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NEOLIBERAL ECONOMICS IN
THE EDUCATION
MODERNISATION REFORM OF
POST-SOVIET RUSSIA**

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MONEY VERSUS THE SOUL: NEOLIBERAL ECONOMICS IN THE EDUCATION MODERNISATION REFORM OF POST-SOVIET RUSSIA²

Through the examination of the concept of ‘commercial service’ the article explores the ideological underpinnings and cultural embeddings of the market economy in post-Soviet education modernisation reform vis-à-vis the makeup of indigenous Russian culture and pedagogy. While post-Soviet Russia’s educational sector has been extensively commercialised, the public attitude towards the new educational economics have remained largely antagonistic. By bringing together the economic and the ideological angles, I show how bottom-up resistance is maintained and normalised, triggering a policy backlash. The article probes the obstinate public resistance to the idea of education as a ‘commodity’ and exposes the cultural logic behind it. Drawing on discourse studies and policy borrowing frameworks, the analysis demonstrates how the market values of competitive individualism, material profit and entrepreneurship were left under-conceptualised in the official discourse and consequently rejected in the public discourse in favour of domestic values of egalitarianism, collegiality, moral education, and an orientation towards non-materialist values.

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Keywords: Russian education reform post-Soviet education, neoliberalism, education commercialisation.

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1. Background for research and problem statement

In one of her first public statements the newly appointed Russian Minister of Education Olga Vasilyeva announced that the concept of ‘educational service’ (*obrazovatel'taya ushuga*) has no place in Russian education: ‘Educational services must go. There can be no services in education³.’ The concept of educational service in the meaning of a paid-for educational activity, is a popular policy buzzword for the educational commercialisation that has taken place in the course of post-Soviet education modernisation reform in Russia. The rhetorical pushback against the idea of monetising education, coupled with resurgent calls from the political elite to return to a Soviet-era educational configuration, including the traditional system of student assessment and the system of moral upbringing (*vospitanie*), has quickly gained political and popular support.

The Minister’s statement presents a curious cultural paradox. On the one hand, Russian education has effectively been marketised and the notion of educational service institutionalised and legalised in educational laws. The radical economic changes of the post-Soviet period have *de facto* turned educational institutions into commercial enterprises (Smolin 2001) and institutionalised a shift from a supply-driven to a demand-driven model of educational provision (Bain 2003)⁴. The commercialisation of Russian education was to a great extent inspired by multinational organisations, primarily the World Bank and the OECD and transmitted through the Russian neoliberally-inclined political elite (Bray & Borevskaya 2001, Gounko & Smale 2007, Bain 2010, Minina 2016a, 2016b). Since the early 1990s, the multinationals aggressively advocated the strengthening of the economic function of education, and the elimination of transition-specific obstacles to a free educational market, while criticising the residues of a welfare state as having ‘major deficiencies in terms of supporting a market system’ (World Bank 1996: 123). Throughout the 2000s, the Russian government formally stipulated the establishment of market principles. At the core of the new paradigm lay the notion of education service and the associated concepts of ‘educational market,’ ‘commodity,’ ‘competition,’ and ‘consumer choice’. Russia’s new post-Soviet socio-economic realities, such as fee-paying programmes, private tutoring and paid electives, have effectively rendered intellectual capital a tangible economic service and altered the interrelation of Russia’s educational agents in terms of consumers and service providers (Smolin 2001, Smolin 2005, Bain 2003, Gounko & Smale 2007).

On the other hand, instead of a much-desired ‘climate of acceptance’ (World Bank 2001: 15), the market paradigm continues to face staunch cultural resistance twenty-five years into the economic reforms. The minister’s call to abolish the notion of educational service

³ <https://ria.ru/society/20160830/1475622923.html>

⁴ Starting with the 1992 Law on Education, legal foundation for institutional freedom in the management of funds and generation of revenues was institutionalised, and tuition charges and commercial activities in public institutions legalised. Educational institutions were allowed to set up joint ventures and invest in securities, use self-generating resources, carry over funds from one fiscal year to another and lease equipment and venue space. Educational institutions were encouraged to seek income from non-state sources and engage in entrepreneurial activities through various self-financing and self-sustainability mechanisms such as the creation of private schools and fee-paying programmes and the establishment of market-based teacher salaries and inter-school competition.

altogether echoes the broader bottom-up public resistance and exposes persevering ideological conflicts between the market economy and domestic structures of meaning. The concept of user-pays market service continues to be juxtaposed with the indigenous notions of *sluzhenie* (selfless service, philanthropy) and *vospitanie*. Oscillating between discontent and outright resistance, the public attitude toward post-Soviet new educational economics has been overwhelmingly negative (Kiselev 2003, Levada polls, Minina 2014). Policy-making debates in the State Duma continue to be heavily polarised between the reformers and the old guard, and mass media continues to frame the educational debate in terms of modernised versus Soviet. Over the last few years, the media framing of the issue has been shifting from preserving elements of Soviet system in the process of modernising to preserving the accomplishments of the modernisation reforms in transitioning to the preceding educational order. Not only has the societal debate failed to resolve its main points of contention, the bottom-up cultural resistance has trickled up into the political discourse, creating a reform backlash and legitimising a policy reversal as a viable option.

It is apparent that this paradox stems from a conflict between the tenets underlying welfare and the new neoliberal models of educational provision (Chubb & Moe 1990, Khrushcheva 2000, Olssen & Peters 2005, Harvey 2005, Gounko & Smale 2007, Eagleton-Pierce, 2016). In socio-cultural terms, the cradle-to-grave socialist socio-economic model treats education as a public good and presupposes the free-of-charge, state-guaranteed egalitarian distribution of education. In contrast, the neoliberal model views education as a private good, prioritises the economy over the state and emphasises individual ability to maximise resourcefulness through competition and entrepreneurship. In economic terms, the welfare model translates into heavy dependence on government funding with the state serving as the major resource provider. The neoliberal model, on the other hand, invariably implies institutional competition and user fees with minimal involvement of the state. From this perspective, the neoliberal view of educational market is antithetical to state guaranteed rights in education (Chubb & Moe 1990, Tooley 2008, Eagleton-Pierce 2016).

The overarching research question addressed in this study is what the cultural logic of resistance to the concept of educational service has been since its introduction. To unpack the primary research question I look at how the concept of educational service has been legitimised in official policy statements and laws, and how it has been culturally interpreted in the public discourse. Through a rigorous discursive analysis of the conflicting frames identified above at the official and public levels, and through a rich cultural exposé, this article unearths the persevering conflicts between the neoliberal and the traditional worldviews that are yet to be resolved within the Russian culture code. I conclude with a discussion of pathways between ideology, including neoliberal and Soviet, and culture, and draw implications for policy borrowing in the area of neoliberal modernisation in post-Soviet context and beyond.

Theory and methodology

The analysis intersects discourse studies and educational policy borrowing. In terms of

discourse studies, it draws on Ball's conceptualisation of policy as discourse (1994, 1998) and Fairclough's (1992, 2001) 'discourse-driven' social change. Both frameworks view education as an instrument in the 'formation of ideologies and collective beliefs which legitimate state power and underpin concepts of nationhood and national "character"' (Green 1990: 77). As such, educational systems are constantly re-modelled on the basis of new political and economic realities, serving to legitimate and reproduce their terms. Methodologically, discourses are constructed, mediated and interpreted through language-in-use and therefore it is possible to 'disarticulate' (Luke 1995: 20) the social meanings people make through the reconstruction of discourse formations from the everyday spoken and written texts which draw on them. A fine-grained textual analysis allows the identification of competing discourses in national policy texts and the tracing of policy paradigm shifts (Fairclough 1992, van Leeuwen 1995, Lemke 1995, Taylor 1997).

For the policy-borrowing framework, I adopt the proposition that the process of neoliberal globalisation goes hand in hand with culture-specific diversification, with the two processes reciprocally enhancing and undermining one another (Carter & O'Neil 1995, Ball 1998, Schriewer & Martinez, 2004, Lingard & Ozga 2006, Alasuutari & Qadir, 2014, Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). The discursive interaction between educational globalisation and indigenisation calls forth significant ideological tensions, triggering unexpected local responses and resulting in contradicting articulations of the global. The outcomes of policy borrowing lead to results that both concretise international models and preserve cross-national heterogeneity. Such powerful buzzwords as 'quality,' 'standardisation' and 'service' become empty vessels filled with culture-specific meaning (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014) and employed by educational stakeholders to their own political ends. As a result, policy reality is made up of not only authored texts with clear-cut meanings intended by policy-makers but also of constructed texts, i.e. 'possible variant and even incommensurable meanings made by the grassroots educational players' (Yanow 2000: 9). The persistent intractability of certain educational issues and bottom-up societal resistance are often rooted in contestations over symbolic meanings made by the interpretative community in a particular policy space.

Covering the period from 1991 to 2016, the corpus comprises five sets of data collected via field, library, and internet research throughout 2014-2016:

- 1) a comprehensive compilation of state law, official government statements, and transcripts of parliamentary hearings in Russia's State Duma;
- 2) sociological data produced by polling agencies;
- 3) public statements, publications, and round-table discussions produced by professional pedagogical associations;
- 4) national and regional media coverage of educational issues; and
- 5) public discussions online, on the radio, and on TV⁵.

⁵ The official statements and transcripts are publicly available on Russian government websites, such as mon.gov.ru, standart.edu.ru, archive.kremlin.ru and zakonoproekt2011.ru. Sociological and polling data includes research produced by such agencies as Russia's Independent Polling and Sociological Research Agency Levada-Center (levada.ru), Public Opinion Foundation (fom.ru), Electronic Monitor for the Development of Education (kpmo.ru) and others. Professional pedagogical publications included such popular national outlets as Uchitel'skaya Gazeta (The Teachers' Gazette), Pedsovet (Pedagogical Council), Pervoe Sentiabria (September the First) Zavuch Info (Headmaster's Information

I draw on these sources as discursive instances of wider social practices to identify the migration route of neoliberal ideas from global → official → public and to highlight the points of tension between the global and the local. Together, these documents constitute a multilateral source of data about the process of policy borrowing, the formation of policy language, and the emergence of ideological contestation within broader traditional and modernisation discourses.

2. The new economic order: representation of educational service in the official discourse

The representation of educational service in the official discourse is characterised by a contradictory combination of neoliberal and domestic ideas, and a conceptual ambiguity as to the boundaries between free and paid-for education. Education as a commercial service is both the process of learning in general and a one-off commercial education-related activity – a usage that obscures the legislative and constitutional boundaries between the concepts. Contrary to the government's continued declarations of its commitment to free education, the official discourse of the reform appears to have been 'colonised' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999) by the concept of commercial educational service. Instead of demarking the free and the user-pays, the official discourse perceives free education and the commercialised nature of education as two self-evident goals of the modernisation reform. In his 2007 annual address to the State Duma, Minister of Education Fursenko stated,

First off, I will outline the key points of the modernisation programme that I will be discussing in my presentation. These are the state provision of free-of-charge secondary education, improving the quality of professional education and increasing the marketability educational services (mon.gov.ru).

The official narrative is silent as to how the new educational market relates to the constitutional commitment to free education, and whether any kind of educational service, even fully subsidised by the state, fits the commercial paradigm. I illustrate this argument with an analysis of post-Soviet educational legislation. The 1992 Law on Education unambiguously employs the term 'educational service' in the context of legalising extra-curricular, paid-for educational activities (as stipulated in articles 13, 14, 26 and 27). Legal documents of the mid-2000s use the two terms interchangeably and as contextual synonyms. Educational service is employed in the sense of both a one-off commercial transaction and the daily routine of teaching/learning or the process of

Bulletin) and Uchitelskii Portal (Teachers' Portal). National media was represented by such outlets as Echo Moskvy (Moscow Echo radio broadcaster), Pust' Govoriat! (Let Them talk!, national talk-show on Russian's Channel 1), as well as dozens of national newspapers, including Argumenti i Fakti, Moscow News, Izvestia, and Nezavisimaa Gazeta. Online public discussions are available on various platforms, including Net Reforme Obrazovania! (National movement No to Education Reform! netreforme.org), state-initiated open public discussions of the 2010 Law on Education (zakonoproekt2011.ru), various parent's portals (kid.ru, ya-roditel.ru, and ped-kopilka.ru) as well as official government websites (kremlin.ru, mon.gov.ru, ege.ru, council.gov.ru, and blog.da-medvedev.ru). All translations from the Russian by the author.

education in general. Consider, for example, the following statements from 2002 Concept for Modernisation:

The government is returning to education as a quality guarantor of educational services.

Educational institutions are liable to provide extra educational services.

In the first statement, ‘educational service’ denotes education in general, while in the second statement it means specifically a user-pays tutoring session. Russia’s current (2013) law on education does not provide a definition of ‘educational service,’ even though all other major reform umbrella terms, including ‘educational standard,’ and ‘educational quality’ are defined. An attempt at providing a formal definition was made in the 2010 Draft Law:

Educational service is a service provided by an educational institution or an individual entrepreneur in designing and implementing educational activities as a result of which the learner completes an educational programme or an individual modules, which *does not incur conferral of a document allowing to continue education at the next level or start a professional career* [emphasis added].

The final specification in this definition effectively excludes all formal degrees, state or privately issued, by secondary schools or universities, limiting the application of the term to additional, i.e. extra-curricular, private and user-pays services, as initially specified in the 1992 Law. A separate definition was provided in the 2010 Draft Law for *paid* educational services (*platnie obrazovatelnie uslugi*) defined as ‘educational services that are subject to a fee (*vozmezdnoi*) and paid for by individuals or judicial entities.’ Thus, according to the 2010 Draft Law, educational service is neither a privately offered user-pays activity nor any of the degree programmes offered within the framework of Russian system of education as defined by the Constitution – a definition that was scrapped in the final revision. In the absence of a legislative definition educational laws and policy documents continue to employ the terms interchangeably. Legislatively, the Law on Education operates with the generic definition of ‘state service’ provided in the 2010 federal law on the provision of state federal services, where a state service is defined as ‘activity aimed at administering the functions of federal executive authorities [...], as well as local government agencies [...] and carried out at the suppliant’s request’ (Article 2). The legislative use of the term assumes conceptual equivalence service sectors (‘medical services,’ ‘housing services,’ and ‘educational service’), suggesting a conceptual equivalence between the concepts of ‘service,’ ‘user-pays service,’ and ‘state-guaranteed/state-subsidised provision’.

Not only are the concepts of ‘education’ and ‘educational service’ interchangeable, educational service is framed as a contemporary or modernised term for education that better reflects new educational realities. Consider, for example, an exchange between Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and a member of the public at a 2007 press conference on education reform:

Question: Dmitry Anatolievich, I would like to know your opinion on the quality of education in higher education institutions offering distance education programmes.

Answer: You must be talking about the quality of education, or, *in contemporary terms, about the quality of educational services* [emphasis added] provided by higher education institutions (Transcript of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's Press Conference, 2007, mon.gov.ru).

The commercial foundation of new relationships between educational stakeholders is consistently implied, but not directly stated. The policy implications of such rhetoric are controversial. The conceptual convergence of 'education' and 'educational service' is consistent with the openly declared agenda for commercialising the bulk of educational provision. On the other hand, such blatant conceptual substitution in pivotal educational policy documents presents a slippery slope in legal terms as being essentially antithetical to the constitutional right to free education.

At the broader rhetorical level, the official discourse claims that the welfare state had been historically exhausted and that a new 'market of educational services' (*rynok obrazovatel'nykh uslug*) had emerged. The aim of the modernisation reform has been positioned as catching up with the existing economic *status quo*. Educational institutions were to be redesigned to provide customer satisfaction through quality services, while maximising economic returns. Competition between individuals in the new market of educational services would incentivise students to succeed, as it induced creativity, self-reliance, initiative and individualism. Competitive pressures were said to equally motivate schools, individual teachers and students to improve. The role of the state was portrayed as facilitating the completion of the commercialisation process that was already taking place, and empowering consumers to make informed, market-led choices. Choice and competition in the education market were presented as forces that help identify 'quality' students and institutions worthy of further investment: 'The developments of the past few years have proven that the state's strategy of putting stakes on the strongest has paid back a 100%.' (Minister Fursenko, 2009, mon.gov.ru).

Students are portrayed in opposition to the Soviet-era 'passive knowledge receivers' and as rational and self-actualising agents able to 'identify their professional aspiration and design their educational trajectories accordingly in order to achieve personal and economic fulfilment' (mon.gov.ru). Students were reconceptualised as self-reliant and economically savvy agents governed by professional ambition. As consumers, they were said to be responsible for the market-led choices they make. Such representation of the student was marked by 'modern' words, such as entrepreneurial (*predpriimchivii*), socially mobile (*mobilnii*), dynamic (*dinamichnii*), cooperative (*sposobnii k sotrudnichestvu*), and enterprising (*initsiativnii*). The Modernisation Concept for 2010 (15), for example, describes a customer of educational service in the following way: 'The changing society needs contemporary, educated, ethical (*nравstvennie*), entrepreneurial people who are able to make independent decisions when faced with a variety of choices and to foresee potential consequences, who are able to cooperate, who are mobile,

dynamic, constructive and who have a developed sense of responsibility for the well-being of their country.’

The official discourse navigated various educational issues by switching back and forth between representations of the student as a sovereign customer or a passive receiver of knowledge, focusing on one or the other depending on the immediate context. The personal qualities associated with traditional social welfare values, such as civic consciousness, spirituality, personal responsibility for others and love of the motherland, are infused with those associated with neoliberal ones, including enterprise, self-reliance, self-interest and employability. The two blocks of qualities often appear in two distinct clusters separated by ‘as well as,’ as in the example from the Concept 2010 below:

As our educational priority, moral upbringing [*vospitanie*] must become an organic part of the learning process integrated into the general course of education. The principal objective of moral upbringing [*vospitanie*] is the formation of civic consciousness, judicial awareness, spirituality and cultured-ness; as well as enterprise (*initsiativnost*’), self-reliance, tolerance, socialisation skills and adaptability in the labour market.

As in the example above, claims of the superiority of the moral norms of *vospitanie* with its emphasis on non-material values go hand in hand with calls to create instrumentally rational, economically productive and competitive members of society. The neoliberal ideal of a harmonious, self-regulating educational market is not concerned with either potential ideological tensions or the gap between textbook neoliberalism and dismal educational realities. Instead, competition and choice are presented as organic solutions for a demand-driven, high quality educational service.

3. Public perception of new educational economics: selfless servicing versus paid-for service

The public has emphatically rejected the new educational economics over the twenty-five years of commercialisation reform. In the eyes of a provincial teacher, State Duma deputy or middle-class parent, education is uncompromisingly neither a market service, nor a commodity. The term educational service continues to be castigated as morally wrong and culturally unacceptable. I begin unpacking the logic of resistance with an extended quote from a 2005 radio call-in show Parents’ Meeting (*Roditel’skoie Sobranie*) hosted by a national radio station ‘Moscow’s Echo’ (*Echo Moskvy*). The popular broadcast programme brought together representatives of distinctly different social domains. Among them Evgenii Bunimovich, a poet and a well-known pedagogue; Alexei Chernyshev, Deputy Head of the State Duma Committee for Education and Science; Ksenia Larina, former actress and popular journalist covering educational issues and a number of call-in members of the public:

Larina: Before proceeding to the discussion, let us first clarify the terminology. *Is education a service market or a national asset?* [emphasis added throughout] Evgenii Abramovich, I would like to ask you first: *is*

this a contradiction?

Bunimovich: *In fact, it is a contradiction.* And I think it's good that we've finally formulated the question in this way [...]. We've been discussing educational standards, the unified state examination and what-have-you, while this whole time the critical question is that of a particular model [of educational provision]. And if education is to be a service market, as has been imposed on us recently, then [the model] is that of a grocery store.

Larina: *Cash for product.*

Bunimovich: *Cash for product.* Pay the bill and check the quality of the product. And this model is possible elsewhere, but it *is absolutely unfit for our realities and our traditions.*

[...]

Chernyshev: A service market or a national project [...]. We've been looking for a national idea and turned it into a national project, education being one of them. But one word doesn't change the essence. Take [the concept of] educational service. I come to the barber and receive a service – a haircut. Is this really the same as educational service, a concept that's being imposed on the system? *There is a huge difference between the two concepts, it's not the same at all. Because education is an internal human need to receive knowledge and apply it creatively.*

[...]

Bunimovich: For me, the key word of this polemic discussion is 'educational service.' Although this ideology is being promoted at the government level I am no supporter of the concept. *I am no supporter of the concept of school being a shop where one pays a certain amount to get a certain amount of sausage of a certain quality. It doesn't matter who pays – you, the municipality or someone else. Education just doesn't work this way. And not just in Russia or anywhere. The quality of education does not improve with the introduction of the crude model of educational service.*

[...]

Call-in parent: I would like to agree – one cannot compare education with an assortment of sausage of different quality. How can one can advocate for [a market model] where one chooses between Zhiguli and Mercedes or a particular type of sausage or cheese? *We are talking about the human soul here, how can one not understand this?*

Larina: *Yes, the human soul.*

In declaring that culture and the market of customer services are mutually contradictory, all speakers agree that the proposed market model (cash for product) is culturally unsuitable. All discussants employ the notion of the soul, which evokes resistance to materialism and modernity. Throughout the discussion, all express their depreciative attitude to the economic reform by making an analogy with primitive or crude transactions, such as getting a haircut. All discussants see money as a non-value and contrast it with *vospitanie*, which is seen as the spiritual basis of indigenous pedagogy ('an internal human need to receive knowledge and apply it creatively'). With the cultural

meanings tightly condensed in the language, the idea that there is no common ground between the material and the spiritual is unarticulated, but implied as self-evident. Below I further delve into these discursive contradictions through the analysis of three major points of contention identified in the societal debate: education versus commercial services, commerce versus *vospitanie*, and *usluga* versus *sluzhenie*. I will illustrate the workings of these oppositions through the analysis of the extensive societal debate following the institutionalisation of the concept educational service in the 2010 draft law ‘On Education.’⁶ The analysis also draws on data from various social domains, including parliamentary hearings, online discussions of the 2010 draft law, public statements from the pedagogical community and educational radio call-in programmes

3.1. Education versus commercial services sector

In arguing the case against the introduction of educational service into legislation, opponents describe the concept as foreign and incommensurable with the ethos of Russian education:

‘Education is not part of the services sector. [...] Market service is not the main component of educational sphere.’ (Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2016).

‘Where are the boundaries between education as public good and education as a commercial service?’ (Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2016).

‘I am convinced that in assessing the new law [on education] we need to remember that education is not a service. As soon as this paradigm, this ideologeme, is forced upon us, education is bound to become a commercial service. That, in its turn, would immediately entail financial and other [inappropriate] components. Education - and I can not stress this strongly enough - is not just about the transmission of knowledge but is about *vospitanie* and the cultural upbringing that is crucial for the succession of generations.’ (Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2010).

‘As soon as education is conceptualised as a commercial service, the fare meter is turned on. We need to understand that national education is by no means a market service. It is the hearth of culture. Although the concept of service is being pushed through the legislation, I fully support Sergey Mikhailovich in that we need to separate the concepts [of education and market]. Education cannot be the same as dental services, like pulling out a tooth.’ (Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2010)

An analysis of parliamentary transcripts in the State Duma shows that since the legalisation of the notion of ‘educational service’ the structure of parliamentary debate has been virtually unchanged: a confusion over the conceptual and legislative basis of the term and negation of the concept on the grounds of its *commercial* character (‘entails

⁶ I draw on the discussion around 2010 draft law on education as an illustrative instance of resurgence of popular debate following the government’s attempt to strengthen the commercial underpinning of “educational service.”

financial components,' 'the fare metre is turned on').

Public and professional pedagogic discussions reveal a similar logic of resistance. The vast majority of public commentary to the 2010 draft law interprets the concept 'educational service' as 'reductionist,' 'illegitimate,' and 'culturally incommensurate' (zakonoproekt2012.ru). One commentator contends, 'To reduce the function of a state educational institution to provide an educational 'service' is just plain wrong. Are our cultural institutions about 'providing a service'? Is it not about preserving and producing cultural values? Is a school now all about providing educational services rather than bringing up (*vospityvat*) citizens and human beings?' (zakonoproekt2012.ru)

Another commentator states, 'The term 'provision of state services' should be changed to 'fulfilment of duties by the state.' The state is not a commercial firm and the talk of 'services' has no legitimate place in this discussion. Any talk of 'state services' (*gosusluga*) is absolutely illegitimate.' (zakonoproekt2012.ru)

Another writes, 'The term 'educational service' [...] is extremely disconcerting. I suggest that the terms educational service and market of educational services be completely abandoned. All market terminology in the text of the law 'On Education' would mean a gross error of reductionism.' (zakonoproekt2012.ru)

In protesting against the concept, popular logic criticises the forceful imposition of the market paradigm on the education system and the government's hidden agenda to dismantle free-of-charge education through a 'crude' and 'mechanistic' substitution of 'education' with 'educational service.'

The attitude of the pedagogical community is epitomised in the 2010 open letter from the all-Russia teachers' community to the President of the Russian Federation. Endorsed by leading Russian pedagogues, the letter alternates between bitter acknowledgements of the inevitability of the commercialisation reform and a defiant apologia for what teachers believe to be bygone fundamentals of national education. The market economy terminology is marked throughout the text by inverted commas signifying the irony the authors see in its pertinence to the educational discourse:

According to the changes introduced to the State fiscal code, the school, as a budgetary institution, will now be financed according to the state order. The school has effectively become a commercial organisation that provides 'services' to the population. The concept of 'learning' has thus been replaced with the concept of 'educational service.' Parents have been turned into clients of this 'service' and school directors have become 'effective managers.' Pedagogical objectives have receded to the background and economic utility has become the cornerstone of education. National education, as we see it, is the nations' activity aimed at exploring and multiplying the riches of knowledge and experience of the past generations. This activity is independent of the economic sphere. By no means can education be regarded as a 'commodity' or a 'service' put out

for sale in the market.’

Another widely circulated public statement - the resolution of the 2011 All Russia’s Teachers’ Forum perceives of the new relationship between education and the market as a dehumanised ‘give-take’ transaction:

The participants of the forum propose that the pedagogically pernicious ideology of ‘educational service’ be renounced. In the course of their duty teachers do not provide any services to the population. The educational process is a complex partnership that requires mutual cooperation and responsibility from all participants. There can be no market ‘give-take’ principle applied to our children. The reference point for contemporary Russian education, as laid down in our national traditions, should be a familial, and not a market, model. Education is a non-market social good to which all citizens of our country are equally entitled to.

3.2. Commerce versus vospitanie

In addition to opposing the notion of education as a commodity, the cultural logic of resistance draws on the counterposition between *vospitanie* and commerce. *Vospitanie*, a uniquely Russian concept (Halstead 2006, Muckle 2003) variously translated as ‘moral upbringing,’ ‘personality development’ or ‘character education,’ deals with the development of Russian values and attitudes in the process of academic learning⁷. What makes *vospitanie* a distinctly Russian concept is the organic fusion of elements that in other cultures are considered independent or even conflicting: factual knowledge, skill formation, personal morality, patriotism and civic ethics (Alexander 2000).

In antithesising *vospitanie* and commerce, a typical line of reasoning begins with an evocation of cultural morals and value orientations, before setting them into a sharp contrast to a commodified package of impersonal rationalistic skills. Consider, for example, a statement by the President of The Russian Academy of Education Nikolai Nikandrov:

When education is governed by the market, the ‘provision of educational services’ comes to the forefront. Centuries ago, Dmitry Ivanovich Mendeleev wrote that knowledge without *vospitanie* is a sword in the hands of a madman. Paradoxically, the contemporary school is paying exceptionally little attention to *vospitanie*. In the meantime, we’re living under the 1996 Law on Education which defines education as ‘*vospitanie* as well as schooling conducted in the interest of an individual, society and the state.’ Mind you, *vospitanie* comes first! (Interview to Education and Work for Those who Want to Learn, 2010, pedsovet.org).

⁷ Halstead (2006: 424), for example, defines it as ‘a systematic attempt to mould the attitudes and comprehensive world view of children and to inculcate in them certain predetermined values and behaviour patterns (...).’ Long (1984: 470) defines the goals of *vospitanie* as raising ‘honest, truthful human beings who are helpful to others and who must work hard in school to develop intellectual, aesthetic, and physical abilities – that is, to develop a comprehensive, harmonious personality.’

A statement by Yurii Solonin, the Head of the Council of the Russian Federation on Education and Science, draws on similar rationale:

I have always upheld and will until the end of my life continue to uphold the view of education as a special sphere of human activity that is defined by value orientations. Without cultural values education becomes a useless activity and begins to fall apart. [...] Unfortunately today education is increasingly being treated as a service. The problem is that there is indeed a tendency in contemporary education that can be called ‘provision of services’: the child needs to learn to write and count, acquire a certain package of skills. But Russian education is not just 10-16 stages of formal schooling but a system of *vospitanie*. We live in the world of the market, so hideous that everything becomes a commodity, whether it’s the love of woman, education or art. All of these things have now allegedly become a commercial service. I, however, will never be able to accept this. As a professional, I believe the concept is out of sync with the system of education. (Interview to *The Teachers’ Gazette*, March 2011)

Devoid of any formerly attached communist bias, *vospitanie* is conceptualised in the public discourse in spiritual, rather than ideological terms: ‘the eternal,’ ‘the good,’ ‘the formative,’ ‘the creative,’ ‘the spiritual,’ with the core component being ‘pertaining to the human soul.’

The backbone of the conceptual opposition, as it emerges from the public debate on *vospitanie*, juxtaposes the spiritual against the material. In maintaining this opposition, the public discourse is categorical in uncoupling the alliance of traditional and neoliberal sets of personal values attempted in the official discourse.

The following statement by the President of the Russian Academy of Sciences Nikolai Nikandrov exemplifies the take-it-or-leave-it public stance:

The educational system can bring up two different types of person. The first is the adoptive type, one that does not possess any kind of an established set of moral and ethical values, one that exists inclusively in the paradigm of personal success and well-being and one that does not associate their deeds with the interests of the society and those around them. He or she is successful in the contemporary, genealogically Western consumer society. In Russia, however, the system of education is purposefully values-oriented [...]. It is not aimed at forming such ‘random’ person [...]. Rather, it is aimed at creating [the second type of] a person with a certain set of personal qualities brought up within the humanistic tradition. An inherent characteristic of such a person is the desire to be a ‘good person,’ possess high moral and ethical standards, be ready for self-sacrifice in the interest of others and for self-restraint when it comes to their personal interests. In other words, we want to bring up a person who

leans toward the pole of the good rather than the pole of the evil. (Interview to Agency for the Implementation of Socio-political Initiatives, arspi.ru)

Traditional and neoliberal values are counterposed throughout the statement above. One is ‘good,’ value-oriented and representing positive national values, spiritual and orderly, while another is value-neutral, representing moral *laissez-faire*, materialism-oriented, ego-centric and disorderly. Teachers and parents also tend to frame the debate in ‘either/or’ terms. One parent, for example, asks,

Today, a certain contradiction has emerged [between the market and pedagogy]. I would like to hear the opinion of the Ministry [of Education] on the following issue. What kind of an end product do we want? Should it be a graduate with a high market value and high applicability, a person who is able to sell themselves in the market? Or should it be a person who appreciates the value of education as such? (Q&A with Minister Fursenko, mon.gov.ru)

Similarly, the Russian teachers’ Open Letter to the President quoted earlier maintains that the two are completely independent of each other. The either/or nature of the relationship between the two is evident in recurring titles of journal articles and TV/radio talk shows, such as ‘Education: service market or value system?’ (‘Parents’ Meeting’ radio show, Moscow’s Echo March, 2011), ‘Are we providing services or planting the seeds of the eternal?’ (The Teachers’ Gazette, 2011).

3.3 Usluga (service) versus sluzhenie (selfless serving)

The spiritual/material dichotomy strongly manifests itself in the language of the debate, particularly through a continued lexico-thematic opposition of two derivatives of a shared root *sluzhit* (‘to serve’): *usluga* in the sense of ‘paid-for service’ or ‘petty favour’ and *sluzhenie* in the sense of ‘philanthropical, selfless serving.’ In the context of the educational debate *usluga*, with its strongly pejorative or judgmental undertone, has come to epitomise the materialistic, petty, practical, rationalistic and mundane. In contrast, *sluzhenie* is associated with the virtuous, moral and imperishable. I will illustrate this perceived dichotomy with two examples from the public discourse. The first is a widely circulated statement by a school teacher published in the Teachers’ Gazette entitled ‘I don’t want to be a tutor!’ (*Ne hochu byt’ tiutorom!*):

The tragedy of educational innovations is the destruction of the image of the teacher. The contemporary pedagogue, morally exhausted and strangled by petty bureaucracy, will never again inspire such lines as ‘Teacher, let us humbly kneel before your name.’ New educational policies have renamed us from enlighteners (*prosvetiteli*) to degree-holders (*obrazovantsy*), public sector employees (*biudzhetniki*) and scroungers (*nakhlebnyki*). We are not longer planting the seeds of ‘the wise, the kind and the eternal.’ We are now providing educational services [...] We are

now service (*usluzhivii*) people. Deliver and get paid. If the consumer is satisfied - get paid more. The formal bureaucratic logic might look spotless but teachers are no longer figures of authority and respect. Their role as educators (*vospitateli*) has been destroyed. (The Teachers' Gazette, 2011)

Another example is the polemic exchange from the October 2012 issue of the popular Big City magazine (*Bolshoi Gorod*), which ran a column entitled 'Two-headed education monster: *usluga* or *sluzhenie*?' In counterposing the two terms, the paper distinguished between the official and the alternative interpretations of education. The former was defined as a 'commercial service' (*usluga*) and the latter as a 'selfless service' (*sluzhenie*) and a 'long-term investment of the state into human capital.' To illustrate the opposing views, the editors interviewed two well-known educational specialists - Efim Rachevsky, representing the Ministry of Education, and Oleg Smolin, an opposition Duma deputy:

Efim Rachevsky (proponent of the reform): Popular etymology no longer discerns the cognate origin of the two words [*usluga* and *sluzhenie*]. Indeed, there is not much semantic difference except for the fact that *sluzhenie* carries an unnecessary pompous connotation. However, a lot of people still see *usluga* as something ignoble. While *usluga* is precisely what education is about – a service that is financed by the state. This is the state's way to serve its people.

Oleg Smolin (opponent of the reform): A lot of my Duma colleagues are trying to wash their hands clean of the ideology of educational service. The [euphemistic] use of the term in the official policy is perfectly justified – one could never call education a 'commodity' or a 'job to be done.' Unlike customer service, education is a two-way process. In the Russian language the word *usluga* carries deeply negative connotations. Just think of Chatsky's 'I'd love to serve. Servility is what I hate' [*Sluzhit' by rad – prisluzhivatsia toshno*]. Russian teachers are no fans of this language; it is associated with dehumanisation and moral decay. We want the educational process to be alive, not dead.

Here, Smolin evokes public etymology by quoting a popular phrase from Aleksandr Griboedov's play 'Woe from Wit.' Central to the dramatic conflict of the play, the *usluga* - *sluzhenie* opposition represents the main character's noble struggle for the national idea (*sluzhenie*) against petty servility (*usluga*), the latter being associated with hypocrisy, moral decay and slavish worship of materialistic pursuits. Note that the rhetoric of the proponent is based on evoking, albeit through negation, the popular frame ('*usluga* is not necessarily ignoble'). This rhetorical move - argumentation *ex contrario*, through negation of common frames of reference - is commonly employed by the government in an attempt to re-frame the overwhelmingly negative public narrative. Proponents of reform often argue that education service is a normal, rather than bad term and that the concept behind the term is neutral, rather than degrading. Consider a statement by Anatolii Gasprzhak, then-Rector of Moscow Higher School of Social and Economic

Science and one of the masterminds of the neoliberal reform:

If we are selling our work, the knowledge of the subject, the skill to teach the subject, then we are vendors of knowledge and *there is nothing degrading about it*. In fact, free education does not exist anywhere in the world. We are paying taxes and, thus, are also paying for education. *Since the Soviet times we have been ashamed of such words as 'bureaucrat,' 'officiary,' 'service.'* Meanwhile, these are absolutely normal words. I don't want teachers to love their pupils, I want them to teach them professionally. I want them to work as professionals who love their job and not their pupils. [...] Having committed to implement educational standards, teachers agree to receive a certain payment for the work they do. *I insist that the word 'service' is not a bad word, it's a good word.* (*The Teachers' Gazette*, 2011)

Whilst the proponents' rhetoric struggles to portray *usluga* as a positive cultural value, the public discourse indulges in witticisms and wordplays based on the common lexical root of *usluga* and *sluzhenie*. One of the most popular jokes, for example, defines educational service as *medvezhia usluga* (literally 'a bear's service,' from Jean De La Fontaine's 'The Bear and the Gardener'), a set expression that denotes an ill-considered act with unfortunate results carried out of best intentions.

In discrediting the concept of educational service, the public, pedagogic and policy-making debate appears to be remarkably homogenous. Within the common structure of the argument, the concept *vospitanie* is brought up as a primary function of education and subsequently contrasted with the idea of money and fiscal relations. The notion of education as a commercial service subsidised by the state is trivialised and ridiculed through comparison to making a purchase at a grocery store, having a tooth pulled out at the dentist's or getting a haircut at the barber's. The actual financial burden associated with the commercialisation of education appears at the far periphery of the debate. While complaints about the rising cost of education are vocal in other strands of the reform debate, the discussion on 'educational service' focuses on ideational aspects, overlooking or sidestepping the practicalities. Within the ideational realm, the common denominator of opinions spread across a number of genres of public discourse is the opposition of the spiritual and the material. The idea of no common ground between the material and the spiritual is not articulated, but implied as self-evident. Further discussion is strikingly absent from the debate. With the market seen as having no spiritual value, public discourse leaves no room for compromise.

4. Money versus the Soul: a cultural insight

The public outrage is unsurprising when the neoliberal agenda is interpreted against the continuity of cultural patterns, both pre-industrial and socialist, including a suspicious attitude towards money, material gain, and entrepreneurship, and persistent values of collectivism, egalitarianism, etatism and moral education. Pivotal to the negative interpretation of *usluga* are broader traditional attitudes towards materialism and wealth.

Historically, Russian people view money with a degree of suspicion and contempt (Lotman & Uspensky 1985, Kon 1995, Nikandrov 1997, Khrushcheva 2000, Smolin 2005, Lotman 2009). Popular sayings refer to money as an unavoidable evil (*neizbezhnoie zlo*) and contemptible metal (*prezrennii metal*). The cultural logic antithesizes money and the idea of the human soul, where the soul represents the inner world, life force and the essence of things. Money is traditionally perceived as a danger to the spiritual well-being: the greater the wealth, the smaller the soul (Khrushcheva 2000, Lotman 2009). A Russian modernist poet Marina Tsvetayeva contends, ‘the notion of the basic falsehood of money is ineradicable from the Russian soul (Tsvetayeva as cited in Khrushcheva 2000: 9). Amidst this broader traditional antagonism towards money, a particularly negative value is assigned to the concept of entrepreneurship (Lotman & Uspensky 1985, Khrushcheva 2000, Lotman 2009)⁸. Possessing material goods is not a sin in itself, however, wishing or striving for it is (Khrushcheva 2000). Paradoxically, gaining money through unexpected inheritance, a stroke of luck or by divine disposal is within culturally acceptable bounds (Lotman 2009)⁹. Meticulously focusing on increasing one’s wealth, however, is ignoble and harmful to the soul. Commerce is considered a dishonourable enterprise (Lotman & Uspensky 1985, Nikandrov 1997, Khrushcheva 2000, Lotman 2009). Russians traditionally have more respect for a lucky gambler than for an honest tradesman (Khrushcheva 2000, Lotman 2009).

Cultural resistance to the accumulation of wealth and material possessions is also organically tied into the socialist view of society, including equal and fair distribution of societal goods. The concept of fairness and egalitarianism in Russia is premised on the principles of communalism, compassion, moderation and self-restraint, where the good of the society invariably comes before self-interest (Khrushcheva 2000, Lotman 2009). As a result, the pursuit of personal economic gain is seen as detrimental to the community. In putting the interests of the group over the interest of the individual, Russian culture concerns itself with the equality of outcomes, rather than equality of opportunity, input or condition. Equality, in social terms, is seen mainly as ensuring that a neighbour does not get ahead of you rather than raising yourself above the average¹⁰. Traditional Russian culture is known as an example of what cultural historians have labelled as ‘envy’ culture, as opposed to ‘greed’ cultures (Coser 1974, Nikandrov 1997, Khrushcheva 2000, Kon 1995). ‘Greed’ cultures¹¹ value material possession and the accumulation of wealth through concerted effort, competition and entrepreneurship (Coser 1974, Khrushcheva 2000). In contrast, the cultural logic of the greed culture is ‘I’m better than my neighbour, and I will prove it by working harder and having more than he has.’ (Kon 1995: 2).

⁸ Despite the negative attitude towards entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial activities have been part of Russia’s and Soviet routine life. Yurchak (2013) describes the cultural paradox in terms of ‘‘binary accounts,’’ where everyday practices ‘‘routinely transgressed, reinterpreted, or refused certain norms(.’)

⁹ In fact, the very word for ‘wealth’ (*bogatstvo*) derives from ‘endowed by God,’ while ‘well-being’ (*blagopoluchie*) means ‘receiving the good from above,’ implying no active involvement of the receiver (Ozhegov 1986).

¹⁰ A popular Russian joke illustrates the workings of this cultural logic: a fairy godmother approaches a poor Russian peasant and promises him anything his heart desires on the condition that his neighbour would get twice as much of it. ‘All right, - said the peasant after some thinking, - Blind me in one eye’ (Khrushcheva 2000).

¹¹ The ‘greed’ cultures can be found in the US, Anglo-Saxon and most of European countries where the middle class, Western-style bourgeoisie, constitutes a core layer of society.

Consequently, greed cultures tend to foster what Novak (1982) calls ‘virtuous self-interest,’ i.e. such personal traits as thrift, self-reliance, individualism, efficiency, calculability, independence and risk-taking. Economic inequality is seen within the greed culture as a natural effect arising from fair competition between individuals. Thus, the image of a good citizen within the greed culture is that of a ‘constantly reinventing entrepreneur’ (Lynch 2006: 5). In contrast, envy cultures are predicated on the principle ‘I’m better than my neighbour, and I will not permit him to have more than I have.’ (Kon 1995: 2). Envy cultures see social stratification as taken for granted and immutable. The envy mentality focuses on levelling and rejects egoistic utilitarianism as an external force that undermines communal well-being¹². In economic terms, preserving the social *status quo* means making the wealthy poorer, rather than making yourself wealthier. Thus, the American motto of ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ becomes ‘keeping the Ivanovs down’ in the Russian version (Khrushcheva 2000: 10-11).

As an extreme representation of the envy culture, Russian culture encompasses such values as compassion, communalism, collectivism, solidarity, inefficiency and spontaneity. In respect to contemporary Russian culture, Levada Centre, Russia’s leading non-governmental polling and sociological research organisation, identifies the following national traits: mandatory self-isolation, low significance of material well-being, orientation to the future, dominance of societal orientations over individual interests and an undifferentiated holistic spiritual attitude to life (Levada 2008)¹³. The political system under socialism strengthened these features by consistently suppressing individual initiative and promoting the fear of competition. Kon (1995: 1) says:

Individuality was suppressed as a sign of bourgeois individualism incompatible with the virtues of the New Soviet Man. The primitive egalitarianism in wages, the fear of competition and especially the bureaucratic mentality that equated individual with a cog in an impersonal clocklike social mechanism conspired to stifle personal initiative.

¹² Khrushcheva (2000: 7) elaborates,

‘Envy cultures’ aim to guarantee the survival of the group at a subsistence level, but ruin the ambitious. The very idea of profit, of tangible reward for taking an economic risk is associated with the inequality imposed by men. Meanwhile, justice is identified with protecting the integrity of the helpless, disadvantaged and weak in a given collective against the indifference and self-promotion of the stronger.’

¹³ These characteristics are reproduced and sustained by other realms of cultural production, such as political structures and religious thought. Thus, in embracing self-interest and material gain, ‘greed’ cultures are prone to liberalism and democracy, while ‘envy’ cultures are subject to authoritarianism and socialism (Kon 1996, Khrushcheva 2000). Similarly, Russian religious thought reflected these beliefs through the prism of Orthodox values. Russian Orthodoxy holds individual profiteering in deep contempt, denouncing materialistic pursuit and emphasising asceticism and selflessness. Two of the principal Russian orthodox values are *beskorystie* and *nestjazhatel’stvo*. *Beskorystie*, literally ‘absence of self-interestedness,’ or ‘self-neglect,’ and *nestyazhatelstvo*, literally ‘non-acquisitiveness’ are two essential characteristics of orthodox *righteousness*. Permeated by the orthodox spirit, Russian literature and philosophy have been unanimous in portraying entrepreneurs and petit bourgeois as anti-heroes and ‘greedy profiteers.’ Codified by Russian writers, most notably, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the prevalent collectivist mindset and the portrayal of the pursuit of money as a moral *laissez-faire* and are endemic to Great Russian literature (Lotman 2009). Russian writers saw the materialistic egotism of the West as a perpetrator into the Russian healthy social organism and a threat to its moral stability. *Kulak* – an independent farmer – is the most popular anti-hero of the early twentieth century classical literature. Literary protagonists, in turn, are often passive, indecisive, incapable of action daydreamers, irresponsible gamblers or light-hearted swindlers. These cultural patterns appear to have been strongly reinforced in the post-Soviet history by the resurgence of the Russian orthodoxy, the rise of ultra nationalism and, most recently, the return of political authoritarianism under Putin.

Finally, *vospitanie*, re-actualised in the debate over educational commercialisation, is also tied into the idea of harmony between the social and the individual, where the collective and the personal are dialectical in nature and the collective is a focal point for nurturing a creative personality. *Vospitanie* is based on principles independent of political doctrines¹⁴: an emphasis on the child's creative potential and spiritual needs, the role of the Educator (*Uchitel'*) as a spiritual and moral model, and close cooperation between teachers and parents in the moulding of a child's morals and ethics (Archer 1979, Pennar et al. 1971, Eklof et al. 2005). In the realm of *vospitanie*, a individual's personal fulfilment and happiness is dependent on the happiness and fulfilment of those around the individual. The collective and the creative go hand in hand: moral foundations are collective but internalising them brings the child individual gratification and personal happiness. Rooted in the cultural worldview, the indigenous notion of *vospitanie* outlived the communist principles of a centralised polity, including a rigid state-controlled, highly ideologised curriculum and the uniformity of hierarchical organisation (Alexander 2001, Archer 1979, Smolin 2005), and remains a powerful interpretative frame in post-Soviet Russia.

Underlying the neoliberal vision of a fair society lies a constitutive principle that by maximising self-interest one maximises social welfare (Beckert 2009). What one wins, another can win too; therefore, the more winners there are on the educational market, the better-off the society is as a whole. Within this neoliberal 'regime of truth' (Foucault 1980) self-interest, self-responsibility and competitiveness are neither positive nor negative values, but taken-for-granted traits of human nature:

Neoliberalism is a philosophy in which the existence and operation of a market are valued in themselves, separately from any previous relationship with the production of goods and services, and without any attempt to justify them in terms of their effect on the production of goods and services; and where the operation of a market or market-like structure is seen as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action, and substituting for all previously existing ethical beliefs. (Treanor 2005: 9)

In the Russian worldview, however, the 'ethic in itself' is reversed: personal ambition is a zero-sum game: one person's gain is someone else's loss. Material and symbolic goods are seen as limited and can only be obtained through a re-distribution of the existing ones at someone else's expense. With social relationships generally undifferentiated, a change in a neighbour's social status or wealth undermines the entire structure of social network.

¹⁴ Although the unified educational provision under the communist regime is widely known as an icon of uniformity, it is the Soviet period that celebrated world-renowned achievements in innovative pedagogy and experimental child psychology. Examples are Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach, Anton Makarenko's self-governing child collectives, Alexander Adamsky's 'lessons of discovery,' and Viktor Shatalov's 'pedagogy of cooperation.' In discussing the relationship between state control and pedagogical innovation, Bereday (1960: 20) observed, 'It [Russian education] carries the ballast of rigid traditions and the bonds of axiomatic philosophy, yet it contains some inspiring notions and tries some courageous solutions.'

The only culturally acceptable way to preserve social balance is, therefore, through a collective decision about ‘what is best’ for the group. As a result, personal ambition is discouraged and change is unwanted. Table 1 summarises contrasting value positions of the neoliberal and traditional worldviews as reflected in the Russian education reform debate:

Table 1: The neoliberal and traditional worldviews

Neoliberal	Domestic
Education as a competitive private good. Moral supremacy of the market. Commercialisation of education enhances personal and institutional effectiveness and improves quality	Education is a public good. Free-of-charge education (or education subsidised by the state) is a social right.
The role of the state in educational governance is ‘steering at a distance.’ Individual responsibility over state obligations	The state has social obligations to the fair provision of education. State obligation over individual responsibility
A good citizen is an economic maximiser who is governed by self-interest, entrepreneurial spirit, competitive individualism and self-reliance	A good citizen is a compassionate community member
Teacher professionalism is ‘doing a good job.’ Teacher self-autonomy and entrepreneurship. Teacher as manager	Teacher professionalism is ‘putting one’s soul’ into the job. Culture of personal commitment to teaching and collective responsibility. Teacher as pedagogue.
There is a direct link between professional and personal self-realisation of the learner and the economic prosperity of the country	The link between personal self-realisation of the learner and the economic prosperity of the country is labour market-specific link and subject to the needs of the society at large
Competition and choice are instruments of maximising individual personality. Social inequality is a legitimate outcome of competition	Fairness and egalitarianism in education are based on the principles of communalism and compassion
Educational standardisation and standardised assessment is a tool for achieving equity and equality of educational opportunity	There is a subjective element in instruction and assessment based on building a personal teacher-student relationship, observation of student progress and other non-quantifiable techniques
Educational quality is a quantifiable characteristic of education system best operationalised in terms of outcomes that are equated to the level of human capital and related to the prospects of economic growth and global competitiveness	Educational quality is a complex stakeholder-dependent characteristic that includes both numerical and qualitative dimensions, such as the suitability of student competencies to the needs of society

5. Conclusion and discussion

The analysis above unveils a narrowly defined textbook version of neoliberal economic modernisation at the heart of the official discourse on educational commercialisation. Market-based ideas of ‘the provision of service,’ ‘competition’ and ‘choice’ were employed as conceptual rationalisations for reform, and positioned as universal and value-neutral. The analysis reveals little room for local socio-cultural adjustments and no effort to reconcile the obvious ideological schisms between neoliberal and traditional values. By means of rhetorical substitution, the official discourse established an implicit equivalence between private profit and public good, blurring the boundaries between the two and suggesting the two coexist organically in the new socio-economic order. The

concept of learning in the official discourse has been premised on the idea of self-interest in a freely competitive market, while the traditional forms of social engagement have been ignored or discarded as deviations. The rhetorical substitution of ‘education’ with ‘educational service’ has driven the otherwise viable idea of partial educational commercialisation to its extreme: not only there is market but there is nothing but market. The official policy mantra of betting on the strongest (*stavka na silneyshgo*) has implicitly established a hierarchy of winners and losers. Policy interpretations of choice and competition have been premised on the moral supremacy of the market which celebrates elitism, selfishness and the triumph of the strong over the weak and which refutes the values of social solidarity. The official discourse circumvented broader socio-economic factors, including pedagogy, history, and the social embeddedness of educational structures. There are number of crucial questions left unaddressed in the official discourse. These include: How does the notion of service reconcile with the social welfare values? How do personal ambition and goals for personal fulfilment link to national goals for economic development? What is the constitutional status of ‘educational service’? How does the notion of service enrich Russia’s educational landscape?

Instead of reconciling competing narratives, the popularisation of the neoliberal worldview has paradoxically re-activated and reinforced the intractable oppositions imbedded in the societal debates of education versus commerce, commerce versus *vospitanie*, and *usluga* versus *sluzhenie*. The application of market ideology to the sphere of education triggered strong resistance by the teachers and parents of the intended consumers of educational services. In both high and popular discursive forms, the common public sentiment towards the idea of education as a commodity has been that of implacable antagonism and moral condemnation. The poles of opposition identified above index a broader discursive contest between a traditional, collegial, communal, egalitarian, non-material, state-paternalistic, and heavily etatist worldview and a market-driven, competitive, individualistic, entrepreneurial and materialistic one. Popular mentalities have played an equivocal role in the reform process. A dramatic re-interpretation of neoliberal ideas has been a legitimate protest against the radical reversal of values, however public conservatism is also an expression of extreme social inertia, fear of ambition and innovation, and a general orientation of culture towards social envy, inefficiency, and stagnation. Educational values are notoriously robust, and while such concepts as medical service and housing service have been to varying degrees absorbed under the market paradigm, public attitudes towards ‘educational service’ have remained overwhelmingly conservative.

The implications of the findings for policy borrowing and discourse-oriented scholarship are twofold. First, the analysis showcases the need for a concerted effort on the part of the reformers in interpreting borrowed discursive meanings. A cognitive restructuring within society is a complex and slow-moving process largely independent of top-down official policy intervention. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Minina 2014, 2016a), without carefully targeted cultural adaptation, the otherwise viable neoliberal solution for educational modernisation, including partial commercialisation, standardisation and quality assurance, will end up being filled with cultural meanings that are not only

different from but directly opposed to those found in the globalised script. The idea of maximising human personality through competition, choice and standardised assessment has been interpreted in the Russian cultural code as the complete displacement of a personality (Minina 2014). The notion of educational equality through quality standards has been perceived in terms of pedagogical reproduction of sameness and averageness (Minina 2014). The concept of quality assurance through nationwide educational standards has been conceived of as a quintessence of authoritarian state control (Minina 2016a).

Some of the assumed common sense reform rationalisations adopted by the Russian reformers to legitimise the neoliberal course, are very problematic in terms of indigenous pedagogical values. For instance, the introduction of standardised national testing was justified through the appeal to objectivity: the objective assessment of academic performance is better than the traditional subjective one as it levels out educational opportunities and eliminates teacher bias. Meanwhile, subjective assessment by the teacher through observation and a personal relationship with the student continues to be viewed in the public mind as a superior form of assessment, despite the evidence of increased educational equality of opportunity attributed to the introduction of national standardised testing (Minina 2014). Another example is the implicit assumption that the contemporary learner directly links their personal fulfilment to the economic prosperity of the nation – an idea that is contradicted by Russia’s job market and sociological research. Studies of post-Soviet Russia’s labour market, its employment trends and attitudes (Brown & Earle 2002, Layard & Richter 1995, Gimpel’son & Kapelyushnikov 2011) reveal a model that is qualitatively different from those observed in the CIS and the rest of Europe and which is characterised by a personal preference for job stability over productivity, professional growth or monetary gain, a prevalence of individual exit strategies over collective actions and the labour market’s general inability to effectively cope with competitive pressures. While attitudes are changing and new epistemic spaces are emerging (Kitaev 1994), post-Soviet generations of Russian people continue to espouse egalitarian and non-economic values (Dobrynina et al. 2000). Similarly to other major reform ideas, as a politically imposed discourse, the market economy in Russia still requires a substantial degree of state-led alignment vis-à-vis cultural norms and patterns of thought.

Second, this analysis underscores the cultural underpinning of political and economic structures. Economic reality is made up of non-economic structures (Jameson 1991), and the Russia’s education reform clearly illustrates the potential reactionary consequences of the neoliberal expansion in education. The stalled societal debate and the unyielding cultural resistance to educational commercialisation has trickled back up into the state discourse, undermined the legitimacy of the market-oriented reform, and created a tangible reform backlash in the form of a reversal of policy course: from the re-conceptualisation of education in terms of the market of educational services to a renunciation of the concept, and appeal for a return to the Soviet model.

Culturally-sensitive research on neoliberal reforms in Russia (Kitaev 1994, Iliin et al. 1996, McDaniel 1996, Wyman 1997, Dinello 1998, Wyman 2007) has long been warning

about the neoconservative restoration in education. In examining cycles of modernisation in Russian history, Iliin et al. prognosticated a decisive sociocultural failure. ‘The reformers are standing *against* the [cultural] reality rather than building on it [emphasis in the original]’ (Iliin et al. 1996: 319). McDaniel (1996) and Wyman (1997) cautioned against detrimental political consequences of an ill-informed neoliberal policy expansion:

If Russians and their foreign mentors do not confront these cultural and moral questions but continue to insist that the reform of Russia is primarily a technical and economic question, it is all the more likely that capitalism will continue to be wild and immoral, and that formal democracy will have a profound antidemocratic content (McDaniel 1996: 18).

In a wider political context the sense that government policy is out of line with social preferences undermines the legitimacy of the government itself, making tough policies still more difficult to adhere to. The political conclusion must be that a much more convincing effort is necessary to persuade the Russian public of the virtues of change if there is not to be a still more significant backlash against reform. (Wyman 1997: 212).

These findings feed into the new wave of scepticism over the viability of authoritarian modernisation in education. While the coercive structures supporting a welfare model of educational provision have crumbled under market pressures, the externally imposed market-based policies in education are up to this day challenged by the anti-individualist and anti-monetary ideals.

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