

## Labor Studies in Russia. Soviet past and Russian present

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Labor research was carried out in the Soviet Union even when the very word “sociology” did not appear in the names of institutes and departments in the early 1960s. Apparently, the topic of labor remained central until the mid-1980s, when it was supplanted by the interest of researchers in perestroika. Soviet sociologists in the field of labor studies were mainly engaged in applied research commissioned by individual enterprises and organizations. Since the early 1960s, an important direction in their work has been “social planning”, which involves “the development and implementation of social development plans, first for labor collectives, and then for territories”. These plans implied “social development” not only of enterprises, but they also covered various spheres of life of the working population. Working for a customer for Soviet sociologists was in the order of things.

The main research methods were questionnaires and sometimes interviews. Participant observation was not used, even though sociologists sometimes spent a lot of time at the enterprise. Of course, there were exceptions. And the most striking example is the project of Andrei Alekseev, who, being a senior researcher at the Institute of Socio-Economic Problems of the USSR Academy of Sciences, got a job at the Leningrad Plant of Printing Machines (Lenpoligraphmash) as an adjuster of a coordinate turret press after “voluntary resignation from the Academy of Sciences” in January 1980 and worked there for eight years, carefully documenting his experience in letters and diaries. The case of Alekseev is almost the only example in the USSR not only of a long-term included study at an enterprise, but also of such a large-scale documented project. Many factory sociologists left no narrative traces of field work since the main task was to develop recommendations for the customer. Alekseev, on the other hand, did this extremely carefully (he wrote formally), and he published most of his notes and letters in the format of a 4-volume book called “Dramatic Sociology and Sociological Autoreflexion”.

Labor studies in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union lost its relevance along with the subject of research. In the 1990s, workers became the object of study to a greater extent of those researchers who were interested in protest movements. Further, the interest in the labor of workers on the part of researchers was irregular and was often satisfied through quantitative data, which, as in Soviet times, created a tangible distance.

Ethnography of work, where the method of participant observation is the key, is in fact the only methodology that allows you to look at the practice of labor (and not only) “from the inside” and get rid of the perspective “from above”. And more importantly, it is the only effective approach to study the “implicit” in the field of work and work: non-obvious skills of workers, ways of making decisions, control and autonomy, informal rules, etc. In a broad sense, ethnographic studies of work as a special methodological approach can be addressed to various forms and types of labor (including non-material ones). Nevertheless, the study of labor by the method of participant observation with long-term immersion in the studied environment has not become more popular since the time of Andrey Alekseev's research in Russia. Moreover, there was no domestic tradition of ethnographic studies of labor.

In Soviet sociology, participant observation in labor research was the exception rather than the rule for two reasons. First, by the mid-1970s, party leadership and factory management began to

limit factory sociologists in their ability to study the “reality” of the shop floor. Prior to this, participatory observation as a method of studying shop life from the inside was occasionally used by researchers. Sociologist V. B. Olshansky even talks about participant observation at a factory as a form of initiation into a profession. But it was not long and local enough. Secondly, as researchers note, Soviet sociologists were more eager not to learn something new about Soviet reality, but to change it in accordance with their ideological and expert ideas. In this case, sociological data become an illustration of expert theses and recommendations. Thirdly, Soviet sociology, in principle, adhered to a more positivist concept of research, relying on quantitative data, only in the 1980s were the first large-scale attempts to study factory labor by qualitative methods (for example, A. Alekseev, S. Belanovsky) made. But, as a rule, this happened on their own initiative and outside the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

In Russian social science, ethnographic labor research is not a popular way of collecting and analyzing data due to the lack of an appropriate tradition, as well as the lack of opportunities for conducting such research (researchers do not have time for long-term field work, there are no appropriate financial support programs, etc.).