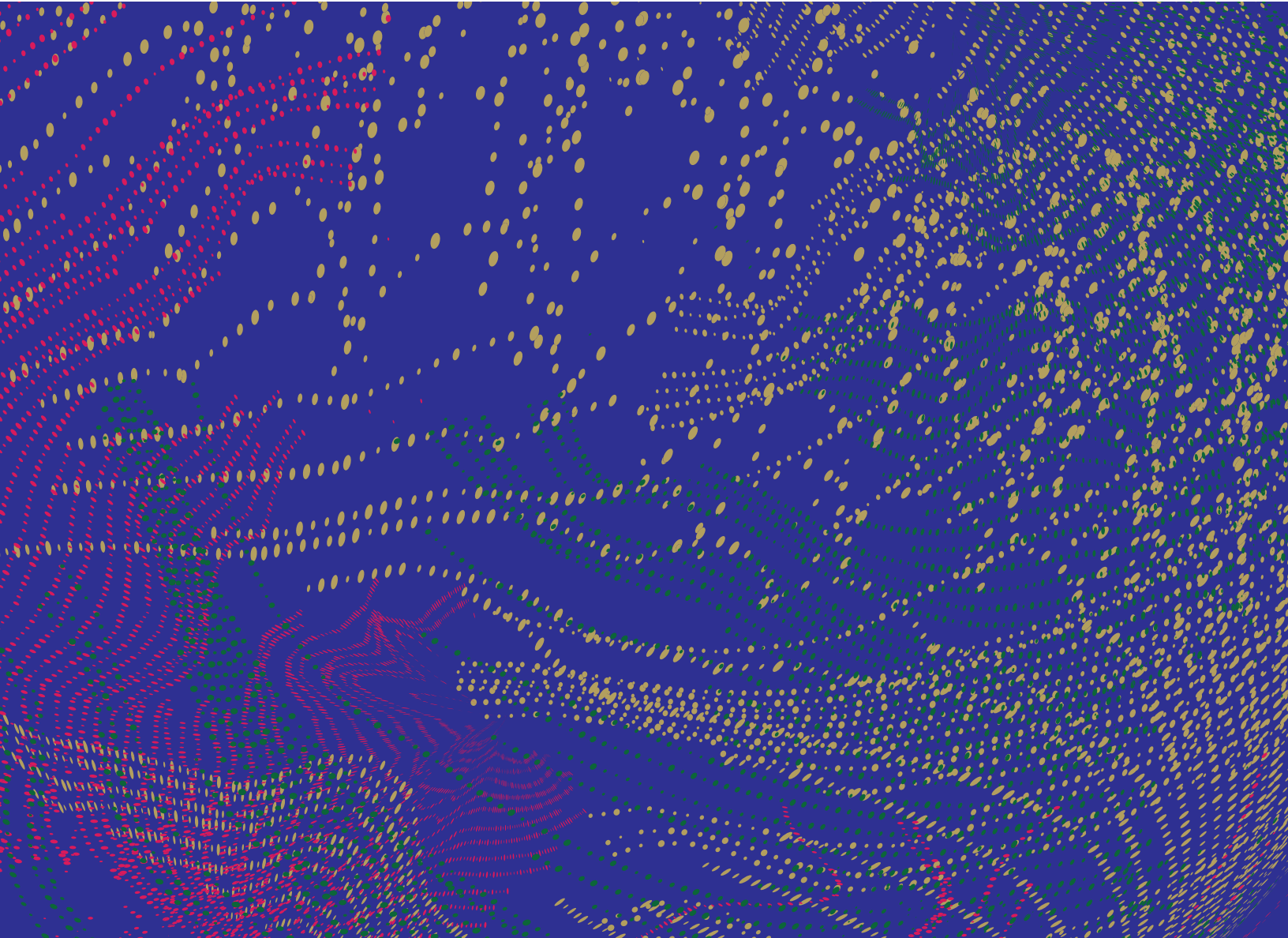


The World Humanities Report

A Perspective from Russia

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A Perspective from Russia

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Discussions of Russia’s historical experience often invoke tropes of exceptionalism and an exoticizing gaze that is either horrified or enchanted by the seemingly unique “ways of Russia.” In contrast, modern historians have demonstrated that most social arrangements deemed specifically Russian are essentially typical, whether in the sixteenth or the twentieth century. If anything, their perceived peculiarity only highlights the aspects of the general trends and structures that remain concealed or even censored in the mainstream discussions of other societies and cultures. In working on this report, we were reminded of this function of Russia-related materials and all too often realized that some of the strangest ideas or practices we encountered resonated strikingly with familiar European or American trends of the past and today.

The main problem we confronted in the course of writing this report was the very fluidity of the notion of “the humanities,” both situationally and diachronously, across time. Given the all-embracing character of the humanities in the Russian cultural canon—in which, until recently, even theoretical physicists or engineers were expected to demonstrate proficiency and even creativity in literature and arts, history and philosophy—a fully inclusive treatment of the subject would be not only megalomaniacal in scale but also frustratingly inconsistent. There were periods when the role of literature in Russian culture was paramount and the so-called thick journals constituted the core of the public sphere, framing the hegemonic political discourse.¹ But these periods alternated with even longer phases when the thick journals as an institution were losing most of their public significance. Likewise, there were eras when philosophy or poetry performed key ideological and cultural functions and times when their relevance to society was negligible. Museums were loci of cultural creativity at certain points in Russian imperial and Soviet history, only to turn into stationary warehouses of past achievements over subsequent decades.²

Even in the academic sphere the term “humanities,” although broadly used, has not been formalized and stabilized. The Ministry of Science and Higher

¹ See Deborah A. Martinsen, ed., *Literary Journals in Imperial Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

² Katia Dianina, “Museum and Society in Imperial Russia: An Introduction,” *Slavic Review* 67, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 907–11.

Education of the Russian Federation first used the term as an official designation for a cluster of disciplines only in its directive of February 25, 2009. This cluster encompassed the disciplines of history, philosophy, and philology, including journalism but excluding art theory and art history.³ The ministry's next directive issued on September 12, 2013, added not only theology but also "physical culture and sport" to the list of "humanities."⁴ Theology was then separated from the humanities by the ministry's directive of June 8, 2017. Soon thereafter, the directive of October 23, 2017, eliminated the umbrella category of "humanities" from the nomenclature of academic disciplines altogether.⁵ Finally, the directive of February 24, 2021, restored the grouping of disciplines that included history, literature, and philosophy, but now under the "social sciences and humanities" rubric. Accordingly, this cluster includes, inter alia, law, economics, psychology, sociology, and political science, as well as pedagogy, art studies, and—once again—theology.⁶ What has prevented the ministry from returning "physical culture and sport" to this cluster is unknown. What is apparent is the return to the Soviet-era understanding of the humanities as inseparable from the social sciences, only substituting theology for "scientific atheism."⁷ The meaning and implications of this move will be discussed in the next section.

The "wavering of the party line" past and present notwithstanding, for the purposes of this report we will concentrate mainly on the academic sphere as the most institutionalized segment of Russia's cultural sphere. It will allow us to apply

³ "Prikaz Ministerstva obrazovaniia i nauki RF ot 25 fevralia 2009 g. N 59" [Order of the Ministry of science and higher education of the Russian Federation of February 25, 2009, no. 59], <https://normativ.kontur.ru/document?moduleId=1&documentId=143818>.

⁴ "Prikaz Ministerstva obrazovaniia i nauki RF ot 12 sentiabria 2013 g. N 1061" [Order of the Ministry of science and higher education of the Russian Federation of September 12, 2013, no. 1061], <https://normativ.kontur.ru/document?moduleId=1&documentId=391201&cwi=1963#h216>. The chairs of theology were part of the Russian imperial universities (not to be confused with the faculty of theology) and were abolished in the Soviet era. The reintroduction of chairs of theology in university structures along with the introduction of religious studies as part of secondary education was subject to a debate on the role of secularism and the role of the Orthodox Church in the multiethnic, polyreligious Russian society.

⁵ "Prikaz Ministerstva obrazovaniia i nauki RF ot 8 iunia 2017 g. N 507" [Order of the Ministry of science and higher education of the Russian Federation of June 8, 2017, no. 507], <https://normativ.kontur.ru/document?moduleId=1&documentId=295363&cwi=205>; "Prikaz Ministerstva obrazovaniia i nauki RF ot 23 oktiabria 2017 g. N 1027" [Order of the Ministry of science and higher education of the Russian Federation of October 23, 2017, no. 1027], <https://normativ.kontur.ru/document?moduleId=1&documentId=310671&cwi=585>.

⁶ "Prikaz Ministerstva nauki i vysshego obrazovaniia RF ot 24 fevralia 2021 g. N 118" [Order of the Ministry of science and higher education of the Russian Federation of February 23, 2021, no. 118], <https://normativ.kontur.ru/document?moduleId=1100&documentId=18974>.

⁷ James Thrower, *Marxist-Leninist "Scientific Atheism" and the Study of Religion and Atheism in the USSR* (Berlin: Mouton, 2011).

relatively stable criteria to the sphere of “humanities” rather than developing a holistic and thus inevitably idiosyncratic approach to the culture at large. In this report the disciplines pertaining to the humanities are identified following the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Fields of Science Classification, which includes “6.1 History and Archaeology,... 6.2 Languages and Literature,... 6.3 Philosophy, Ethics and Religion,... and 6.4 Arts,” as well as “6.5 Other humanities.”⁸

The factors shaping the current situation of the humanities in the Russian Federation can be grouped in several clusters: first, long-term lineages in the development of the university system and modern nomenclature of academic disciplines; traditional epistemologies of the role of knowledge about culture and society in the Russian context; second, specific arrangements of academic and public intellectual life in socialist and postsocialist countries (formerly known as the “Second World” of the twentieth century); and third, the current global dynamics of the neoliberal social-economic regime. Although in varying degrees, all these factors make the Russian case comparable to other societies and inform the structure of this report. The following sections of the report review the evolving status of the humanities throughout the short twentieth century and the efforts to adjust this academic field to the conditions and priorities of the society: in the Russian Empire and the USSR. It also assesses alternative scenarios of the transformation of the humanities in the Russian Federation throughout the 1990s in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse, as well as the rise of the neoliberal culture and academic sphere in Russia over the past two decades and their impact on university humanities. Finally, we synthesize the report’s findings and put forward recommendations regarding the most promising course for the adjustment of humanities to modern society and for their sustainability in the future. Any society is a project in the making, a factor that is particularly obvious in the case of Russia, which seems to be in a constant state of transformation and reform. This makes past developments relevant for the proper contextualization and informed discussion of the current state of affairs.

In preparing the report, we have benefited from the feedback of Marina Mogilner (University of Illinois Chicago) and materials shared by Elena Vishlenkova (Higher School of Economics, Moscow).

⁸ “Working Party of National Experts on Science and Technology Indicators: Revised Field of Science and Technology (FOS) Classification in the Frascati Manual,” Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, February 26, 2007, 11, <https://www.oecd.org/science/inno/38235147.pdf>.

Russian Humanities in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union

We do not subscribe to the path dependency theory, so in this analysis history matters not because it sets some rigid patterns that predetermine the future. Rather, history helps explain the choices made in specific situations. The trajectory of the decline and abandonment of traditional humanities and the neoliberal assault on them at the turn of the millennium were results of economic and political dislocations. However, this trend was framed by references to the actual or imagined late Soviet state of things rather than by attempts to produce original answers to the radically new socioeconomic challenges. A review of the history will map out the structural preconditions that continue to inform expectations and decision-making in the field of humanities.

Taking a long-term perspective first, one can see that Russia followed the European continental pattern in developing the university system and public role of the humanities.⁹ Russian universities today are heirs of the European and, specifically, German model of the university: they lack the concept of liberal arts education and reproduce the continental European system of early specialization in university training (as of September 2003, Russia has been part of the Bologna Process).¹⁰ Similarly, the state retains a key role in budgeting public universities and regulating their curricula and admission criteria and conferring degrees. In the early Enlightenment European model, research was concentrated in the academy of sciences under royal or imperial patronage. This model was brought to the Russian Empire and resulted in the division of the academic sphere between universities and the Academy of Sciences.

Russian imperial universities initially accommodated the teaching of literature, languages, and history in separate departments within the faculty of philosophy. In 1850 such departments in Russian universities evolved into autonomous “faculties” of history and literature. Other than at universities, humanities were taught at several elite colleges but also at state pedagogical institutes, including St. Petersburg Institute of History and Philology. Since the turn of the twentieth century, dozens of private colleges (formally designated as institutes and “permanent courses”) complemented imperial universities, making education more accessible. Some of them were accredited by the imperial

⁹ By public role of the humanities we mean the training of graduates of public universities for the purpose of employment in the state schools under the Ministry of Education and teaching mandatory subjects in the curriculum regulated by the Ministry of Education.

¹⁰ Launched in 1998, the Bologna Process is an intergovernmental higher education reform process that currently involves forty-nine European countries. Through a series of ministerial agreements they have ensured comparability in the national standards and quality of higher education.

Ministry of Enlightenment, and their diplomas had the same status as those granted by imperial universities.¹¹ Most of these private schools were essentially women's colleges, in which history and philology were the most popular and populous departments.¹² Other private colleges were not granted the same official status, but their programs in humanities attracted even more students.

Given the utterly complicated composition of late imperial college-level education and its dynamic evolution, it is difficult to compile precise statistics of students and faculty in the humanities. In 1899 only 4 percent of imperial universities' students studied in the departments of history and philology.¹³ However, universities accounted for a small part of all students (less than 30 percent in 1913).¹⁴ So, whereas the majority of their students (43 percent) studied law, the much more numerous private institutions demonstrated the opposite trend. The top three professional specializations of students graduating from state universities and institutions in 1898–1916 were law (34,529 graduates), medicine (22,878), and “pedagogy” (20,156). The last category mainly included students in the departments of history and philology, as well as physics and mathematics, who were expected to find jobs primarily as teachers. Over the same period, graduates of private colleges and institutions had different top three specializations: pedagogy (17,000), medicine (4,000), and economics (3,500).¹⁵ These figures are approximate, not least due to lower retention rates in private schools, and they demonstrate the general trend, with law students (about 1,000) lagging far behind. Overall, about one-quarter of all students in the Russian Empire, of all universities, colleges, military and religious academies, majored in the humanities or physics and mathematics (24.6 percent). The exact share of humanities instruction, which was also part of the curriculum in most other specializations, is unknown and can be between 4 percent and 12 percent of the total.¹⁶

These numbers are important only inasmuch as they document the transformation of the elite and exclusive university training of the state bureaucracy into a more inclusive system of citizens' higher education. This

¹¹ A. E. Ivanov, *Vysshaia shkola Rossii v kontse XIX–nachale XX vv.* [Higher education in Russia in late XIX–early XX centuries] (Moscow: Institut istorii AN SSSR, 1991).

¹² Ivanov, *Vysshaia shkola Rossii*, 107–8.

¹³ “Universitet” [University], in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* [Encyclopedic dictionary], vol. 34 (St. Petersburg: F. A. Brokgauz and I. A. Efron), 798–99.

¹⁴ Ivanov, *Vysshaia shkola Rossii*, 257.

¹⁵ Ivanov, *Vysshaia shkola Rossii*, 318–20.

¹⁶ The lower estimate is based on their share in imperial universities; the higher one assumes their possible parity with physics and mathematics achieved by the 1910s at the expense of private institutions.

transformation involved the rising visibility of the humanities, whether history, philosophy, linguistics (including Oriental studies), or arts. Indirectly, the humanities affected the entire literate population of Russia through the cult of belles lettres and philosophy. As the academician Dmitry Likhachev put it, “due to the particularities of Russian political and social life in the nineteenth century, Russian literature of the time (from the War of 1812 to the beginning of the twentieth century) had to take on the analysis of the most important social and political problems from the vantage point of progressive social ideals.”¹⁷ Humanities gained this special status by developing populist (nationalist and socialist) and anti-imperial discourses (ideologies of national movements in the multinational empire) in the nineteenth century. What is called the intelligentsia tradition continued in the Soviet period in the forms of both the official culture and counterculture (subverting the regime of ideological censorship and official communist ideology).

During the imperial period, an archetype of the high prestige of studying and teaching the humanities at an imperial (that is, state) university formed. In other words, whereas schoolteachers of literature, along with poets and artists, might be poor and considered people of low social status, university graduates and their professors were recognized as part of the imperial establishment. In 1803, when the system of academic degrees was introduced in the Russian Empire, it was immediately coordinated with the Table of Ranks, the all-embracing nomenclature of government service classes. Thus, a university graduate who passed the qualification exams and presented a final thesis was awarded the academic degree of candidate, which automatically gave him the tenth rank in government service (equivalent to army captain). After several years of preparation, a candidate could pass exams and defend an academic thesis in a university department and become a master, which gave him the next rank, the ninth. Until 1884 the main distinction of this rank was that it entitled its holder to personal nobility (which could not be inherited by his children). A similar procedure was required to become a doctor of sciences and thus acquire the eighth rank (equivalent to army major). Once in government service as a university professor, a philologist or a philosopher advanced through the ranks at a regular pace, so that a full professor was a government officer of the seventh rank (equivalent to lieutenant colonel), and a university rector held

¹⁷ D. S. Likhachev et al., *Istoriia russkogo romana: Prospekt* [History of the Russian novel: Prospectus] (Leningrad: Institut russkoi literatury AN SSSR, 1958), 4.

at least the fifth rank, which awarded hereditary nobility. After 1884 university faculty status was upgraded by one class.¹⁸ Therefore, certain literary scholars and philologists could claim a high social status simply by virtue of teaching at a university.

The imperial period left a dual and somewhat contradictory legacy concerning the treatment of academics in the field of the humanities. On the one hand, they enjoyed broad informal recognition as the backbone of the intelligentsia, regardless of their occupation. This recognition had a clear political dimension, albeit it was hardly endorsed by the imperial regime. The humanist intelligentsia could use their expertise to promote the cause of social revolution or rising national movements, which built their legitimacy on the arguments provided by historians, folklorists, ethnographers, and linguists. But on the other hand, humanities professors could have expected the value of their studies to be recognized by the political establishment, at least in their capacity as government officials at imperial universities.

Despite the seemingly outlandish characteristics of the comprehensive Bolshevik reform, many of its elements sound remarkably familiar in the present-day intellectual climate.

The Bolshevik Revolution brought about the most radical transformation of teaching and studying the humanities. Arguably, this transformation was more profound here than in any other subject because the decisive institutional reform complemented the reconceptualization of the very object and content of the field. Despite the seemingly outlandish characteristics of the comprehensive Bolshevik reform, many of its elements sound remarkably familiar in the present-day intellectual climate and reverberate with the proposals of various parties in ongoing discussions.

The conceptual outline of the reform was drafted by the Marxist historian Mikhail Pokrovsky, who was appointed deputy commissar of enlightenment in May 1918. In practice, he was put in charge of higher education in the country. He announced a task of tripartite democratization: scholarship, professional training, and popular education.¹⁹ In practical terms this meant that all colleges

¹⁸ E. A. Ivanov, *Uchenye stepeni v Rossiiskoi imperii: XVIII v.–1917 g.* [Academic degrees in the Russian Empire: XVII century–1917] (Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, Institut rossiiskoi istorii, 1994), 55, 60.

¹⁹ M. N. Pokrovskii, “Reforma vysshei shkoly” [Reform of higher education], in M. N. Pokrovskii, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v chetyrekh knigakh* [Selected works in four books] (Moscow: Mysl’, 1967), 4:457.

and universities were nationalized and became free for any student (by the decree of July 4, 1918). However, enrollment decisively prioritized applicants of proletarian background (as per the decree of August 2, 1918). Otherwise, anyone who had reached the age of sixteen was eligible to become a university student: the second decree of August 2, 1918, permanently waived the requirement to present a diploma demonstrating one's prior education or even the necessity of any previous schooling.²⁰

Next came the turn of university professors to change their status. During the imperial period, the position did not exactly confer secured lifetime tenure, but it was quite stable for as long as one remained in government service in the capacity of university faculty member. The decree of October 1, 1918, abolished all academic degrees and ranks: there were no more masters and doctors, associate and full professors. Anybody “known for their scholarly work ... or academic teaching” could become a professor following the all-Russian call for job applications and selection of the most qualified candidates. Each professor was up for reelection every ten years. Instructors who were not considered fully autonomous or those employed only part-time were to be reelected every five–seven years.²¹ The qualifying criteria for the election of university instructors were not formalized: until 1934 no academic degree or record of scholarly output beyond some vague “academic achievements” was required of successful candidates.

It was in the context of these structural transformations that the field of academic humanities was radically altered. True to the Marxist sociology of knowledge, the Bolshevik government fused together the humanities and the social sciences, initially in the form of the faculties of social sciences (FON) established in 1919. In 1921 departments of history and philology within the FONs were abolished altogether as redundant, so the teaching of the humanities continued mostly in pedagogical institutes. These departments would be restored everywhere after 1934 as part of Joseph Stalin's normalization of the academic sphere, but the principle of fundamental intertwinement of the humanities with the Marxist social sciences persisted until the end of the Soviet Union.

The revolutionary assault on the old imperial academic system was by no means merely a dogmatic attempt to impose certain abstract principles. The exclusiveness of college-level education was an acute problem, and the proliferation of all types of private institutions of higher learning before 1917

²⁰ *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti* [Decrees of the Soviet government] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1964), 3:137–41.

²¹ “O nekotorykh izmeneniakh v sostave i ustroistve gosudarstvennykh uchenykh i vysshikh uchebnykh zavedenii Rossiiskoi Respubliki” [On some changes in the composition and structure of state scientists and institutions of higher education of the Russian Republic], *Izvestiia VTsIK*, no. 219, October 9, 1918.

testified to the high public demand for accessible education. University professors were not motivated to pursue scholarship and were often accused of presenting the same lecture course for decades, unchanged. Finally, even without any administrative pressure, the global evolution of humanities in the twentieth century followed a path of conceptual integration with the social sciences or at least the establishment of a systematic dialogue with them. However, by the 1930s the Bolshevik government had admitted the failure of their approach to solving the problems of higher education, which included the academic field of the humanities. By March 1923 the Soviets had already made education fee-based again, which was the ultimate antisocialist measure. Certain categories of students, such as the poorest peasants or members of the military, were exempt from paying for education. “Proletarians” were conspicuously excluded from this list—they could be exempt from paying only if they were enrolled at special workers’ faculties or communist universities. Initially, the quota for free or state budget-funded (“budget”) students was set to be “at least” 25 percent.²² Subsequently, this quota was reduced and the cost of education was increased, in 1940 reaching the equivalent of three to four average monthly salaries for a year of university education—in a country of wage workers barely managing until payday, having no capital assets and virtually no savings.²³ This model persisted until 1956. Obviously, free education of any quality presented a tremendous financial burden even in the Stalinist nominally socialist and industrialized USSR.

Students’ class attendance did not increase in the 1920s. This was the result of the poor quality of instruction and the high cost of study combined with the unclear practical benefits of graduating from college, particularly in the humanities. Accordingly, the social composition of students had not changed much since prerevolutionary times.²⁴ The problem of deteriorating education in all fields became painfully obvious during the First Five-Year Plan. As it turned

²² “Dekret VTsIK, SNK RSFSR ot 22.03.1923 ‘O poriadke vzimaniia platy za obuchenie v uchrezhdeniakh Narodnogo Komissariata Prosveshcheniia’” [Decree of the Central Executive Committee of the Council of People’s Commissars of the RSFSR of March 22, 1923, “On the procedure for collecting tuition fees at institutions of the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment”], <https://phdru.com/study/stalinputin/#section1>.

²³ “Postanovlenie Soveta Narodnykh Komissarov N 27 ot 26 oktiabria 1940 goda ‘Ob ustanovlenii platnosti obucheniia v starshikh klassakh srednikh shkol i v vysshikh uchebnykh zavedeniakh SSSR i ob izmenenii poriadka naznacheniia stipendii’” [Resolution of the Council of People’s Commissars no. 27 of October 26, 1940, “On the establishment of tuition fees in senior grades of secondary schools and at institutions of higher education of the USSR and on changing the procedure for granting scholarships”], <https://phdru.com/study/stalinputin/#section3>.

²⁴ James C. McClelland, “Bolshevik Approaches to Higher Education, 1917–1921,” *Slavic Review* 30, no. 4 (December 1971): 824.

out, by enforcing the appearance of democratization and equality, the Bolshevik regime all but destroyed the very structure of academe. By the late 1920s students in many departments were studying either extramurally or collectively as members of “learners’ brigades,” with the entire study group receiving the same grade based on the performance of one of its members as the designated presenter. Obviously, this method was rooted in John Dewey’s pedagogy, but it differed significantly: it was applied to college students rather than middle-schoolers; it practically disregarded their individual cognitive characteristics; and it was employed mostly to compensate for a dearth of teaching cadres. To alleviate this rapidly worsening problem, by 1925 the Commissariat of Enlightenment had introduced the Soviet graduate school (*aspirantura*) as the institution responsible for training academic cadres. Graduate students were required to meet certain formal criteria, such as nominal command of a foreign language and proven proficiency in Marxism, as well as the submission of a written thesis. However, Soviet academe was unstructured, thus making these efforts largely redundant because graduate studies led to no academic degree.

Between 1932 and 1939 most of the revolutionary measures in the academic sphere were dismantled. In 1932 the Communist Party leadership demanded that any teaching experiments be abandoned and traditional curricula be developed.²⁵ Simultaneously, the Higher Attestation Commission was established, which began conferring academic degrees when they were reintroduced in January 1934: candidates of sciences and doctors of sciences.²⁶ The 1934 decree restored the elaborate academic hierarchy that had been leveled in 1918. In 1937 it was decided that only doctors of sciences could become full professors. Between 1934 and 1939 departments of history and philology were restored, and their students and instructors acquired the kind of prestige that was enjoyed by students and professors at imperial universities: as members of the political elite. The need for quality education caused the regime to invest in academic cadres, which eventually led to Stalin’s pact with the intelligentsia and the rise of the new Soviet elite.²⁷ If imperial-era humanities professors enjoyed high social

²⁵ “Postanovlenie TsIK SSSR. Ob uchebnykh programmakh i rezhime v vysshei shkole i tekhnikumakh. (Utverzhdeno Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) 16.IX.1932 g.). Prilozhenie N 1 k p. 1 pr. PB N 116” [Resolution of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union. On curricular and regime in higher education and technical schools], <http://istmat.info/node/57484>.

²⁶ “Postanovlenie SNK SSSR ot 13.01.1934 g. N 79 ‘Ob uchenykh stepeniakh i zvaniyakh’” [Resolution of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR of January 13, 1934, no. 79 “On academic degrees and titles”], https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Постановление_ЧНК_СССР_от_13.01.1934_г._№_79_“Об_ученых_степенях_и_званиях”.

²⁷ A. B. Kozhevnikov, *Stalin’s Great Science: The Times and Adventures of Soviet Physicists* (London: Imperial College Press, 2004), 287–91.

status simply because of their formal rank, the restored Soviet humanities of the 1930s were inseparable from the social sciences and, thus, functioned as part of the ideological machine as the backbone of the Soviet regime. Professors of literature or history were not only government employees but mid-level political functionaries. This was the main legacy of the revolutionary period, when the entire academic sphere was nationalized and the humanities were systematically politicized and, in this regard, turned into applied disciplines substantiating the official ideology.

True, imperial universities were entirely financed by the state but still claimed the right to academic autonomy, which was more or less accepted by the regime. In his 1918 plan Mikhail Pokrovsky envisioned the revolutionary university as academically autonomous, but this was the sole element of his project that met with vehement opposition from Vladimir Lenin, who “could not stand the very thought of any bourgeois autonomies.”²⁸ With the central Higher Attestation Commission instead of university councils conferring academic degrees, the academic sphere became fully centralized and placed under total government control. The appearance of grassroots academic creativity produced by the revolutionary-era reforms proved to be futile and was discarded under Stalin because of its complete failure. As it turned out, inequality could not be neutralized simply by abandoning complexity, at least in the academic sphere. Equally important are additional investments in human and financial capital.

This is what Stalin’s conservative model of academic institutionalization of the humanities demonstrated. Personally intervening in cultural matters and the academic sphere, including such a seemingly abstract discipline as linguistics, Stalin sustained the high political relevance of the humanities and hence the high social status of its practitioners.²⁹ Both factors were divorced from the corresponding economic characteristics of productivity and remuneration, which created the powerful myth of the cult of pure humanistic knowledge in the USSR. True, market indicators did not function in the USSR as a universal language meaningfully communicating social value across various avenues of human experience. This did not mean, however, that scholarship had no pragmatic rationale. To the contrary, its structural political partisanship, both compulsory and voluntary, as a matter of self-promotion, proved that Soviet academe involved anything but the unselfish pursuit of pure knowledge. In the syncretic regime of Soviet political economy, not differentiated into politics and economics, a disproportionate engagement in political matters compensated for

²⁸ M. N. Pokrovskii, *Lenin i vysshaia shkola* [Lenin and higher education] (Leningrad: GIZ, 1924), 5.

²⁹ J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* (Moscow: Foreign Languages, [1950] 1954).

the lack of economic incentives, and vice versa. The pursuit of the humanities was heavily skewed toward the political end of the spectrum, which predetermined the Soviet historical legacy in this sphere: the expectation of high social status in exchange for ideological support of the regime.

The primarily ideological relevance of the humanities is unsustainable in a modern democratic society. Likewise, the Soviet-type preponderance of humanities was based largely on overeducation, which cannot be sustained for long in a market economy and hence should not be viewed as a productive solution to their predicament today. The latter point can be illustrated using official Soviet statistics, which showed that college education provided no economic advantages. In 1955 the average monthly salary of industrial workers was 785 rubles, whereas in the sphere of “education (schools, educational institutions, research and cultural institutions),” which by definition required a college degree, the salary was 742 rubles.³⁰ By the end of the USSR this gap had significantly widened. In 1990 the average monthly salary of industrial workers was 284 rubles (after the 1961 monetary reform, this was nominally 3.6 times more than in 1955). Workers in agriculture earned 263 rubles. At the same time, in the sphere of education the average salary was 188 rubles, in “culture” 157 rubles, and in arts 198 rubles. Only in “science” (including humanities), which primarily employed people with advanced academic degrees, was the average salary higher than that of an average worker: 333 rubles.³¹ A college degree did not pay off, but graduate school was a path to the middle class.

Russian Humanities during the Post-Soviet Transition in the 1990s

Naturally, with the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the demise of the ideological factor that supported the academic bubble on the job market, the magnificent edifice of Soviet academe collapsed. In the fall of 1992 the prominent mathematician, academician Nikita Moiseev concluded: “Behold the ruins of the

³⁰ “Statisticheskaya tablitsa TsSU SSSR ‘Srednemesiachnaya denezhnaya zarabotnaya plata rabochikh i sluzhashchikh po otrasliam narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR v 1940, 1945, 1950–1955 gg.’” [Statistical table of the Central Statistical Agency of the USSR “Average monthly wages of workers and employees in different branches of the economy of the USSR in 1940, 1945, 1950–1955”], <http://istmat.info/node/18454>.

³¹ *SSSR v tsifrakh v 1990 godu: Kratkii statisticheskii sbornik* [USSR in numbers, 1990: A brief statistical compilation] (Moscow: TsSU pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR, 1991), 124–25.

scientific empire.”³² The transformation of Soviet-type economies and societies was traumatic for everyone, but the academic sphere, which did not produce any immediately monetizing economic commodities, was hit especially hard in all post-Soviet countries.

In the situation of strategic anomie, individuals and institutions scrambled for available precedents as a resource for scenarios of the future. The domestic tradition, both imperial and Soviet, envisioned the social value of academic humanities as serving the government or serving the nation. Both approaches were pursued by humanities practitioners in post-Soviet countries, with varying success. In Russia in the early 1990s the federal government showed little interest in buttressing its legitimacy by mobilizing the humanities, so this avenue remained underexplored. The autonomous national republics were a different matter. There, the consolidation of power by local political elites rode the wave of ethnocultural mobilization.³³ Academics specializing in the humanities and the social sciences performed a familiar function as the regime’s ideologists, while student enrollment in the humanities departments was stimulated by considerations of national patriotism. The republics of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Sakha, and Buryatia as well as the republics of the Northern Caucasus demonstrated this trend.³⁴ Political relevance immediately converted into relatively well-paid jobs in the old and newly created academic institutions. For example, Tatarstan established its own Academy of Sciences on September 30, 1991. It currently includes eight research institutes, of which only two deal with natural sciences, one—the Institute of Family and Demography—can be regarded as mostly social sciences oriented, while the rest are more influential, dealing with various aspects of the humanities. Similarly, the old academic structures, such as Kazan State University or the Pedagogical Institute, boosted their programs in Tatar history, language, and culture. In the sphere of academic publishing, too, scholars working in the interests of the national cause had an advantage.³⁵ This situation was typical of other national republics, particularly those that managed to secure and redistribute additional revenues, such as the resource-rich Sakha (Yakutia) Republic. The majority of Russia’s

³² N. N. Moiseev, “Oni mogut nam prigodit’sia let cherez piat’-desiat” [They may be useful to us in five to ten years], *Poisk* 44 (1992): 3.

³³ Robert J. Kaiser, *Political Indigenization and Homeland-Making in Russia’s Republics* (Washington, DC: NCEEER, 2006).

³⁴ Vladimir Kolosov, “Ethnic and Political Identities and Territorialities in the Post-Soviet Space,” *GeoJournal* 48, no. 2 (1999): 71–81.

³⁵ Helen M. Faller, *Nation, Language, Islam: Tatarstan’s Sovereignty Movement* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011).

regions, however, were unable to rely on the Soviet legacy of national-territorial autonomies that substantiated new political and economic claims. Even national

As the Russian past demonstrates, it is too easy for the humanities to turn from voluntary supporters of a political cause into an ideological machine fully appropriated by the regime.

republics could use this resource only as long as the federal government tolerated regional autonomy, which changed after 2000. Structurally, Russia's national republics in the 1990s were playing an ideological card, not unlike Soviet academics or some modern-day Western academics, which makes this case quite normal. However, ideology alone cannot serve

as a resource for sustainable development in academia: political circumstances and ideological fashions tend to change, while ideological partisanship interferes with the humanistic ideal of free thinking and unrestricted creativity. In addition, unlike universal Marxist ideology, national ideologies tend to be local and specific and cannot ensure the integration of a particular scholarship into a broader academic context. As the Russian past demonstrates, it is too easy for the humanities to turn from voluntary supporters of a political cause into an ideological machine fully appropriated by the regime.

Another response to the new post-Soviet realities was an attempt to forge a new narrative of relevance of the humanities in society that would resonate with the then dominant ideology of naive capitalism. If the fall of communism had exposed the humanities as impractical in a capitalist economy, the new narrative attempted to enhance the social capital of humanities disciplines by proving their direct practical "usefulness." The traditional mission of training high school teachers was seen as a lost cause at a time when the prestige of this chronically underpaid profession was at its lowest in the early 1990s. Therefore, many university history departments announced that they were training students to become professional clerks and record keepers in state and capitalist corporations, which was a stillborn idea in the age of rapid computerization. For example, a dedicated chair for "record keeping studies" was established at Kazan State Power Engineering University in 1998 and in the history department of Samara State University in 2002.³⁶ In the same vein, preparing cadres for the tourist industry became a *raison d'être* for the humanities with

³⁶ See Program in Document Science and Document Support for Management and Administration, Department of Management, Kazan State Power Engineering University, <https://kgeu.ru/Education/EduProfil/19?idProfil=512>; and Chair of Document Science, Department of History, Samara State University, http://www.archive.samsu.ru/ru/historical_faculty/documentation_dep.

the rise of international mobility and commercially viable domestic tourism. Thus, in 2005 the history department at Tver State University began offering a major in “sociocultural service and tourism.”³⁷ In 2006 the Chair of Regional Studies and Tourism was established in the history department of Yaroslavl State University.³⁸ These measures were quite in line with a European trend toward vindicating the “impractical” humanities based on their usefulness for the tourist industry: from a research concentration of university professors, such as the interdisciplinary research group Tourism, Travel, and Text at Radboud University (Netherlands), to the MA program in Tourism Strategy, Cultural Heritage, and Made in Italy at the Tor Vergata University of Rome School of Humanities, to the dozens of humanities professors teaching at the University of Macerata’s Department of Education, Cultural Heritage, and Tourism (Italy).³⁹ It is important that students majoring in the humanities have more opportunities to apply their education in the job market and adapt it to the demands of various occupations. However, using the tourist industry (or any other industry for that matter) to argue for relevance of the humanities does not seem particularly promising in the Russian university system. From the imperial period to today, Russian college students are not just majoring in certain areas but are enrolled in a certain university department and taking courses offered solely by that department. Studying tourism or other practical trades for five or even four years is obviously redundant, just as claiming that studying the French novel, Egyptian art, or American history directly enhances one’s chances of achieving success in the business of Russian domestic tourism.

A final strategy for adapting Soviet-era humanities to the post-Soviet society prioritized internationalization, understood as borrowing foreign standards and practices. In the 1990s the government funds required for the structural reform of academia were lacking, as were the cadres capable of conducting the reform and a clear vision of the desired transformation. Unlike Ukraine, where diaspora scholars were instrumental in shaping the new humanities research agenda and narrative, or Kazakhstan, with its ambitious program for training the new generation of scholars abroad (Bolashak International Scholarship), the role of the Russian academic diaspora in reforming the country’s academic sphere was

³⁷ Chair of Sociocultural Service, Department of History, Tver State University, <https://ckc.tversu.ru/pages/111>.

³⁸ Chair of Regional Studies and Tourism, Department of History, Yaroslavl State University, <http://hist.uniyar.ac.ru/enrollee/bachelor/tourism/>.

³⁹ See, correspondingly, <https://www.ru.nl/rich/our-research/research-groups/tourism-travel-and-text/full-mission-statement>; <https://en.uniroma2.it/academics/courses/master-degrees/tourism-strategy-cultural-heritage-and-made-in-italy>; <http://sfbct.unimc.it/it/ricerca/docenti-dipartimento>.

insignificant.⁴⁰ Arguably, foreign influence was more visible in newly created disciplines that lacked established domestic academic traditions, but most of them were social sciences. Even there Soviet-era epistemological inertia often prevailed. Thus, as a rule, former scientific communism chairs and departments were converted into sociology chairs and departments, and history of the Communist Party departments became political science departments. There were many local variations: thus, the scientific communism department could be relaunched as political sciences or even philosophy departments, and history of the Communist Party departments could be turned into world history. This trajectory explains why the new academic disciplines nominally borrowed from the “West” lacked the critical theory component that dominated Western social sciences. Gender and postcolonial theory and intersectional critical race theory played marginal roles in the “westernization” and internalization of Russian academic spheres. The Soviet-type connection between social sciences and humanities, where the former supplied theory for the latter, had been broken and was never recovered again.

Somewhat paradoxically, the most successful area of post-Soviet transformation and innovation in Russia emerged largely spontaneously and in the process of self-organization, rather than by design or copying a certain foreign precedent. In the course of several years, a diversified and broadly internationalized market of academic grants and scholarships appeared in Russia that, by all accounts, was responsible for saving Russian academe financially but also for advancing its rapid modernization and adaptation to modern standards. This is especially true of the humanities, which were abandoned by the state and benefited the most from the competitive but abundant financial opportunities offered by various grantmaking entities.

The prominent investor George Soros was the founder of this unlikely market. In 1988 he established the first charitable grantmaking body in the USSR, the Foundation for Cultural Initiative. Responding to Soros’s lobbying, the Soviet government issued a special decree regulating the organization’s activities in the country. The decree of February 23, 1989, recognized the right of Cultural Initiative to distribute stipends and office equipment to Soviet citizens, hire local personnel, conduct all sorts of economic activities that were serving its humanitarian goals, and organize public events. Cultural Initiative

⁴⁰ Aida Sagintayeva and Zakir Jumakulov, “Kazakhstan’s Bolashak Scholarship Program,” *International Higher Education* 79 (Winter 2015): 21–23.

was exempt from taxation and customs duties.⁴¹ This ad hoc measure defined the principles that regulated similar initiatives for the next twelve years, well after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Colloquially known as the “Soros Foundation,” the organization changed its name and format several times before it was finally banned in Russia in 2015. The contribution of the Soros Foundation to the development of post-Soviet Russian humanities was immense. By 2003 Soros had spent \$950 million in Russia. His foundation awarded 65,000 individual grants to students, scholars, and schoolteachers. In the second half of the 1990s the foundation began prioritizing institutional projects. Among the most significant was the program of University Internet Centers: in 1996–2001 it spent \$100 million on equipping and running internet classes in thirty-three Russian universities. Another \$100 million was spent in 1998–2001 for the Pushkin Library Project that subsidized Russian libraries and allowed them to purchase books and periodicals.⁴² Financing a whole plethora of individual and institutional projects that supported arts, literature, history, and philosophy, the Soros Foundation was the most consistent and inclusive supporter of Russian humanities.

This unprecedented scale of financing notwithstanding, the primary importance of Soros’s initiatives was that they created a precedent and model for other foundations—American and European, private and public. In 1991–2015 the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation awarded over 1,800 grants totaling \$107 million to 1,300 individuals and organizations in Russia, including support for humanities periodicals and universities.⁴³ In 1996–2005 the Ford Foundation invested more than \$25 million in higher education and scholarship in Russia.⁴⁴ The American Council of Learned Societies and Carnegie Corporation of New York, Heinrich Böll and Gerda Henkel Foundations, the British Council, and the Eurasia Foundation were among the main players on the grantmaking market offering grants to individual scholars and artists, usually regardless of the applicant’s institutional affiliation. The latter factor is hard to overestimate. Introduced by Soros and subsequently accepted as a norm,

⁴¹ “Postanovlenie Sovmina SSSR ot 23.02.1989 N 177 ‘O deiatel’nosti na territorii SSSR sovetsko-amerikanskogo fonda ‘Kul’turnaia initsiativa’” [Resolution of the Council of Ministries of the USSR of February 23, 1989, no. 177 “On the activities on the territory of the USSR of the Soviet-American foundation ‘Cultural initiative’”], <https://www.lawmix.ru/sssr/4630>.

⁴² Elena Fedotova, “Chto Fond Sorosa sdelał dlia Rossii” [What the Soros Foundation has done for Russia], *Kommersant*, November 30, 2015, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2866188>.

⁴³ “Our Work in Russia,” Past Work, MacArthur Foundation, <https://www.macfound.org/programs/russia/>.

⁴⁴ Ford Foundation, “What We’re Learning: Revitalizing Academic Institutions in Countries in Transition,” https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/2127/scholarly_communities_russia.pdf.

it was rather a Russian peculiarity as can be seen in the paradigmatic case of the government-sponsored Russian Foundation for the Humanities (RGNF).

Founded in 1994, it could be expected to resemble the US National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) as an independent federal agency, but in reality the RGNF operated on ad hoc principles of private foundations developed by Soros in the early 1990s. The RGNF could not compete with Soros or MacArthur or many other Western foundations in terms of its budget: fixed at 1 percent of the federal expenses for science and research, in the 1990s it averaged just \$10 million a year.⁴⁵ This money was distributed remarkably efficiently by a staff of only forty people. The RGNF received about 4,500 applications a year, of which about 1,500 (one-third) were supported. Because some grants were given for two- or three-year projects or were collective, every year about 15,000 individuals or 2,500 projects in the field of the humanities were funded. Due to the vague definition of the humanities in Russia, only 25–30 percent of the projects were in the fields of history and philology. Philosophers received about 12 percent of the grants (same as economists, who were also supported by the RGNF). Art theory and history claimed another 5–7 percent (the same as sociology or psychology). The selection process was conducted by expert panels that included 1,155 doctors of sciences from 300 institutions.⁴⁶ Numerous Russian academics, from graduate students to professors, were involved in the RGNF's activities at some point, either as grant applicants or peer reviewers, which was instrumental in forging a new professional ethos and developing new academic practices, such as peer reviewing. Besides individual and collective research projects, the RGNF supported conferences and, most important, provided subventions for book publishing. It was reported that over the initial 100 months of its existence (by 2003), the RGNF financed the publication of over 3,000 monographs, or one academic book a day. Under the publication grant's provisions, part of the book's print run had to be sent, gratis, to 100 major academic libraries in Russia.⁴⁷ Grant support meant that a monograph had successfully passed through the peer-review process, which otherwise was a nonexistent practice in Russian academe.

Most of the numbers cited above referred to 2006 (except for the RGNF's

⁴⁵ “Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva RF ot 8 sentiabria 1994 g. N 1023 ‘O Rossiiskom gumanitarnom nauchnom fonde’” [Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation of September 8, 1994, no. 1023 “On the Russian Foundation for the Humanities”], <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/9026918>.

⁴⁶ E. V. Semenov, “Granty v rossiiskoi nauke: Opyt Rossiiskogo Gumanitarnogo Nauchnogo Fonda” [Grants in Russian science: Experience of the Russian Foundation for the Humanities], *Nauka. Innovatsii. Obrazovanie* 3 (2007): 227–52.

⁴⁷ Semenov, “Granty v rossiiskoi nauke,” 228.

budget, which in 2006 reached about \$25.5 million⁴⁸), so it is instructive to put them into perspective by comparing them to the NEH's activities in 2006. The NEH's annual budget was almost \$141 million (and an astonishing \$178 million in 1994, the year the RGNF was established). Financing a variety of ambitious programs, in 2006 the NEH awarded just 264 individual and 98 collective research grants: a total of 362 compared to 1,500 funded by the RGNF. That year, the NEH employed 801 scholars as experts on their selection panels, as compared to 1,155 working for the RGNF. The administration of NEH activities cost \$23.5 million—almost as much as the RGNF's total budget.⁴⁹ True, in the 1990s the value of the dollar was much higher in Russia than in America, and the overhead costs were much lower. This was no longer the case in the 2010s. The value of research grants awarded by the NEH ranged from \$5,000 to \$40,000, which is not much more than the average research grant of \$15,000 awarded by the RGNF in 2014. The average book subvention awarded by the RGNF was \$7,500—something an American scholar cannot even dream about.⁵⁰ The budget of the NEH's Division of Research Programs in 2014 constituted just 13 percent of the organization's total budget.⁵¹

Given that in the 1990s the RGNF was just one of a dozen major foundations supporting initiatives in the humanities, the overall impact of the grant market in Russia and the scale of its outreach are hard to overestimate. At a fraction of the NEH's annual budget, the plethora of private and government foundations had not only sustained but, in the course of one decade, transformed the entire sphere of academic humanities in Russia by introducing new practices and competitive selection of the strongest, most modern projects. The financially diversified process was largely coordinated by the academic community itself through broad participation on peer-review panels. It should be added that the available statistics from the 2010s showed that scholars younger than thirty-nine constituted 39–44 percent of the RGNF's grantees, which can be expected to be typical of the 1990s as well. The median age of the grantees

⁴⁸ “Federal’nyi zakon ot 03.04.2008 N 36-FZ ‘Ob ispolnenii federal’nogo biudzheta za 2006 god’” [Federal law of April 3, 2008, no. 36-FZ “On the execution of the 2006 federal budget”], http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_75974/d5f8eb0b75ec19c4fd441ea2bf47a01244fe7062/.

⁴⁹ National Endowment for the Humanities, *2006 Annual Report*, 3, 81, https://www.neh.gov/sites/default/files/inline-files/2006_neh_annual_report.pdf.

⁵⁰ I. E. Il’ina, “Analiz deiatel’nosti nauchnykh fondov, obespechivaiushchikh podderzhku fundamental’nykh issledovaniy v Rossii” [Analysis of the activities of scientific foundations that fund fundamental research in Russia], *Upravlenie naukoj i naukometriia* 18 (2015): 186.

⁵¹ National Endowment for the Humanities, *2014 Annual Report*, 3, https://www.neh.gov/sites/default/files/inline-files/2014_neh_annual_report.pdf.

was forty-seven to forty-eight years.⁵² These numbers probably corresponded to the actual demographic situation in Russian academe and suggest that the RGNF compensated for the ageism of some other foundations that prioritized younger scholars and discriminated against high-quality projects of their senior colleagues.⁵³

Unlike the NEH and many other foundations acting in other countries, most grants in Russia were awarded directly to individuals, not to their employers. Even the RGNF in the 1990s did not explicitly require that applicants be formally employed by an academic institution. Therefore, the grants supported the humanities as represented by scholars and artists, particularly younger or unaffiliated ones, rather than institutions with their bureaucratic overhead expenses. This system compensated for the enormous institutional inertia and promoted dynamism and innovations in the humanities in a matter of one decade. The Soviet canon of the humanities and social sciences was not just about ideology: the Soviet version of Marxism simply preserved a particular type of scholarship from the early twentieth century. Academic institutions were reproducing this obsolete academic culture and epistemological standards even without their Marxist ideological component, so the funding going directly to individual scholars was instrumental in bypassing this formidable obstacle. Of all the experiments in modernizing the humanities in the 1990s in Russia, the direct support of individual scholars and artists by grants as coordinated and mediated by the self-organized professional community of peers, largely beyond academic institutions, proved to be the most efficient.

At some point, the investments in human capital reached a level at which the quantity of individual grants began producing a qualitative effect at institutional level. Appearing in the mid-1990s were new educational institutions, which employed the most active individual grantees who were interested in the novel training of students. These new institutions, which were nongovernmental entities primarily supported by grants and private donations, disproportionately prioritized humanities and social sciences. In 1994 the European University at St. Petersburg (EUSP) was founded as a graduate university. Its initial activities were supported by the Soros, Ford, and MacArthur Foundations. For example, between 1995 and 2010 the MacArthur Foundation awarded \$9,320,328 to EUSP.⁵⁴ In 1995 the British sociologist Teodor Shanin founded the Moscow

⁵² Il'ina, "Analiz deiatel'nosti nauchnykh fondov," 187.

⁵³ In 2009 the median age of Russian scholars was 47.8 years. T. Zimina, "Iznoshennyye kadry nauki" [Worn-out cadres of science], *Nauka i zhizn'* 4 (2009), <https://www.nkj.ru/archive/articles/15577/>.

⁵⁴ "European University at St. Petersburg," Grant Search, MacArthur Foundation, <https://www.macfound.org/grantee/european-university-at-st-petersburg-21823/>.

School of the Social and Economic Sciences as a graduate university. It was supported by the same donors on the same scale. Between 1997 and 2013 the MacArthur Foundation gave \$8,432,428 to Shanin's university.⁵⁵ In 1999 Smolny College of Liberal Arts and Sciences began teaching students at St. Petersburg State University. Although backed by Bard College (Annandale-on-Hudson, New York), it, too, enjoyed broad support from various grantmaking foundations. Rather than establishing a totally autonomous new entity, Smolny was designed as a subdivision of the conservative St. Petersburg State University with loose links to the faculty of philology, promising to reform the university from within by employing a novel liberal arts and sciences educational model and a dynamic faculty.

At this point, the idea of institutional transformation of the existing Russian universities by nongovernmental actors gained popularity. As before, the main priorities were programs in the humanities and social sciences. At the time, the interest in institutional reform was articulated in terms of business management, as a shift from initiative-oriented to project-oriented activities: from a "new plan or action to improve something or solve a problem" to "a piece of planned work or an activity which is done over a period of time and intended to achieve a particular purpose."⁵⁶ Accordingly, whereas in the early 1990s Soros's main program in Russia was called Cultural Initiative, by 2000 it became the Megaproject Education Development in Russia. The megaproject envisioned forming stable regional clusters coordinating cutting-edge research in the existing academic institutions. The goal was to establish the more advanced scholars as drivers of institutional change. Their authority was to be secured by their ability to bring institutional grants to their organizations. Five regions—winners in the open competition for project grants—were to receive funding for two years, after which a different five regions were expected to receive funding. The program's budget for 2000 was \$25 million.⁵⁷ This was about 5 percent of the state budget's expenditure on all higher education in Russia in 1999.⁵⁸ Simultaneously, the Program of Interregional Research in Social Sciences was launched by Carnegie Corporation of New York in collaboration

⁵⁵ "Moscow School of the Social and Economic Sciences," Grant Search, MacArthur Foundation, <https://www.macfound.org/grantee/moscow-school-of-social-and-economic-sciences-25644/>.

⁵⁶ *Cambridge Business English Dictionary*, ed. Roz Combley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 439, 665.

⁵⁷ Aleksandr Adamskii, "Obrazovanie, otkrytoe dlia grazhdanskikh initsiativ" [Education open to civic initiatives], *Pervoe sentiabria*, no. 26, 2000, <https://ps.1sept.ru/article.php?ID=200002601>.

⁵⁸ Ministerstvo finansov Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Pis'mo ot 25 maia 1999 goda N 01-02-01/02-2283 [Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, Letter of May 25, 1999, no. 01-02-01/02-2283], <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901742263>.

with the MacArthur and Soros Foundations and involvement of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation. The program established a network of nine permanent “interregional institutes of social sciences on the basis of the largest regional classical universities in Russia,” with an annual budget of \$3.2 million in 2003.⁵⁹ Each institute had a thematic concentration that envisioned the interdisciplinary collaboration of specialists from across the country.

Eventually, Russia’s nascent business tycoons followed suit and decided to enter the growing market of nongovernmental institutional reform of the academic sphere, also prioritizing the humanities and social sciences. In June 2003 the Russian State University for the Humanities, which enjoyed a reputation as the leading center of humanities education (although not on the liberal arts model), elected as its new rector Leonid Nevzlin, a close associate of Mikhail Khodorkovsky of the Yukos Oil Company. This happened after Khodorkovsky

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had pledged to invest \$100 million in the university over the course of ten years and had transferred \$5 million as a down payment.⁶⁰ At least one more young “oligarch” contemplated founding a new university in 2003.⁶¹ These plans were undercut by the

government’s crackdown on Yukos and Khodorkovsky’s arrest in October 2003. Soon thereafter, other nongovernmental projects on the institutional reform of Russian academe were terminated. Arguably, these programs became victims of their own scale and success and got in the way of a political regime that was set on consolidating control over all the financial resources and institutions in Russia. Developed in the logic of business management,

⁵⁹ See the 2003 INO-Tsentr annual report at <https://ino-center.ru/doc/report2003.doc>.

⁶⁰ “Interv’iu prezidenta i rektora Rossiiskogo gosudarstvennogo gumanitarnogo universiteta zhurnalu ‘Formula kar’ery” [*Formula for career* magazine’s interview with the president and rector of the Russian State University for the Humanities], Russian State University for the Humanities, August 2, 2003 (updated April 9, 2019), <https://www.rsuh.ru/news/detail.php?ID=32350>.

⁶¹ Authors’ archive.

these programs envisioned phasing out support for individuals as a result of switching from “initiatives” to “projects.” This was a controversial decision, since improving the quality of academic institutions by itself is insufficient for sustaining the diversity and freedom of scholarship in the humanities.

Russian Humanities under the Regime of Neoliberal Authoritarianism since 2000

The diversified system of grantmaking foundations was instrumental in stimulating the autonomous creativity and productivity of the humanities. It therefore comes as no surprise that this was the first system to fall victim to President Vladimir Putin’s regime, which aimed to consolidate control over all the financial resources in the country since his ascent to power in 2000. The state-funded RGNF was the first to be affected by the new policy. By the government decree of May 7, 2001, its charter was changed so that the autonomous foundation was transformed into a regular government office and grants legally became allocations of the state budget funds for academic purposes.⁶² To most observers other than those immediately involved in the RGNF’s activities, these changes were a matter of legal wording. The abolition of the former tax-exempt status of grants had more obvious consequences for private and foreign donors, who had to compensate for increasing taxation on their grants. Resulting only in a small gain to the state budget, this move delivered a major blow to multimillion-dollar annual investments in Russian culture. These measures, beginning with the change in the RGNF’s status, were perceived as part of economic normalization and institutional development that had nothing in common with the scandalous raider seizure of the main independent TV station NTV just three weeks earlier by the state-controlled corporation. Yet, after a series of seemingly apolitical and economically progressive legislative initiatives, as well as a series of measures regulating the rights of foreign entities in Russia, the entire system of competitive grantmaking was eradicated. All the foreign foundations were forced to leave Russia by 2015, and the RGNF was liquidated in 2016 in the form of its merging with the Russian Foundation

⁶² Pravitel’stvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii, “Postanovlenie ot 7 maia 2001 goda N 347 ‘Ob utverzhdenii ustava Rossiiskogo gumanitarnogo nauchnogo fonda’” [Government of the Russian Federation, Resolution of May 7, 2001, no. 347 “On adoption of the charter of the Russian Foundation for the Humanities”], <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901786877>.

for Basic Research, which itself is scheduled to be liquidated.⁶³ The parallel rise of political censorship and direct ideological indoctrination stemmed as much from the regime's authoritarian character as from its ability to monopolize the institutional and financial underpinnings of the humanities. Thus, it took fifteen years to fully demonstrate that the neoliberal project of cost optimization through institutional consolidation and securitization is incompatible with the development of the humanities.⁶⁴

The fundamental interconnection of authoritarianism and neoliberal disregard for the humanities was not evident to everybody in Russia at the turn of the millennium. Moreover, to many, the neoliberal rationalization of the outdated academic institutions seemed the only way to save the higher education and research facilities in the country. With a few notable exceptions, the booming grant market was investing in the most able scholars rather than in their less productive colleagues and the institutions themselves, which was seen as a major problem. Grants were unpredictable and personalized, and even new institutional funding opportunities were not suitable to keep afloat the entire overblown staff of universities and research institutes, which reflected the Soviet-era overproduction of ideologically valid cadres. The structural long-overdue reform was expected to make academic institutions more manageable and efficient.

The neoliberal reforms of the 2000s came in the wake of the economic calamities of the 1990s that culminated in the financial crisis of 1998. This was the period of shrinking state subsidies and unindexed inflation that made all the public universities adopt the tuition model as a pillar for balancing the budget. Since then the revenue from tuition has constituted an important factor of sustainability of universities. According to expert opinion voiced in early 2000s, the balanced budget of a public university should rely on state subsidies for no more than 40 percent of its entire budget.⁶⁵ This might be a reasonable strategy

⁶³ "Rasporiazhenie Pravitel'stva RF ot 29 fevralia 2016 goda N 325-r. 'O reorganizatsii Rossiiskogo fonda fundamental'nykh issledovaniy i Rossiiskogo gumanitarnogo nauchnogo fonda'" [Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of February 29, 2016, no. 325-r "On the reorganization of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research and the Russian Foundation for the Humanities"], <https://rulaws.ru/government/Rasporiazhenie-Pravitelstva-RF-ot-29.02.2016-N-325-r/>; Pravitel'stvo Rossii, "Operativnoe soveshchanie s vitse-prem'erami" [Government of Russia, Operational meeting with deputy prime ministers], November 23, 2020, <http://government.ru/news/40921/>.

⁶⁴ In political analysis, "securitization is an extreme version of politicization that enables the use of extraordinary means in the name of security," thus transforming subjects from regular academic issues into matters of security. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 25.

⁶⁵ Authors' archive.

for a top university situated in Moscow or St. Petersburg, but it is very hard for most regional universities to operate using the same approach. The educational market in the 1990s made students choose more profitable disciplines, such as law and economics, which reaffirmed the university leadership's neoliberal prejudice against humanities programs as a burden on a budget balance based on tuition-paying students. This was exacerbated by the narrow disciplinary structure of educational programs inherited from the Soviet and imperial periods, which lacked liberal arts models or generic undergraduate programs. Russian students were supposed to choose one discipline at the age of seventeen or eighteen and graduate with a specialty in history or philology with little exposure even to adjacent disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. As noted above, in the 1990s university managers had already tried to find a more practical application for the humanities, such as "record-keeping studies" or tourism. In the 2000s programs in humanities were merged with those that promised greater revenues. One option for the department of history was to reinvent itself as international relations; in fact, most of the international relations educational programs in post-Soviet Russia were started by historians who specialized in world history. Since 2013 the Department of History at Kazan Federal University has been part of the Institute of International Relations.⁶⁶ Given the escalating international tensions, the new trend in the 2020s is to opt for politically neutral urban studies. According to Irina Abankina, director of the Institute of Education at the Higher School of Economics, "many universities today combine humanistic and pedagogical programs with new curricula in urban improvement and development. This also includes the design and architecture track."⁶⁷

The market-oriented logic also informed the structural reform of Russian universities, which included the merger of existing universities into regional educational hubs and mega-universities. The monopolization of the market of academic employers resulted in brain drain to super-universities in major cities and made the faculty more dependent on their employer and hence more vulnerable. For example, since 2010 Kazan Federal University has absorbed four hitherto independent colleges and become the main employer of the humanities

⁶⁶ Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies, Kazan Federal University, <https://kpfu.ru/eng/academic-units/humanities/institute-of-international-relations>.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Mariia Agranovich, "Na kakie spetsial'nosti v vuzakh byl samyi bol'shoi spros v 2019 godu" [What specializations in universities were most in demand in 2019], *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, September 12, 2019, <https://rg.ru/2019/12/09/na-kakie-specialnosti-v-vuzah-by-l-samyj-bolshoj-spros-v-2019-godu.html>.

faculty in the region.⁶⁸

As one would expect from neoliberal scenarios of institutional optimization, between 2010 and 2020 the number of faculty members and researchers in Russian universities and colleges decreased by 35 percent while the number

In the heavily censored intellectual climate of modern Russia, [scholars] cannot be expected to pursue any truly critical analysis, so they take on a role as ideological supporters of the regime.

of “managerial personnel” grew by 11 percent.⁶⁹

However, contrary to expectations, these personnel cuts were not evenly distributed across the departments and did not even touch the humanities.

In fact, between 2010 and 2019 the numbers of “researchers in higher education” (a category often different from “professors/faculty members”) in the humanities had increased by 31 percent (to 5,544). Over the same period, in the natural sciences, traditionally patronized by the university administration, the growth was less than 9 percent (to 14,861), while social sciences became the ultimate champion by more than doubling their number of scholars (109 percent, to 11,846).⁷⁰ On the one hand, this dynamic proves the inefficiency of monopolism: the alleged optimization of the institutional structure by no means leads to the optimization of personnel or guarantees the high quality of the rapidly multiplying numbers of “researchers.” On the other hand, the disproportionate growth of academic cadres reveals the government priorities that drive these changes. Despite the declared priority of the “practical” sciences, the logic of state-dominated higher education leads to the disproportionate proliferation of social scientists. In the heavily censored intellectual climate of modern Russia, they cannot be expected to pursue any truly critical analysis, so they take on a role as ideological supporters of the regime. Apparently, the more modestly growing humanities have the same

⁶⁸ “Prikaz Ministerstva obrazovaniia i nauki Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 2 fevralia 2011 goda N 156 ‘O reorganizatsii Federal’nogo gosudarstvennogo avtonomnogo obrazovatel’nogo uchrezhdeniia vysshego professional’nogo obrazovaniia “Kazanskii (Privolzhskii) federal’nyi universitet”” [Order of the Ministry of science and higher education of the Russian Federation of February 2, 2011, no. 156 “On the reorganization of the Federal state autonomous educational institution of higher professional education Kazan (Privolzhskii) federal university”], https://kpfu.ru/docs/F1134185227/Prik_reorg.pdf.

⁶⁹ N. V. Bondarenko et al., *Indikatory obrazovaniia: 2021* [Education indicators: 2021] (Moscow: National Research University Higher School of Economics, 2021), 303.

⁷⁰ K. Ditkovskiy et al., *Science and Technology Indicators in the Russian Federation: Data Book* (Moscow: National Research University Higher School of Economics, 2021), 224.

value in the eyes of the regime: anybody who is allowed to grow faster than natural sciences must be doing so for ideological reasons. The natural sciences can be viewed as the benchmark in this regard because they represent the type of fundamental research with the lowest ideological potential and the highest promise for the future economic application of their results.

A substantial part of this reform included an internal reorganization of the existing faculties. Until the mid-2000s the structure of the Russian university resembled the fissure in a nuclear reactor. Like history, philosophy, or philology, every discipline constituted a separate department. As new disciplines were added (such as cultural studies), more departments populated university governance. Supplementing the university mergers, the idea of larger internal academic units came into being. It envisioned faculty or schools that encompassed all the humanities. Ideally, it could strengthen cross-disciplinary dialogue within the existing universities. But such a result would run afoul of the narrow disciplinary structure retained in the educational programs. Even new cross-disciplinary programs such as cultural studies reinforced the construction of an isolationist curriculum and excluded adjacent disciplines for reasons of budget allocation. The latter is of decisive importance in Russia, where the absolute majority of colleges and universities are public and hence are financed and administered by the government. As was mentioned in the introductory part of this report, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, having had a hard time defining the notion of the humanities, eventually restored the Soviet-era understanding of the humanities as belonging to the social sciences. This, along with the disproportionate growth of the cadres in these disciplines, reflects the government's view of them as providing ideological services for the regime. From this perspective, interdisciplinary cooperation between the humanities becomes problematic, as it stimulates their autonomous development.

Inertia on the part of faculty played a role too, although this was as much a result of one's methodological conservatism as of learned helplessness under the new structural conditions. In the peculiar circumstances of the post-Soviet Russian university, the neoliberal reform resulted in diminishing the faculty's autonomy. Appointed by the state, the university rector of a merged super-university appoints the heads of each subdivision. The elimination of the competitive grant market has made faculty entirely dependent on the university administration for funding of their research. Several government programs that support research initiatives are administered through universities in a

bureaucratic fashion, which by no means alters this fundamental dependency.⁷¹ True, university professors still had low income back in the 1990s, but between 2005 and 2019 the average monthly salary in higher education (unadjusted for inflation) had increased more than sevenfold.⁷² Over the same period, in the institutions of higher education annual funding for research in the humanities had increased almost fifteenfold. By comparison, in the social sciences with their rapidly swelling ranks, the amount of funding increased twelvefold over the same period, while the natural sciences that depend on expensive lab equipment had only seen an increase by a factor of 8.6.⁷³ But all this money was distributed through the pipeline along the administrative hierarchy, from the federal government down to university departments and individual scholars. Allocated for specific purposes and disciplines, each assigned a unique code, government funding can be appropriated only for the initially envisioned categories and can be sustainably received for as long as there are no spontaneous alterations on the ground that add new topics or subfields or modify existing ones. So, the very logic of centralized government funding precludes any systematic cross-disciplinary dialogue in the humanities.

Access to funding is also conditioned by the faculty's compliance with the university administration, its appointees, and policies. Of even more importance is the faculty's dependence on the system of regular formal evaluation, which conditions not only their pay rate but also the prospects of their job contract (usually up for renewal every several years). In Russia there are no tenured positions or contracts without termination dates, so even full professors' contracts have a limit of five years. The performance review is a purely administrative procedure borrowed from business management and industry-oriented natural sciences research; it is directed toward meeting certain criteria of key performance indicators. This practice was part of the neoliberal modernization effort to change the academic sphere institutionally—something that the alliances of grantmaking foundations attempted to do by other means in the early 2000s. Grounded in a distrust of faculty autonomy—partially justified by the conservative attitudes of some faculty members vis-à-vis any change—the new state policy encouraged the use of formal science metrics in assessing university

⁷¹ For example, the system of president's grants (<https://президентскиегранты.рф/public/contest/directions/science>) or the international scientific cooperation program of “mega-grants” (<https://p220.ru/en>).

⁷² Ditkovskiy et al., *Science and Technology Indicators*, 357; N. Bondarenko et al., *Indicators of Education in the Russian Federation: Data Book* (Moscow: National Research University Higher School of Economics, 2018), 282.

⁷³ Ditkovskiy et al., *Science and Technology Indicators*, 234–35.

productivity and hiring faculty. The main flaw of this approach was not the particular criteria of assessment but the very idea that a certain predetermined end goal can be squarely applied to everyone in any situation and remain the same for years and even decades. Humanities imply a complex, nonlinear process of meaning production and communication that goes through different stages and can take various forms. As this evolving cultural institution pursues the moving target of the ever-changing society, it requires elaborated mechanisms of self-organization and peer review. The neoliberal modernization strategy dismantled the remnants of Russian academic self-organization in order to effectively enforce a new institutional model: easily formalizing the goals of education and the merit of scholarship by some universal criteria. Efficient by design, this model proved nonviable on its own, without constant administrative interventions from above. This can be concluded from the reform's failure to reach the proclaimed goal of making the modified academic institutions internationally competitive.

The rise of university rankings and science metrics was a universal trend in the 1990s and 2000s.⁷⁴ It was a response to the emerging global “knowledge economy” and increasingly globalized market of education that required some universal indicators for comparison of national academic programs. Hence, the recourse to formal metrics as a way to coordinate college education in different countries belonging to different academic and cultural traditions. In Russia these instruments were adopted for the internal reform of university research and education. The special program for encouraging the international competitiveness of Russian universities was created in 2013 and is popularly known by the abbreviation 5-100-2020. According to the program, at least five Russian universities were supposed to enter the ranks of the top one hundred universities by the year 2020. The program envisioned structural reforms and the stimulation of the most promising research tracks. In 2021 its cost was estimated at 80 billion rubles (\$1.1 billion according to the July 2020 exchange rate but \$2.5 billion in 2013 rubles).⁷⁵ None of the Russian universities had made it to the top tier in either of the three main ratings: Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), Times Higher Education (THE), or Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). In 2020 QS and THE registered two Russian universities in the 200–300 range,

⁷⁴ Michael A. Peters, “Global University Rankings: Metrics, Performance, Governance,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 51, no. 1 (2019): 5–13.

⁷⁵ “Vuzy iz proekta ‘5-100’ tak i ne voshli v top-100 mezhdunarodnykh reitingov” [Universities from the 5-100 project never made it into the top 100 of international ratings], RBC.ru, February 18, 2021, <https://www.rbc.ru/society/18/02/2021/602cbdff9a7947765cbb58e5>.

while ARWU acknowledged just one in the 400–500 range.⁷⁶ The actual dollar cost of the program was probably about \$1.5 billion, which was much more than the total sum of all the grants awarded to individual scholars and research teams in Russia since 1991. These research, travel, conference, and publishing grants were instrumental in forging a cohort of Russian scholars, including those in the humanities, efficiently integrated in international academe and well reputed globally—something that the Russian government could not achieve for its universities after seven years of institutional reform. Paradoxically, we can substantiate this conclusion quantitatively precisely because of the neoliberal transformation of Russia’s academe.

Initially introduced for the 5-100-2020 program, the formal assessment criteria were later adopted throughout all Russian universities and faculties. Specifically, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education directive of December 10, 2013, required the faculty to regularly report a certain number of scholarly publications indexed in the abstract and citation database Scopus (Elsevier) and the citation index aggregator Web of Science (WoS).⁷⁷ This measure was detrimental to the position of the humanities. First of all, the Scopus and WoS indexing platforms were developed for the purpose of assessing natural sciences, hence the privileging of research articles over books. The academic politics of citation in the natural sciences is different from that in the humanities, where the originality of research is measured by the scholar’s ability to identify a new research problem and amass hitherto unknown primary sources for its study. References to works by colleagues, past and present, are usually invoked as part of a broader conversation about the topic rather than as a formal catalog of previous studies and can disproportionately refer to more general works. Second, the new requirements encouraged publication in journals that happened to be included in Scopus and WoS rather than in publications more relevant to an author’s study and reputed in their field. This created a market for paid publications in low-quality journals that were included in indexes for various reasons and the mass of junk publications that nevertheless met the formal criteria established

⁷⁶ “Proekt 5-100: Itogi programmy” [Project 5-100: Outcomes of the program], Forbes Education, July 31, 2020, <https://education.forbes.ru/authors/5-100-experts>.

⁷⁷ “Prikaz Ministerstva obrazovaniia i nauki RF ot 10 dekabria 2013 g. N 1324 ‘Ob utverzhdenii pokazatelei deiatel’nosti obrazovatel’noi organizatsii, podlezhashchei samoobsledovaniiu’: Prilozhenie 4” [Order of the Ministry of science and higher education of December 10, 2013, no. 1324 “On the approval of performance indicators for educational organizations subject to self-assessment,” Appendix 4], http://273-фз.пф/akty_minobrnauki_rossii/prikaz-minobrnauki-rf-ot-10122013-no-1324.

by the ministry.⁷⁸ Third, most of these were English-language journals, which imposed an additional burden on the authors of narrative-based studies in the humanities (compared to brief and often formula-centered reports by natural scientists). Theoretically, the encouragement of academic publishing in English was a good tool for fostering international dialogue in the humanities, but its mandatory enforcement was unfair and counterproductive, resulting in a proliferation of primitive texts in broken English. The situation improved somewhat with the inclusion of several Russian-language periodicals in the indexed databases, which often produced curious results when a periodical with a low academic reputation received the highest grade from the indexing organization.

Paradoxically, in the present situation of authoritarian control over monopolized markets, the neoliberal system of formal science metrics remains the best protection for scholars in the humanities.

So, after 2013 Russian scholars more than doubled their annual number of articles indexed in Scopus (from about 34,000 thousand in 2011–2012 to 73,500 in 2019); in WoS the number of articles from Russia increased by 75 percent between 2012 and 2019. And yet the share of Russian articles in Scopus was 3.1 percent in 2000 but remained much lower throughout the 2010s until 2018, when it reached 3.2 percent. In WoS articles from Russia accounted for 3.4 percent of all indexed publications in 2000—a level never reached again despite the billions of rubles spent on institutional reform.⁷⁹ Apparently, the high share of indexed publications by Russian scholars in 2000, before the administratively induced urge to publish junk articles in predatory journals, was the result of targeted investments in human capital by the diversified and competitive academic grant market during the 1990s. True, the share of Russian humanities in international indexes that had been created for the assessment of English-language science publications was tiny in 2000—just 0.4 percent of all the Russian publications indexed in Scopus and 0.5 percent of those indexed in WoS. By 2019 this share had grown to almost 5 percent in Scopus and 8.2 percent in WoS, which was still much smaller than the share of the social sciences (11.2 percent in Scopus

⁷⁸ See Maria Yudkevich, “Why Are ‘Garbage’ Publications Dangerous and How to Deal with Them,” HSE University, August 17, 2020, <https://www.hse.ru/en/news/387182451.html>; and “List of Predatory Journals,” Stop Predatory Journals, <http://web.archive.org/web/20211220083526/https://predatoryjournals.com/journals/>.

⁷⁹ Ditkovskiy et al., *Science and Technology Indicators*, 240–41.

and 12.6 in WoS) and a far cry from the natural sciences' share (78.5 percent in Scopus and 57.5 in WoS). While the total number of published articles can be misleading, particularly after 2013 and the skyrocketing of junk publications, their actual citation rate as reflected in the index is hard to fake. In 2015–2019 the publication index of articles from Russia in history and archaeology was 1.85 in Scopus and 1.84 in WoS—second only to Russian articles in physical science out of thirty-four disciplinary categories (2.25 in Scopus and 2.61 in WoS). Russian articles in the “philosophy, ethics, religion” category were ahead of Russian articles in social sciences as indexed in Scopus (1.12) and only lagged behind articles in physics, chemistry, and mathematics (and history). In WoS the index of Russian articles in “languages and literature” was the seventh highest of thirty-four categories.⁸⁰

Russian humanities were outsiders in the international indexes created for assessing English-language publications in the natural sciences but have outperformed the social sciences and even most natural sciences and technical disciplines. It is reasonable to suggest that the humanities would have been even more successful in the more suitable institutional setting of liberal arts education, but they were not given this opportunity. The neoliberal reform of higher education that culminated in the 5-100-2020 program stressed the importance of internationalization in the sphere of research and education and was thus driven by a desire to break the isolation in these spheres on the institutional level: individual scholars have successfully internationalized since the 1990s. However, this trend toward internationalization developed hand in hand with the opposite trend toward autarky driven by the growing securitization of Russian politics and society.⁸¹ Possible ideological and financial motivations or specific group interests behind this trend are beyond the scope of this report. What matters is the daily reality faced by scholars who have any international exposure. Since the late 1990s they have found themselves under the scrutiny of the Security Administration (“First Department”) that exists in every Russian university and increasingly controls everything that can be qualified as related to “secret information.”⁸² Many of these security departments, including at Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University, are staffed by

⁸⁰ Ditkovskiy et al., *Science and Technology Indicators*, 242–47.

⁸¹ For an outline of the initial stages of this process, see Edwin Bacon, Bettina Renz, and Julian Cooper, *Securitising Russia: The Domestic Politics of Vladimir Putin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

⁸² For a sample statute of a university First Department, see “Polozhenie o pervom otdele upravleniia bezopasnosti” [Regulations about the security administration’s first department], <https://cfuv.ru/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/1-otdel.pdf>.

active Federal Security Service (FSB) officers, who may also occupy other administrative positions.⁸³ Participants in large international academic projects in the social sciences and humanities can be interviewed about their activities by FSB officers or might be required to become informers. This trend culminated in 2019 when the Ministry of Science and Higher Education issued a directive regulating scholars' contacts with "international and foreign organizations and . . . citizens," reminiscent of Stalinist xenophobic paranoia. Among other measures, the directive forbade one-on-one contacts with foreigners and required Russian scholars to write reports after each meeting with a foreigner.⁸⁴ The directive was recalled one year later.⁸⁵ However, this did not ease the situation of scholars in the humanities, who have to self-censor their research and educational activities lest they violate the "gay propaganda law" of June 30, 2013, which penalizes any value-free academic discussion of homosexuality in art or history; the simultaneously promulgated law criminalizing "insulting religious feelings," which has been applied to a broad range of artistic and scholarly statements; the 2021 law establishing long jail terms as punishment for "public dissemination of knowingly false information about the activities of the USSR during World War II and veterans of the Great Patriotic War," which essentially banned studies of Soviet history in the 1930s and 1940s; or the "law on popular education" of June 1, 2021, which forbids partnership with foreign scholars and educators other than those administered by government institutions, which themselves

⁸³ Igor Pushkarev and Alina Ampelonskaia, "My idem po puti stroitel'stva politseisko-chekistskogo gosudarstva: Kak ustroena sistema slezhki kuratorov FSB za uchenymi i prepodavatelyami v RF" ["We are following the path of building a police-chekist state": How the FSB system of surveillance of scientists and instructors works], Znak.com, January 21, 2021, http://web.archive.org/web/20220208182648/https://www.znak.com/2021-01-21/kak_ustroena_sistema_slezhki_kuratorov_fsb_za_uchenymi_i_prepodavatelyami_v_rf.

⁸⁴ "Prikaz Ministerstva obrazovaniia i nauki RF ot 11 fevralia 2019 g." [Order of the Ministry of science and higher education of February 11, 2019], <https://trv-science.ru/2019/08/inostranec-snimaj-chasy>.

⁸⁵ Mikhail Telekhov, "Otmenen prikaz, ogranichivavshii sviazi rossiiskikh s zarubezhnymi uchenymi" [The order restricting ties between Russian and foreign scientists is cancelled], RAPSI, February 13, 2020, http://rapsinews.ru/human_rights_protection_news/20200213/305459554.html.

are required to receive government approval of such partnerships.⁸⁶

These are just the best-known of the odious laws that constrain the work of scholars who are not engaged in antiregime political activism, which is the subject of even more draconian legislation.⁸⁷ Much of the political pressure that takes the form of moral panic, neofundamentalist reaction, security concerns, or patriotic hysteria derives from the conflict over material and symbolic resources. With most economic resources being monopolized and controlled by the highly centralized state, priority access to limited public funding can be claimed only by virtue of championing the “common good.” The character of Russia’s political regime predetermines conservative interpretations of the meaning of the common good. However, the structural situation that involves framing conflicts over buildings, budgets, or jobs in principled ideological disagreements is more fundamental and rooted in the monopolist modernism that has characterized Russia’s political project since 2000. The very existence of a single center for administering all resources makes it rational and desirable to maintain firm control over them, while the resources themselves have value only inasmuch as they are traded internationally. This applies equally to Russian oil, gas, and scholarship. Securitization of the economic and intellectual markets

We see a strong demand on the part of society in the form of tuition-paying households for education in the humanities, which goes against the demand from the state for training in applied disciplines.

resources. With most economic resources being monopolized and controlled by the highly centralized state, priority access to limited public funding can be claimed only by virtue of championing the “common good.” The character of Russia’s political regime predetermines conservative interpretations of the meaning of the common good. However, the structural situation that involves framing conflicts over buildings, budgets, or jobs in principled ideological disagreements is more fundamental and rooted in the monopolist modernism that has characterized Russia’s political project since 2000. The very existence of a single center for administering all resources makes it rational and desirable to maintain firm control over them, while the resources themselves have value only inasmuch as they are traded internationally. This applies equally to Russian oil, gas, and scholarship. Securitization of the economic and intellectual markets

⁸⁶ “Kodeks Rossiiskoi Federatsii ob administrativnykh pravonarusheniakh’ ot 30.12.2001 N 195-FZ (red. ot 01.07.2021) (s izm. i dop., vstup. v silu s 01.09.2021)” [Code of the Russian Federation on administrative offences], of December 30, 2001, no. 195-FZ (updated on July 1, 2021, and September 1, 2021)], http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_34661/f385ab5d34de901b2e5f3d08ac0b454481377d6a/; “Ugolovnyi kodeks Rossiiskoi Federatsii’ ot 13.06.1996 N 63-FZ (red. ot 01.07.2021) (s izm. i dop., vstup. v silu s 22.08.2021)” [Criminal code of the Russian Federation of June 13, 1996, no. 63-FZ (updated on July 1, 2021, and August 22, 2021)], http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_10699/3f061fb01a04145dc7e07fe39a97509bd2da705f/; “Federal’nyi zakon ot 05.04.2021 N 59-FZ ‘O vnesenii izmenenii v stat’iu 354-1 Ugolovnogo kodeksa Rossiiskoi Federatsii’” [Federal law of April 5, 2021, no. 59-FZ “On amending article 354-1 of the Criminal code of the Russian Federation”], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202104050005?index=0&rangeSize=1>; “Federal’nyi zakon ot 05.04.2021 no. 85-FZ ‘O vnesenii izmenenii v Federal’nyi zakon ‘Ob obrazovanii v Rossiiskoi Federatsii,’” [Federal law of April 5, 2021, no. 85-FZ “On amending Federal law “On education in the Russian Federation”], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202104050036?index=3&rangeSize=1>.

⁸⁷ “Russia: End of the Road for Those Seeking to Exercise Their Right to Protest,” Amnesty International, August 12, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/08/russia-end-of-the-road-for-those-seeking-to-exercise-their-right-to-protest>.

helps preserve control over their proceeds, but autarky is the worst-case scenario for the beneficiaries of this system. Paradoxically, in the present situation of authoritarian control over monopolized markets, the neoliberal system of formal science metrics remains the best protection for scholars in the humanities. The decisively apolitical language of metrics allows them to prove the relevance of their studies and their own value to employers without entering the shaky grounds of public discourse.

In the long run, this defense mechanism, just as the academic system itself, is unsustainable and heading toward intellectual and social collapse, of which the humanities will be a part. The neoliberal academic reform is an attempt to impose a monopolist corporate culture, prioritizing a single and universal purpose and rigid criteria of productivity over the dynamic, multifaceted, and internally contentious academic sphere. The failure of Russia's 5-100-2020 program predicts the neoliberal system's failure as judged by its own standards. This will inevitably lead to the idea of dismantling the entire system of higher education as redundant or of, at least, significantly cutting its financing and skewing the allocated funds in favor of certain disciplines deemed "useful" to the funding institution—the government of the Russian Federation. This is what we are observing now.

Through the 2010s the share of state universities and colleges increased from 59 percent in 2010 to 68 percent in 2019 (from 61 percent to 72 percent counting the regional branches of large schools), consolidating the government's role as the main manager of student education and employer of instructors. Over the same period, government expenditure on higher education decreased from 0.8 percent of GDP in 2010 to 0.5 percent in 2019.⁸⁸ Shrinking resources necessitated the redistribution of funds and rearrangement of the academic sphere. Since Russian college education is still organized by departments with narrow disciplinary specializations, spending cuts take the form of explicit discrimination against certain departments and hence academic disciplines.

The sphere of the humanities is the least pricey of all—specialists in the humanities account for about 11 percent of all "researchers in the higher education sector" but only 5 percent of the total expenditure on research.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, humanities education has become a champion in terms of cutting the number of "budget students" (those who study for free because the state budget is paying for them) in state universities and colleges. Between 2011 and 2020 the share of humanities students who pay for their education increased from 46

⁸⁸ Bondarenko et al., *Indikatory obrazovaniia*, 139, 98.

⁸⁹ Ditkovskiy et al., *Science and Technology Indicators*, 224, 235.

percent to 66 percent. Compare this to the natural sciences where the share of paying students was about 10 percent in 2020, while in technical sciences this

In using human culture in all its diverse manifestations, past and present, as a medium for articulating competing ideas, the humanities produce the very possibilities for new social imagination and hence the politics of the future.

number was below 9 percent.⁹⁰

This is a remarkable and yet to be reflected upon situation, whereby we see a strong demand on the part of society in the form of tuition-paying households for education in the humanities, which goes against the demand from the state for training in applied disciplines.

It must be noted that in terms of the national educational space these numbers conceal further internal asymmetries among individual disciplines and among the bigger and smaller, central and regional universities. The constantly shrinking number of state scholarships for students fueled competition for them among universities, to the advantage of the more prestigious ones located in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In 2018 and 2019, respectively, these two cities together accounted for 27.3 percent and 27.2 percent of all state-sponsored student scholarships in the entire Russian Federation.⁹¹ However, in 2020 regional schools retaliated by lobbying the Ministry of Science and Higher Education to change the enrollment procedure. Its directive of August 21, 2020, essentially eliminated the two-tier system of application, which corresponded to early and regular decision. Now applicants have to assess their chances and make a single bid, either aiming at less prestigious schools where they have a better chance of being accepted or embracing the significant possibility of being rejected by a top school and being unable to apply to their second-choice university.⁹² Obviously, the prospective humanities students have to make tough choices. Many more of them decide to apply to their regional universities rather than trying their luck in Moscow.

⁹⁰ *Monitoring kachestva priema 2020* [Monitoring of the quality of admissions 2020] (Moscow: Higher School of Economics, n.d.), 23, https://ege.hse.ru/data/2020/10/27/1284792642/Презентация_2020.pdf.

⁹¹ *Monitoring kachestva priema*, 18.

⁹² “Prikaz Ministerstva nauki i vysshego obrazovaniia RF ot 21 avgusta 2020 g. N 1076 ‘Ob utverzhdenii Poriadka priema na obuchenie po obrazovatel’nym programmam vysshego obrazovaniia—programmam bakalavriata, programmam spetsialiteta, programmam magistratury’” [Order of the Ministry of science and higher education of the Russian Federation of August 21, 2020, no. 1076 “On approval of the Rules for admission to higher education programs—bachelor’s, specialist’s, and master’s programs], <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/74441661/>.

This development has contributed to the discrediting of the Unified State Exam (USE)—a standardized test used for college admissions in Russia since 2009. Viewed as part of the neoliberal approach to evaluating knowledge by some universal metrics, it has been a popular object of humanities scholars' ire for imposing standardized answers to complex problems.⁹³ At the same time, it has been fought against by more prestigious schools interested in a “holistic approach,” which in the stratified Russian society means the reproduction of social and cultural elites, regardless of their academic merit. The most vocal critic of the USE is the Moscow State University rector since 1992, Viktor Sadovnichiy, who has proudly declared his university to be “the forge of oligarchs.”⁹⁴ Before the introduction of the USE, admission to Russian universities was based on oral and written examinations that took place in situ: mostly for local applicants and often prioritizing nonacademic considerations. The USE led to a threefold increase in geographic mobility rates among high school graduates who come from small cities and towns to start college.⁹⁵ It also highlighted other problems, such as the minuscule number of universities with a good reputation in Russia (almost all of them in Moscow and St. Petersburg) and the disparity in quality of education between regional Russian universities and those in the two capitals. The abolition of USE or elimination of its comprehensive and mandatory character will not eradicate the above-mentioned disparities and will have devastating results for the humanities and higher education in general.⁹⁶ It will certainly result in the dissolution of the single educational space in the Russian Federation—which stretches from the Kaliningrad region on the shores of the Baltic Sea to the Kamchatka Peninsula on the Pacific Ocean—along with its territorial compartmentalization and class stratification.

The decline of the academic book market contributes to the erosion of the single academic space. Since 2013 the number of academic books published

⁹³ Elena Denisova-Schmidt and Elvira Leontyeva, “The Unified State Exam in Russia: Problems and Perspectives,” *International Higher Education* 76 (Summer 2014): 22–23.

⁹⁴ “Rektor MGU rezko protiv EGE” [MGU rector strongly against USE], Moscow State University, https://www.msu.ru/press/federalpress/rektor_mgu_rezko_protiv_ege.html; “Sadovnichii nazval MGU ‘kuznitsei oligarkhov’” [Sadovnichiy called MSU the “forge of oligarchs”], TASS, January 25, 2017, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/3971145>.

⁹⁵ Marco Francesconia, Fabián Slonimczyk, and AnnaYurkob, “Democratizing Access to Higher Education in Russia: The Consequences of the Unified State Exam Reform,” *European Economic Review* 117 (August 2019): 56–82.

⁹⁶ “Modeli EGE pochti po vsem uchebnym predmetam izmeniat s 2022 po 2024 god” [USE models for almost all academic subject to change between 2022 and 2024], *Izvestiia*, August 28, 2021, <https://iz.ru/1213856/2021-08-28/modeli-ege-po-vsem-uchebnym-predmetam-izmeniat-s-2022-po-2024-gody>.

annually has steadily decreased.⁹⁷ Another trend is even more troubling: the median print run for a monograph was 500 in 2008 but only 369 in 2017, which means that books have become much less accessible to readers.⁹⁸ Bibliographers explain this decline as the result of a lack of financial support for academic publishers by either grantmaking foundations or the government, as well as the inability of libraries to purchase books.⁹⁹ As a result, academic publications remain largely outside the book market in the most technical sense: as one's ability to get access to the necessary book regardless of one's location and the book's date of publication. Numerous titles published as recently as 2017 or 2018 are out of print, unavailable even in online stores and held by only few libraries. This makes them virtually nonexistent in the academic process. This void is partially compensated by the widespread circulation of electronic copies in open access, which is formally classified as internet piracy. Given a state of academic publishing that can hardly be characterized as a market with countrywide outreach generating profit, this practice has not necessarily been economically damaging to publishers and certainly has played an important role in sustaining and developing the sphere of humanities in Russia. It is clear, however, that this is only a temporary solution to the problem unless the copyright laws are radically changed, in Russia and globally.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has given a new boost and justification to distance learning. This format started modestly with Russian top universities offering MOOCs (massive open online courses) on various international platforms (Coursera, Uniweb, Hexlet) and then on the national platform Open Education.¹⁰⁰ The pandemic dramatically expanded online education. As recently as September 2, 2021, the minister of science and higher education declared the total shift to distance learning as undesirable because it lowers the quality of education.¹⁰¹ However, it is reasonable to expect the format of prerecorded lecture courses to proliferate in Russian universities in the future regardless of epidemics. The then rector of the Higher School of Economics predicted in

⁹⁷ V. V. Grigor'ev, ed., *Knizhnyi rynek Rossii: Sostoianie, tendentsii i perspektivy razvitiia* [Russia's book market: Status, trends, and prospects for development] (Moscow: Federal'noe agentstvo po pechatu i massovym kommunikatsiiam, 2020), 12.

⁹⁸ V. A. Tsvetkova, "Nauchnoe knigoizdanie v Rossii: Krizis ili smena paradigmy?" [Academic book publishing in Russia: Crisis or paradigm shift?], *Bibliotekovedenie: Russian Journal of Library Science* 67, no. 2 (2018): 129.

⁹⁹ Tsvetkova, "Nauchnoe knigoizdanie v Rossii," 131–32.

¹⁰⁰ <https://openedu.ru/>.

¹⁰¹ "Fal'kov iskluchil polnyi perekhod rossiiskikh vuzov na distantsionnoe obuchenie" [Fal'kov ruled out full switch of Russian universities to distance learning], *Izvestiia*, September 2, 2021, <https://iz.ru/1215941/2021-09-02/falkov-iskluchil-polnyi-perekhod-rossiiskikh-vuzov-na-distantsionnoe-obuchenie>.

December 2020 that 20 percent of university programs in Russia would take the form of online education by 2030.¹⁰² The reform of the 2010s was predicated on the neoliberal understanding of education as aimed at acquiring a formalized content of knowledge and “competencies,” and it shifted priorities “from the content to the results of schooling.”¹⁰³ Since every standard class regularly offered by a university pursues the same results every year, each repeated live offering of the course, in the neoliberal view, seems wasteful. The growing dearth of funds inevitably stimulates university administrators to offer more prerecorded online courses as capturing a high level of otherwise static knowledge on the topic.

These main trends reinforce each other and accelerate the decline of academic humanities in Russia. Quality education becomes more exclusive and inaccessible to most students on the basis of merit, which leads to the collapse of the faculty job market and unsustainability of professional standards, makes humanities even less valuable in the eyes of university administrators and less attractive to new students, and starts a new cycle of systemic degeneration.

Russia’s Path to the New Humanities

The starting point for any practical measures to improve the state of Russia’s humanities is democratization of the country and liberalization of its legislation. This is a matter not of one’s political preferences but of the very nature of this cultural sphere. However, political change alone is not enough, as Russia’s problems are caused in part by the same global challenges, which nobody yet has found a “silver bullet” to resolve: how to make mass education high quality yet inexpensive, how to address globalization without ranking universities and subjects, and what the alternative is to incorporate business logic in assessing the social value and relevance of the humanities. There are no readily available scenarios from which Russia can simply borrow to improve the plight of its own humanities.

Historically, humanities have played various social roles, each proving their social usefulness: they have helped define the social status of the true gentleman and lady, formed the canon of national culture and the core of national identity, helped elaborate and sustain ideologies, and formed critical thinking and

¹⁰² Mariia Nabirkina, “Bakalavr iz seti: K 2030 godu piataia chast’ vuzovskikh programm uidet v onlain” [Bachelor’s degree from the internet: By 2030 one fifth of university programs will be online], *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, no. 282, December 14, 2020, <https://rg.ru/2020/12/14/rektor-vshe-k-2030-godu-piataia-chast-vuzovskikh-programm-ujdet-v-onlajn.html>.

¹⁰³ Evgenii Sheval’, “Tsel’ obrazovaniia: Znaniia ili kompetentsii” [Purpose of education: Knowledge or competencies], *Troitskii variant*, no. 85, August 16, 2011, 6.

analysis. With their direct political relevance rapidly diminishing in the twenty-first century, humanities seem to have lost their *raison d'être* in modern society. This has been reflected in falling student enrollments, a shrinking job market, and growing public indifference. Incidentally, the culmination of these trends we are currently observing coincides with the most significant social crisis since the 1940s: unprecedented public polarization, the proliferation of moral panic, and the rise of aggressive populism. We believe that the fundamental social value of the humanities is clear and very important. In using human culture in all its diverse manifestations, past and present, as a medium for articulating competing ideas, the humanities produce the very possibilities for new social imagination and hence the politics of the future. The ever-changing society makes this process permanent, for even the greatest ideas elaborated in the past do not reflect new social circumstances and new sensibilities and people's priorities. Russia remains an integral part of the world; it, too, experiences the inflow of migration and growing complexity of society (e.g., the role of new sensibility, forms of sexuality, and gender roles). Humanities prepare society for encounters with difference in its contemporary variegated manifestations; therefore, remaining part of the world, not to mention claiming to be regional or global leader, necessitates not only the preservation of the humanities (which we observed in the case of ethno-territorial units of the Russian Federation) but their development and adaptation to new questions arising from society. The most abstract sphere of intellectual activity has the most direct practical consequences that we observe daily in the news. Without exposure to the humanities students do not understand the phenomenon of text—even if it is just a post on social media—and the concept of primary sources and their verification. Fake news, conspiracy theories, and polarization of the public sphere are natural and inevitable in a society that has deemed humanities redundant (due to their low moneymaking capacity). History, literature, philosophy, and arts play key roles in holding the society together by generating and circulating new meanings. The basic function of the humanities is to train students in critical thinking and textual analysis and cultivate their ability to understand, express ideas, and deal with complexity.

The most radical reform of the humanities in Russian history was undertaken in the wake of the 1917 Revolution, and it taught several important lessons. For the humanities to survive as a branch of human culture, it is essential to avoid being dominated by any single ideological strain, be it progressive or neoliberal. Likewise, eagerness to produce an immediate practical impact on the society, whether it is the elevation of the proletariat or the maximization of

corporate profits, is futile if it is not mediated by purely cultural mechanisms of professional creativity. And, as was already mentioned, inequality cannot be neutralized simply by abandoning complexity. For a complex social institution such as higher education or scholarship to be made both accessible and efficient, it needs to become even more complex, not less so. As in other areas, Stalin's counterrevolution in the academic sphere did not follow from a long-cherished secret plan. It was a response to the failure of the revolutionary project itself. (As a sidenote it should be added that those who claim that the Soviet project was just a totalitarian experiment simply devalue the life experience and many sacrifices of people who believed in their cause and worked hard to advance it. It is disheartening to observe how their original concepts and approaches are being appropriated by modern ideologues who refuse to even acknowledge the intellectual and political precedence of Soviet Marxist projects or distort their meaning.)

The most lasting legacy of the Soviet revolutionary project was its nationalization of the academic sphere and hence monopolization of control over it. "Public funding" may sound good in English, invoking social solidarity and responsibility, but in Russian it translates as "state funding," which is what it is: money raised from the society in a compulsory manner and redistributed single-handedly by state administrators. Even an academic body that monopolizes this role would exhibit certain intellectual priorities and biases. But when the government is put in charge of these tasks, its sole priority eventually becomes ensuring ideological conformity and political loyalty, as can be observed in the USSR or modern Russia.

By contrast, the most productive legacy of the post-Soviet transformation was the market of competitive, diversified academic grants of the 1990s–early 2000s. Its significance lies far beyond any economic theories: this system seemed to reflect and fit the competitive and contradictory nature of the humanities. An original contribution to the humanities aims at establishing its difference from other studies, not its compliance with established interpretations; its ultimate criterion of value is originality, not uncovering the ultimate truth. Contentious conversations and dialogues within the field result in the predominance of certain ideas, interpretations, and approaches—for a while. Accordingly, any centralized body conferring academic degrees, such as the Russian Higher Attestation Commission, or distributing funding, such as the Russian Ministry of Science and Higher Education, will discriminate against many otherwise legitimate projects. Hence the importance of a pluricentric system of funding, publishing, and academic promotion, all based on peer review, as the only way to allow

alternative views on the academic merit of individual projects and give individual scholars a chance to avoid the bias of the dominant academic or ideological fashion. What students and professors need in Russia is not the abolition of this market in the name of some abstract egalitarianism but the practical equality of opportunities to join it and access information. Centralization and coordination should concern not the sources of funding but the sources of information about the available financial and infrastructural support. An agency run by the state or an independent public agency is needed to provide easy access to the available opportunities. We envision such an agency as accommodating various specific circumstances and interests of potential grantees: those formally affiliated with academic institutions and independent scholars who otherwise meet formal professional standards and selection procedures. Equally important is the diversification of grantmaking bodies, public and private, foreign and domestic. Even public funds need to be distributed through several state foundations that are institutionally differentiated and specialized in different areas and tasks. They should be encouraged to join forces for particular projects as well as to act on their own. The ultimate goal is to create and support a diversified, competitive system of funding that matches the competitive diversity of the humanities as an academic field and a type of cultural activity. Awarded through peer review by scholars holding different views and sometimes exercising personal biases, grants from various foundations will maximize one's chances for support and minimize various considerations of academic politics.

The tax-exempt status of grants in Russia—viewed as a sign of institutional underdevelopment and a loophole in revenue collection—was abolished in the early 2000s. Even if it aimed at benefiting the state budget, it was a Pyrrhic victory. This measure contributed to the liquidation of many millions of dollars in annual investments in Russian culture by grantmaking foundations of all types. It seems disingenuous to demand that the government support culture financially and at the same time collect taxes from grants in this sphere. We believe that the sphere of humanities, which has essential albeit nonmonetary significance for the society, should be exempt from taxation. This move is even more logical from the neoliberal and business management point of view: if the humanities are as economically unproductive as it is argued, why tax contributions to this sphere? A diversified system of grants capable of processing many tens of thousands of applications annually could be a workable alternative to the necessarily monopolistic, one-size-fits-all neoliberal approach. Priority should be given to individual and team grants, including book subvention grants that will directly benefit academic publishing and libraries and deprive internet

piracy of its central role in dissemination of scholarship. The development of human capital through individual grants is the necessary prerequisite for institutional change.

This was demonstrated in Russia by the rise of the “project management” stage of diversified funding for academic institutions in partnership with government agencies. As a result of the sea change produced by large-scale support for individual scholar initiatives in the

1990s, new universities began to emerge at the turn of the millennium, and the established ones were about to reform. The government terminated this process for political reasons, but the practice also had systemic flaws. On the one hand, it almost obliterated the system of individual grants, which the management of grantmaking foundations saw as but a stage in their transformation efforts. In retrospect, it becomes clear that a system of grants to individuals is an important element supporting the very existence of the humanities in modern society and would be equally beneficial in countries with highly developed academic institutions. This system should function permanently, as it is a highly cost-efficient way of promoting creativity and countering institutional inertia. But on the other hand, the big-time institutional projects of the early 2000s tended to reproduce the old academic structure: apart from Smolny College acting as an outreach of Bard College (declared non grata by the Russian government in 2021), none of the new or reformed universities pursued explicitly the liberal arts model. Thus, they contributed to the rise of the neoliberal critique of students’ narrow specialization, especially four-year training in history, philosophy, or literary studies, which had no justification on the job market.

Liberal arts education is the only workable solution for accommodating the humanities in higher education and exposing most students to their influence. This is the only sustainable form for developing critical thinking and social imagination in students. It is also a structural prerequisite for developing new concepts and disciplines at the intersection of the established ones, as illustrated by the cases of gender studies and postcolonial theory. Despite the present breakneck transformation of the job market and replacement of certain occupations by artificial intelligence and computerized algorithms, one can

Liberal arts education is the only workable solution for accommodating the humanities in higher education and exposing most students to their influence. This is the only sustainable form for developing critical thinking and social imagination in students.

see that occupations requiring human interaction and mediation are stable and growing. This proves that education that provides an integrated understanding of human nature, culture, and society remains relevant.¹⁰⁴

Obviously, the liberal arts model would need to be tailored to fit the specifics of Russia and its historical circumstances. Truly accessible mass education requires adapting liberal arts from the scale of a small college to the nationwide system and integrating it with research tracks of education or incorporating it within research universities. This is a most challenging task that requires a comprehensive survey of existing precedents and the elaboration of several workable scenarios to be implemented simultaneously. As past attempts to reform Russian higher education have demonstrated, no single reform along a single program can be equally effective (if effective at all) for all types of universities and colleges across a vast country. Centralized institutional experimentation is too costly and inefficient. Local needs and the institutional and human capacity of individual universities should be taken into consideration during the pluricentric transformation spearheaded by large grantmaking foundations, government agencies, and corporate donors, as was the case in the early 2000s. Individual variations should still comply with a certain general framework and principles upheld by the federal government.

Accessible mass-scale higher education will need to rely on modern technologies more than traditional elite colleges do, not least because of the need to enhance the internationalization of education and provide access to foreign instructors and academic events. Teaching comparative and global topics in history and cultural studies can benefit tremendously from introducing online discussion groups between various universities linked in educational consortia.¹⁰⁵ But the wholesale move of seminar work and advising to online formats is a different matter. The social environment of learning and the interactive manner of teaching are the prices of such a shift. Crucially for the humanities, the online presentation of material and assessment of learning outcomes tend to remove the multiperspectivism and multidimensional approach, reproducing a modern version of the panopticon. Through their computer screens, individual students face centrally positioned universal knowledge, which does not allow to be questioned in horizontal dialogue among the learners.

Inasmuch as the neoliberal turn was a response to the challenge of mass education, its approach that uses universal quantifiable metrics for assessing the

¹⁰⁴ C. B. Frey and M. A. Osborne, “The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation?,” *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 114 (2017): 254–80.

¹⁰⁵ See one such successful experiment by the Global History Lab run by Princeton University and the consortium of universities, <https://ghl.princeton.edu/>.

student's knowledge and the faculty's efficiency cannot be simply discarded as reactionary. Following the epistemological premises of this report, we believe that the solution lies in diversifying these metrics rather than discarding them, acknowledging the equal value of very different and even incomparable factors as long as they serve particular goals in particular circumstances. A university department as a self-administering entity of peers should be able to set the criteria for assessing its members along several tracks, including teaching, research, and service. Obviously, the priorities in a research university will be different from those in a liberal arts college. The development of academic self-organization through self-assessment should lead to the introduction of the tenure system in Russian academe. In the current top-down, hierarchical system of administrative control, tenure is the ultimate prize for academic and civic political complicity, not the recognition of a candidate as a good citizen of the academic community and as a respected scholar by peers. The development of assessment criteria, including those used for conferring academic degrees, can be more productive if arranged through international, cross-cultural, and cross-disciplinary conversation about shared formal standards and formally acknowledged differences in the sphere of the humanities.

Similarly, it makes more sense to retain and develop the USE test as a metrics technology rather than to sabotage its comprehensive character. Presently, even the written section of the USE in history, for instance, requires a student to give the exposition of an established interpretation using "historically correct" concepts rather than to engage in independent analysis. Essentially, this section reproduces the old style of examinations in Russia, so much lamented by the USE's critics. Apparently, it is not the format of the exam that predetermines its character. Even the multiple-choice test, which is abhorred by the humanists, can be adjusted to involve critical thinking and analysis if the goal of studies in the humanities becomes understood differently. In our contemplation of the attempts to modernize Russia's humanities over the past century in this report, we have identified as part of the problem the paramount expectation that students need to memorize certain "snapshots" of particular cultural forms as the goal of their studies. It seems more productive to be teaching students to autonomously navigate culture as an ever-changing dynamic milieu that takes unfamiliar, novel forms not only in the present but also every time its past is revisited. For this, students need to understand the value of facts (the exact historical dates, terms, and names of writers and their protagonists) and how to look for them and check their credibility. But of no less importance is the ability to reconstruct cultural contexts, past and present, and hence understand and critically explain human actions and choices.

Postscript

Very rarely do people in the humanities have an opportunity to verify their analysis empirically and almost immediately. We completed this report in September 2021 and now, barely six months later, in mid-March 2022, we can observe the effect of the trends identified and outlined in our original text.

On February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin started a brutal war against Ukraine, substantiating his de facto declaration of war solely with wild historical speculations.¹⁰⁶ However outlandish, Putin's ranting resonates with the official historical narrative that has been forcefully imposed in Russia at least since the early 2010s. Based on methodological nationalism, the political ideal of converting the multicultural postimperial Russian Federation into a monocultural Russian nation-state, and colonial and orientalist notions of civilizational and political supremacy, this narrative has been upheld by many respectable historians and social scientists. It is this narrative that causes a significant part of Russians today to rally in support of the regime even if they question the war as such.¹⁰⁷

This is a direct result of the systemic denigration of the role of humanities in post-Soviet Russia coupled with the ideological censorship of the few remaining places of teaching and research in the field. The main problem is not even the proliferation of fantastic historical views but the general paralysis of critical thinking that has become so shockingly evident since the war began. The delicate balance between trends toward neoliberal globalization and autarkic isolationism has unequivocally shifted toward the latter. It was only a matter of time under the authoritarian regime before this shift would occur anyway. Today, we observe frantic attempts to dismantle the entire academic system based

¹⁰⁶ "Full text of Vladimir Putin's speech announcing 'special military operation' in Ukraine," ThePrint, February 22, 2022, <https://theprint.in/world/full-text-of-vladimir-putins-speech-announcing-special-military-operation-in-ukraine/845714/>. This declaration of war evolved from Putin's earlier historical oeuvres: Vladimir Putin, "The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II," *The National Interest*, June 18, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/vladimir-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982>; Vladimir Putin, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," President of Russia, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

¹⁰⁷ See counterfactual and morally offensive collective declarations by Russian university presidents, members of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Association of Anthropologists and Ethnologists of Russia, to name a few: <https://www.rsr-online.ru/news/2022-god/obrashchenie-rossiyskogo-soyuza-rektorov1/>; <https://scientificrussia.ru/articles/-28/>; https://aaer.co/?fbclid=IwAR3cgJeXjm-9sXiM3Eu6vHpMoWiqa7eJFPAL_yOJzcnyn-LOKNkLiVpukh.

on formal metrics and international indexing and to create ad hoc an insular “national science.”¹⁰⁸ These efforts will be spearheaded by former outsiders—people with no international contacts, publications, or even language proficiency. Judging by recent Facebook posts, former rabid opponents of formal metrics have changed their minds when faced with the new reality of a thoroughly ideological and nativist academe. Appealing to the imaginary Soviet precedent, the project of Russian autarkic national science 2.0 is no more sustainable than Russia’s would-be autarkic economy: even the Soviet model was never truly autarkic, and it still collapsed due to its insufficient global integration. The need to reform the humanities and restore their proper role in society will become blatantly obvious very soon, after Russia’s inevitable collapse.

Russia will learn its lesson the hard way, demonstrating to the entire world the political and ultimately economic costs of neoliberal contempt for the humanities as a “redundant archaism.” But even in its demise, Putin’s regime will leave a toxic legacy of methodological nationalism to Ukrainian or any other society that mobilizes against Russia’s aggression. In unreformed twentieth-century-style humanities, it is too easy to misread this conflict through familiar stereotypes, as the triumph of nationalist mobilization over imperial inefficiency. It takes a critical theory approach and new analytical language to recognize the role of multicultural hybridity behind Ukraine’s patriotic mobilization across ethnoconfessional divides, as well as the primacy of Russian ethnic nationalism in Putin’s political project. To serve society in the best possible way, humanities need to prioritize their function of critical thinking over their traditional predisposition to servicing the establishment and reproducing authoritative discourses.

¹⁰⁸ “Eksperty obsudili sozhdanie Natsional’noi sistemy otsenki rezul’tativnosti nauchnykh issledovaniy i razrabotok” [Experts discussed creation of the National system for evaluating efficiency of scientific research and development], Ministerstvo nauki i vysshego obrazovaniya Rossiiskoi Federatsii, March 11, 2022, https://minobrnauki.gov.ru/press-center/news/?ELEMENT_ID=48219.

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