

## Russian Sociological School of Neo-Kantianism: Qualitative Research Strategy

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**Abstract:** The article analyzes the experience of classification and formation of the structure of sociological knowledge by the representatives of the Russian sociological school of neo-Kantianism. Particular attention is given to the subject matter and the method of social science. The method of making qualitative sociological researches, which focuses on the analysis of goals of human activities and the evaluation in accordance with the hierarchy of social values, serves as a method of acquiring the systematic sociological knowledge. The article draws a parallel between the scientific and social development of Russia at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

**Key words:** Russian sociological school of neo-Kantianism, teleologism, qualitative methods of sociological research, history of sociology, Russian sociology.

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### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the world sociological community establishes the rise of a new self-organized nonlinearly developing society, the understanding of which must be based on working out new qualitative theoretical and methodological instruments. In modern social transformations the new instruments cannot be universal and complete by their definition as the world represents the range of unbalanced dissipative social systems which in terms of self-organization give rise to the infinite variety of the forms of social life with the availability of alternative variants of their development at any moment of time. Russian society is not an exception here and it became a new social reality over the last twenty years which made Russian sociologists take a different view not only of the methods and technique of sociological researches, but also of the methodology and theory of sociological knowledge [1]. The scientific community has focused its attention on the discovery of new fields of sociological knowledge based on rich traditions of sociological theory. There are debates in today's Russian science concerning the question of the origin of the modern sociological tradition which is the continuation of the "soviet" or "pre-revolutionary" sociological school.

Sociologists currently get an opportunity to overcome the polyparadigmal fragmentation by means of

a dialogue and the methodological synthesis of different strategies for its development. The domestic sociological science at the same time has to solve the problems of intradisciplinary intergration, interdisciplinary cooperation and consolidation of its position in the system "authority – society – science" [2]. Thereby, sociology implements not only a scientific function, but also a very important social and civil one, a function of education. After all, keep it in mind that every science arises and develops to solve concrete social needs. For sociology it is satisfaction of the needs of society in understanding itself and self-improvement, self-development. This is why enrichment of theoretical knowledge about social changes has a great practical importance for the implementation of the changes. The richer these sources are, the more diverse the conceptions, models and theories are, the deeper and more critical their contents are, the more conscious human activities and activities of certain individuals, groups, organizations, social movements and so on become [3]. Thus, the analysis of social changes is the basis of the modern stage of development of the whole social science.

**Main Part:** It is exaggeration to consider that history repeats itself, but something in history is definitely recurrent. Singularity is always relative and is connected with some aspects, measurements and lines of current

events. Russia is a country of radical changes which repeated themselves in a spiral at the turn of centuries. The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is, on the one hand, a period of global and swift changes of the new Russia and, on the other hand, a period of integration, self-identification and the status-role determination of Russian sociology. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is, on the one hand, an epoch of significant social transformations and, on the other hand, a period of the recovery of the young sociological science from recession, a period of its self-determination and establishment. Right in that historical period neo-Kantianism begins to flourish in domestic sociology. The consonance of social and theoretical and methodological problems at the turn of the centuries makes the researchers think about the experience of previous generations while solving identical problems; and taking into account that the value of theory does not depend on the time of its creation, the analysis of the sociological school of neo-Kantianism makes it possible to broaden the possibilities of searching for adequate answers to actual questions of the development of modern domestic sociology. The active involvement of the representatives of neo-Kantianism in social, political and cultural life of the country made this branch of sociological thought the essentials of general historical development of the state reflecting its collisions and contradictions in the transition period of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [4].

Among the general methodological problems raised by the representatives of neo-Kantian sociology there is a global question about the unity and specifics of social cognition. It is noteworthy that the main goals of cognition for the representatives of the Russian sociological school of neo-Kantianism (A.S. Lappo-Danilevsky, V.M.Khvostov, B.A.Kistyakovsky, P.I.Novgorodtsev, L.I.Petrzhitsky) are the formation of unite system-forming and coherent knowledge, striving for which determines the whole process of scientific development. Reformation of the science does not consist in the discovery of something new, but in the strict critics of the theoretical material already collected by sociology [5]. Thus, sociology must determine its place in the system of sciences and the researchers need to draw the demarcation lines between natural and socio-humanistic knowledge.

The method of classification, according to neo-Kantians, can help to solve these complicated questions, namely, on the one hand, to lead the sociological knowledge to the scientific one, or in other

words the systematic one and, on the other hand, to draw a distinction between it and other sciences. «Under the name of classification a set of divisional judgments is meant by means of which some notion is divided into a number of parts coordinated between one another and making a degradable notion all together.” [6]. As the grounds for division some changeable element of a notion is taken which, firstly, must be present in all members of a divided notion and, secondly, “the changes of other essential changeable elements of a divided notion must correspond to its changes” [7]. It is exactly the approach that provides the classification with a logically correct character, in V.M.Khvostov’s opinion.

Following their West European colleagues the representatives of domestic neo-Kantianism divided sciences by their subject matter and their method into “sciences of spirit” and “sciences of nature” and also “sciences of the individual” and “sciences of the general” correspondingly. This idea was particularly being developed by the leading methodologist of the neo-Kantian school A.S.Lappo-Danilevsky; he continued with the ideas of the representatives of the Baden school H.Rickert and W.Windelband who were the fathers of this division. However, the supporters of positivism, N.I.Kareyev in particular, also saw this division in the works of Auguste Comte when sciences were called “abstract” and “concrete”.

For neo-Kantians the division of sciences by their subject matter and their method was not the creation of dualistic notions strictly opposed to each other. Their main principle was the methodological synthesis of scientific knowledge. V.M.Khvostov demonstrated this in his works more than other neo-Kantians. Dividing sciences, as other representatives of the school did, he introduced two intermediate notions: diving sciences by their subject matter- “sciences of life” and dividing sciences by their method- “typological sciences”. With these notions he made an attempt to turn the data of two worlds, natural and social, into a single consistent whole. After all, for him, as well as for all the other neo-Kantians, the world disintegrates into two worlds: the world of physical objects and the world of spiritual feelings. In this concern, the main characteristic of the first one (the physical world) is space, the same of the second one (the spiritual world) is time.

Introducing the category of “science of life”, he singled out the specific area of reasonable human activities where a human certainly belongs to the physical world, but his human feelings function as a primary origin of consciousness.

The main goal of “typological sciences” is the description of the real world to a greater degree of completeness than it is in sciences of the individual, but to a smaller degree of depth than it is in sciences of the general. Neo-Kantians say herewith that only the science which has a separate and definite circle of phenomena not occupied by other sciences has the right to exist.

In the existing division of scientific knowledge sociology is a science of spirit and a science of the general, but at the same time there arises a question for researchers what sort of generalizations sociology must make. “Whether those generalizations which appear to be formulas of the unchangeable laws of nature, or the generalizations which are the objects of typological sciences and which produce the formulas admitting exceptions by their notion.” [8]. In Khvostov’s opinion, sociology deals with both. It is connected with the fact that, firstly, a part of sociology is “a study about real social laws which is in other words the establishment of the formulas determining permanent and unchangeable event connections. And, secondly, researches of sociologists fall into the area of typology and make the part of sociology that lies between sociology itself and the study of concrete and singular events, states of social reality” [9]. For instance, the typical processes are such processes as the origin of a state, property, religion, science, family, etc.

Therefore, neo-Kantians singled out two parts in sociology as in a science about society: the first part is the basic sociology which deals with the investigation of social connections and social laws, the second part is the social typology investigating the most important types of human societies. As sociology is a science of spirit for all representatives of the neo-Kantian school, quantities must take the second place to qualities for a researcher; in other words, investigating the life of society a sociologist “is interested not so much in a degree of this or that phenomenon, as in its qualitative ideological contents, but the latter cannot be covered by a statistic method that is so widespread in sociology. A researcher needs to have particular methods of a qualitative analysis of social phenomena at his disposal, which can be produced only by means of a detailed examination of separate, singular facts of social life, not for the purpose of their historical investigation, but for the purpose of entering the constantly functioning mechanism of social processes” [10]. A sociologist must not simply register phenomena, but be able to disintegrate them into simpler components. At the same time it is necessary that a method provides the reliability of the received knowledge and could give

guaranties that the analyzed phenomenon or process is normal or typical. And the most important for neo-Kantians is that a method must help to eliminate the subjectivity inevitable in all spiritual phenomena and processes. Qualitative methods of sociological knowledge applied by a group of authors must help to solve the given problems.

When a researcher turns to qualitative methods of sociological research, he always faces such problem as what he must focus on: analysis of actions, causes, the world of values, intuition, etc [11]. For neo-Kantians the answer is vivid, it lies in understanding a notion of goal, as it is teleology that determines existence and development of the human world, it underlies his activities and actions, his world of values and intuition. The physical world can be explained by means of a notion of causality and the spiritual world – by means of teleology. Such division is connected with the qualitative creative character of human activities. The element of creativity is present in all areas of spiritual life, that is why in the social world a cause does not contain consequences completely and partly they are new and have never existed before. At the same time teleologism and causality are not dualistic notions for Khvostov, they do not contradict and do not except one another. While doing a teleological analysis a researcher has to overthrow causal lines and to consider them inversely. The complications of teleological formations are connected with the fact that, on the one hand, goals lie in the future and that is why they are hypothetical; on the other hand, the area of deliberate human actions is always unpredictable. A human always goes through a conflict of different goals; during this conflict he evaluates and makes a decision on a goal. In case of collective cooperation a decision on a goal is made on the ground of a collective value. Thus, a value is the most important factor of individual and social development. For reasons given, there arise a question about the hierarchy of goals and patterns of the evaluation choice. In this concern, the main goal of sociology is the formation of the system of correlation of values and determination of the ultimate and highest goal of human activities.

**Summary:** To sum up the discourse of the representatives of the neo-Kantian school of sociology (V.M.Khvostov in particular), it is noteworthy that sociology, in order to recover from recession and solve the problems of self-determination, must strive for the maintenance of its subject matter, the structure of scientific knowledge and a method which should be the

method of qualitative researches aimed at the investigation of goals of human activities and their correlation to the social hierarchy of values.

### **CONCLUSION**

The ideas of neo-Kantianism are consonant to the development of a modern situation in Russian society and Russian sociological science. Recent political events in the country proved that quantitative research methods of social processes cannot cope with the given scientific and social task and explain the reasons of resulting changes. In this concern, the use of qualitative methodology as the strategy of researching social processes perfectly meets the requirements laid down by the scientific community to the social science. Thus, qualitative methods give an opportunity to fix the sociological reality, to expose the deep premises and accomplished consequences of social processes which could not be adequately comprehended before. Nowadays the meaning of past social processes is divulged in a wider context, giving an opportunity to raise the validity of their interpretation. This potential only rises with time letting a researcher understand the present and predict future consequences of the current social processes more exactly.

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