

# THE PURPOSES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN RUSSIA: THE CONTINUITIES AND CHANGE IN SOVIET AND NEOLIBERAL DISCOURSES

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# Background

- “Change in Networks, Higher Education and Knowledge Societies» (CINHEKS)” (PI – Jussi Välimaa) (includes cases of Germany, Finland, Portugal, UK, USA, and Russia)
- Russian case includes:
  - policy discourse analysis
  - two case studies of universities (document analysis, interviews)
- The Russian part of the CINHEKS project was supported by the Basic Research Program at the National Research University - Higher School of Economics.

# Introduction

- 1980-1990s: deconstruction of the Soviet model and economic collapse coincided with globalisation and the global rise of neoliberal ideology
- Neoliberal reforms meant a priority of the market, rational individual decision-making, education as an investment, economic perspective on education, economic role of education
- Since 1990s: neoliberal approach to educational reforms was employed in Russia (cuts in public funding, introduction of private sector, tuition fees, performance-based accountability etc)

# Conceptual departure points

- Acknowledgement of the limitations of concepts when they are applied to higher education systems beyond those where the concepts were developed (Marginson and Considine 2000, Välimaa and Hoffman 2008): thus, an original historical narrative is important to be kept.
- Critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach by Fairclough (1992): discourse both reproduces and transforms knowledge, identities and social relations, but also is being formed by other social practices and structures.
- Discourses are historically nested (Titscher et al 2009).
- The study does not employ CDA fully as research objectives did not require in-depth linguistic analysis, nor a rigid interpretation by imposing a single framework on both Soviet and post-Soviet period.

# Research objective and data

The **goal** is to analyse discursive transformations of the purposes of higher education in policy documents of the Soviet and Post-Soviet periods.

Over 30 federal **documents** released from 1956 to 2013:

- laws on education (1992, 2012)
- law on higher education (1996)
- federal programs of educational development (2000, 2005, 2011)
- Presidents' decrees (1990, 1991, 2012)
- governmental concepts and programs of the development of Russia (2008), education (2000, 2002, 2012), science and innovations (2000, 2012), informatisation of higher education (1993), information society (2008)
- other decrees and programs on higher education of Soviet and post-Soviet period.

This study did not go further into 1920-30s due to feasibility issues.



# Major findings

The basic dichotomy in the discourse over decades unfolds between

- **vocational training** (education as a determining factor in the development of the economy, the knowledge economy or national economy) and
- **personal development/education** (education as a basic condition of social, public and spiritual development).

These two poles can be described as  
**economic instrumentalism** and **social instrumentalism**.

# Soviet period (I)

Education was considered as a key factor in the building of socialist society:

- Educational system is a place of the **formation of a new man**

*“... communist transformation of the society is intrinsically linked with the formation of a new man in which there is a harmonious combination of spiritual wealth, moral purity, and physical perfection” (Ob ukreplenii... 1958).*

- HE as an **instrument of economic and technological development** of the country.

*"The tasks of communist building require closing the gap between the higher school and life, production, improving the theoretical level of training in accordance with the latest achievements of science and technology" (Ibid.).*



**(A.Radakov, 1920.  
Knowledge will break the  
chains of slavery)**



# Soviet period (II)

In late 1950s, the purposes of higher education included **training of “highly qualified specialists”** with practical and theoretical skills (also brought up on the basis of Marx-Lenin doctrine); research; training of research and teaching cadre, further education [povyshenie kvalifikatsii] of professionals, dissemination of scientific and political knowledge for wider population.

Later, further **extension of socialization mission**, multiplication of requirements for the graduates:

- *to demonstrate modern economic thinking, proactively participate in the acceleration of social, economic, technological development, play a proactive social role* (Osnovnye... 1973).
- *“a responsible, creative attitude towards study and work, discipline, organization, high culture, respect for the socialist property, environmental education”, legal education and” the formation of high aesthetic tastes”* (Ibid).
- formation of *“a harmoniously developed personality”* (Ibid).

Thus, **Soviet discourse can be characterized as having both economic and social instrumentalism. However, the predominance of social instrumentalism should be recognized.**



**ДОРОГУ К ЗВЕЗДАМ  
ПРОКЛАДЫВАЮТ  
КОМУНИСТЫ!**

**(The road to the  
stars is being  
made by  
communists)**





# Transitional period (mid-1980s - mid 1990s): late Soviet



**“Perestroika is based on the live creativity of the mass”.**

**“Perestroika is continuation of the October [1917 revolution]”**

- **For the first time: anticipatory role** of higher education "in relation to the technical reconstruction of the national economy" (Osnovnye napravleniia... 1987)
- Higher-educated cadre, their qualifications and competence *"determine the scope and pace of technological progress, the intensification of the national economy"* (Osnovnye napravleniia... 1987).
- Policy emphasizes the special role of higher education in the "development of spiritual [dukhovnoi] culture" and "activation of the human factor".
- Introduction of notions of “educational service” and “consumer”
- In 1990-1991 higher education **lost much of the discourse about economic utility** and became described as a key element "in the renewal and intellectualization of society".

# Transitional period (mid-1980s - mid 1990s): early post-Soviet

- **Humanistic** nature of education and free development of the person (new Education Law of 1992).
- The connection between the transformation of higher education and the revival of the country; stressing the value of **knowledge, intellectual and creative abilities** of the individual, and personal development (Concept of Higher Education Informatization of the Russian Federation (1993))
- First task of the university was “to **meet the needs of the individual** in intellectual, cultural and moral development” (1996 Law on Higher Education)



**In transition period: socialization mission prevailed.**

# Post-Soviet period

- Since mid-1990s **humanistic discourse is gradually disappearing** from policy documents.
- A new society of late 2000-2010s, an innovative socially oriented one is “a type of development”, based on the knowledge economy, but not a society. The documents do not develop further the values of education and future society.
- New “type of development” is based on the policies and declarations taken from the "advanced", "developed" countries.
- **Education is seen in economic terms** and is evaluated on the criteria of the contribution to economic growth and the extent of the compliance with the **labor market** (in relation to which education is always in the position of catching up, lagging behind, forced to adapt).
- **Labour market** was seen as a driver of changes in HE.

Thus, recently **economic instrumentalism has been dominating.**



# Continuities in the Soviet through post-Soviet discourse

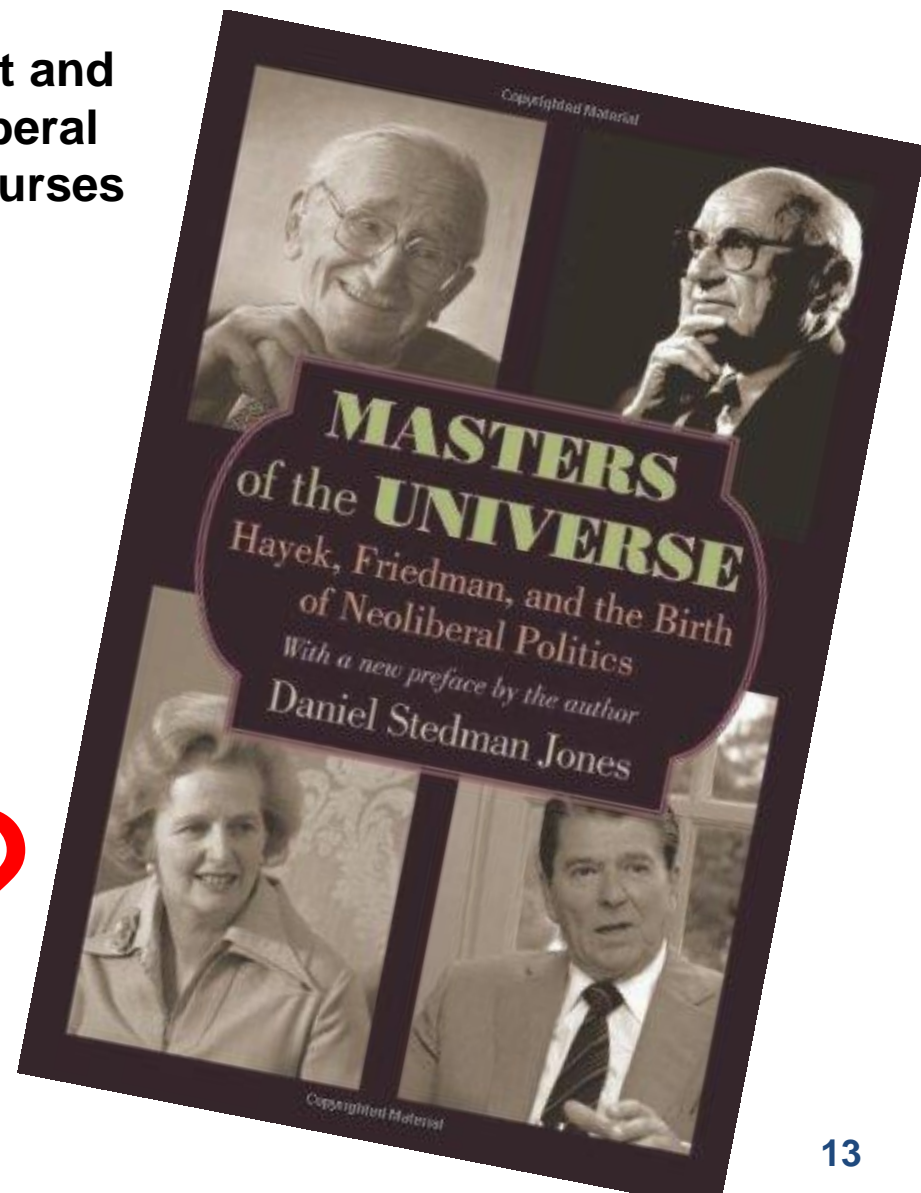


| Recurring themes   | Soviet discourse   | Post-Soviet discourse   |
|--|--|---|
| training of highly qualified specialists as a main purpose of higher education                       | training of highly qualified specialists                     | training of highly qualified specialists  |
| matching higher education and future employment  | better use of specialists                                    | matching field of study and job, matching higher education and labor market needs, over-education |
| evaluation of higher education in terms of matching its outcomes to the external environment, namely | production sector, life, practice                            | labor market, employers   |
| a need to intensify cooperation of higher education and production/economy sector, namely            | production sector, life, practice                            | labor market, employers   |
| a need to intensify cooperation with external agents regarding R&D, namely                           | production sector, academic and sectoral research institutes | business, employers, academic and sectoral research institutes                                    |



# Conclusions and further questions

Soviet and  
neoliberal  
discourses  
meet



## Full version of the paper is later published

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