

Interpretation Patterns with Relation to the Soviet Past in Everyday Life Subjects in Contemporary Russia

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Project Summary

The proposed study is devoted to patterns of collective memory of the Soviet past and to the interpretation of these patterns in contemporary Russia. The lack of a reflective approach to Soviet history is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Russian population's collective conscious today. The aim of the proposed research project is the detailed explication and theoretical analysis of collective interpretation patterns that condition the people's attitude to the Soviet experience.

I regard the manner in which meaningful reference is made to the Soviet past, if it is made at all, as an essential component of present political culture in Russia. In addition it is an important defining factor in the process of post-Soviet social transformation. My objectives are thus 1) to closely record specific social interpretation patterns with regard to the Soviet past and 2) to better understand their specific role in the process of post-Soviet social transformation. Of particular interest is the theoretical question of the extent to which the dynamics and direction of post-Soviet social transformation can be linked to critical reflection about the Soviet experience within society. I am thus particularly committed to researching the potential for the collective and its development triggered by a reflective approach towards historical experience. This question has been hardly touched upon by existing research into post-Soviet Russian society; the proposed project will be a pioneering study.

With the help of biographical narrative interviews I will carry out an empirical survey of the specifics of subjective historical retrospective and interpretation patterns with regard to Soviet experience. Thereby I will focus on the manner in which the subjects make meaningful reference to the Soviet experience, if they do so at all, on specific patterns in their perception and interpretation of past events, on the context in which reference is made and on how, if at all, they justify the relevance of the historical experience of the Soviet era.

I envisage taking between 30 and 40 interviews and to research at least two age groups, namely the young generation between 20-25 years of age and the older generation of those who are now over 60. To heighten the informative value of the data I will at first concentrate on the two 'capitals', Moscow and St Petersburg, and on the social stratum of the so-called intelligentsia (in the humanities and technical subjects). My partner organisations in Russia will assist me in recruiting respondents.

The results of this study are relevant to both scientists and active members of civil society. Moreover, the study opens a new perspective on post-Soviet Russia for representatives of the public, policy

makers and the economy. The project will provide these groups with valuable insights into the challenges and specific characteristics of post-Soviet transformation, as well as into present-day traits of political culture and the social conscious in Russia.