the dominant form of social and cultural self-determination, the strategy of life-course in modern societies. Socio-cultural identification is a process of choosing among multiple modernities and trying to appropriate them. The diversity of fluid modernities constituting the environment of Russian society is a new format of global realities.

During the second day of the conference, papers were presented that addressed the epistemological issues of civilizational analysis and the different aspects of civilizational dynamics of contemporary societies. Presentations were delivered within two parallel sessions.

The first session entitled 'Civilizational Analysis, Discourse of Modernity, and Identity Politics in Contemporary World' included 13 presentations which were delivered by participants from Czech

Republic, Indonesia, Belarus, and Russia. The one set of the papers within this session addressed the different but interrelated theoretical and methodological issues of civilizational analysis. Jiri Subrt's presentation was devoted to the problem of social change in the perspective of Anthony Giddens' theory, in which the speaker underlined defining role of space-time structuring principles of social integration as the foundations of different types of social formations. The following presentations considered such topics as methodological significance of temporal structures of social expectations and cultural memory research for understanding of sources of multiple modernities emerging in the universal civilizational process (K. Zavershinskiy); the stages of development of the conceptual apparatus for the theory of modernity, with the latter being understood as a novel form of articulating social time and social space (A. Menshikov); the main lines of convergence and divergence in the history of relations between sociology and civilizational analysis in the context of a common problematicity of modernity (R. Braslavsky); the mutual relations and the dynamics of exchange between civilizational centers and peripheries in scientific knowledge creation (A. Shirokanova); 'indexes of civilizationity' of any given society relative to the nature and the culture (A. Stchvolkin).

The subject field of the other set of the presentations comprised discourses and politics of civilizational identity in different countries. The papers delivered in this part of the session focused on an analysis of the following: political debates on Russia's civilizational identity reincarnated since Perestroika in Westernism, Slavophilia and Eurasianism (Y. Prozorova); discourse of civilizational identity in the president of France Nicolas Sarkozy's public texts (A. Daugavet); the images of Russia's and

Japan's civilization identity in the British press at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries (V. Makarov); the process of politics of civilization identity and the struggle over authentic identity between indigenous communities and central government in Indonesia (J. Purnomo); civilizational discourse in the social construction of Siberia's regional identity in Russia from the middle of 19th century onward (A. Zainutdinov). Two presentations closing the session were devoted to the problem of violence. I. Osipov analyzed the different approaches to phenomenon of violence that were proposed by the some main branches of the Russian pre-revolutionary social thought: conservatism, liberalism, sociology of universalism. V. Bochkareva considered Russian sociologist Mikhail Engelhard's (1861–1915) views on the transformation of violence in the evolutionary process of civilization.

The second session comprised of presentations focused on two research subjects: 'Civilizational Aspects and Contexts of Economic, Political and Cultural Changes of Contemporary Societies and Modernization and Globalization as Factors of Civilizational Dynamics of Contemporary Societies'. Participants from Russia, Switzerland, Poland, United Kingdom, Netherlands, United Arab Emirates, Indonesia delivered presentations that covered a broad range of issues. Theoretically oriented presentations addressed the explanatory capacity of the theory of local civilizations in the analysis of contemporary societies (V. Kozyrkov) and the evolutionary approach to the analysis of civilizations, for example, from the point of view of the cyclical sociogenesis (S. Dobrolubov). Presentations devoted to the issue of sociocultural and political dynamics in contemporary societies considered the revolution as an inevitable mechanism

of changes in the context of stagnation and crisis of institutions of civilization's self-regulation and the traditionalization problem in the East (V. Bocharov); modern social movements acquired new characteristics by employing the Internet and became more virtualized (N. Wilecka); new principles of societies' structuration based on revised logic of inclusion-exclusion and ideas of 'norm' and 'deviation' (A. Dmitrieva). A number of presentations concerned globalization and westernization phenomena and their consequences for contemporary societies. B. Renevey focused on the social protection system as a civilizational characteristic of Western industrial societies that have changed into the hypermodern consumption societies with different conception of relationship between individual and society which he called "because I'm worth it' societies". I. Sizova presented results of empirical research of the new configurations of labor market in contemporary Russia. A. Krasilova and G. Yastrebov proposed distinctions between Western and non-Western societal forms based on the analysis of Human Development Index. F. Aminuddin analyzed regionalization and localization in South-East Asia as processes provoked by globalization and opposition of Eastern values to westernization. Cultural and interpretative changes in contemporary world were discussed in the papers on phenomenon of copyright as a practice of inventory support conceived as a vehicle of development of human civilization (T. Abeysekera); critique of the consumption society through the lens of zombie-narratives in the contemporary cinema (N. Ozgenalp); changed attitude toward consumption, "tiredness" from consumption correlated with mobility from megalopolities to backwoods areas and new type of social behavior such as downshifting (V. Ilyin); new tendencies

of cultural politics represented by the active role of a consumer as the subject of cultural production (I. Grigorieva).

Selected conference papers will soon be published in the Special Issue of the *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*.

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Problémové rezidenční čtvrti a politiky k jejich regeneraci  
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**Petr Matějů, Michael L. Smith:**  
Kontinuita a změna přesvědčení o distributivní spravedlnosti v České republice  
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**Lenka Slepíčková, Iva Šmídová, Eva Šlesingerová:**  
Biomoc a reprodukční biomedicína: konceptuální inspirace pro český kontext

**Dana Sýkorová:**  
Staří lidé ve městě. Na okraj velkého tématu

**Romana Trusinová:**  
Věk jako zdroj sociální identity

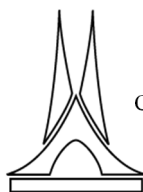
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