

PROFESSIONAL REVIEWS

Olga Gurova

Institutionalization of the Sociology of Consumption in Russia



GUROVA, Olga Yur'evna — PhD in Cultural Studies, Academy of Finland Research Fellow, Department of Social Research, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki. Address: 35 Unioninkatu, Helsinki, 00014, Finland.

Email: olga.gurova@helsinki.fi

This article explores the process by which a subfield of sociology, the sociology of consumption, became institutionalized in Russia. By “institutionalization” is meant the process of its establishment as an autonomous field of scientific knowledge, university-level discipline and academic community of scholars. Drawing on data from document analysis and expert interviews, the article reviews the evolution of the sociology of consumption — its topics, methodologies and approaches — in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. We look at its emergence and functioning as a subject in university curricula and the formation of a community of scholars self-identifying as belonging to this field. The main observations are the following: while the institutionalization of the sociology of consumption accelerated in the 1990s, its origins can be traced to the beginning of the 20th century. The subfield continues to be in the process of formation in Russia. Currently, two major approaches can be discerned: the socio-economic and socio-cultural approaches. Since the 1990’s, Sociology of Consumption was included in university curricula as an elective course for students preparing themselves for a professional career in sociology. On one hand, this provoked a certain standardization. At the same time, scholars in Russia remain free to manipulate the content of a particular course. In terms of community, the experts we interviewed noted the lack of a “strong promoter” or “charismatic leader” but emphasized the existence of “growing points,” namely, places across the country where scholars at various universities play a particularly key role in developing the subfield and contributing to its further institutionalization.

Keywords: sociology of consumption; consumption; institutionalization; university curriculum; academic community; Soviet and post-Soviet Russia.

In his letter of acceptance for my recent article on the sociology of fashion, an editor suggested changing its title, claiming that there was no such thing as “sociology of fashion” and, furthermore, that there was no point in attaching random nouns to the word “sociology.” Whether it is the sociology of fashion or the sociology of consumption, the editor’s remark problematized the issue of emerging sociological sub-disciplines and research fields. Andrew Abbott confirmed this, saying that sociology “is not very good at excluding things from itself” [Abbott 2001: 5].

In this paper, I examine the process by which one of the emerging subfields in Russia, namely, the sociology of consumption, became institutionalized there as a field of research, university-level subject and academic community.¹ The

¹ The institutionalization of sociology suggests a concept with the following indicators: “Institutionalization of sociology is a historical process of its establishment as an autonomous field of scientific knowledge and official recognition of its public importance. The following points of this process are worth mentioning: bringing the category ‘sociology’ into academic discourse; publishing articles and books devoted to sociological issues; holding academic

sociology of consumption is defined as a subfield of sociological knowledge that is focused on the social embeddedness of consumption. The content of the term “consumption,” as will be shown later, might vary, depending on the historic period, the research approach taken, the peculiarity of the empirical object, or the chosen subject, among other things. As a result, the term “consumption” may mean the utilization of practical properties of a good in order to satisfy one’s needs or the process by which a person forms his identity through the utilization of material and non-material goods that are perceived as symbols or as an activity, way of life or thinking that guides the expression of one’s identity and belonging to social groups. “Social embeddedness” of consumption implies the search for consistent patterns within the sphere of consumption that connect consumption to social institutions, social structure to inequalities, identities, material objects and services to consumer behavior and practices at a given moment.

My motivation to study this particular subfield within sociology is twofold. First, there is the topical actuality of consumption in the context of the rise of capitalism and the attendant profound transformations that have taken place in post-Soviet Russia. Second, the subfield is relatively new; the themes we explore in this article have not been sufficiently studied yet.

The institutionalization of the sociology of consumption has accelerated since the 1990s, although the origins of this subfield, as with sociology in general in Russia, can be found in the early 20th century. Hence, in order to trace the evolution of the sociology of consumption, it is necessary to consider the studies that attempted to explain the social embeddedness of consumption during different historical periods of Russian society.

Consequently, the primary purpose of this study is to present an analytical overview of the roots of the sociology of consumption as a research field, and shed light on the process of its development by focusing on the type of sociological problems that were tackled, the themes and approaches that were applied, the key categories that were developed and the methods that were implemented.

Institutionalization also includes the development of the sociology of consumption as a university subject and a course within degree programs in sociology. Only after it was recognized as a discipline of higher learning could the research field begin to gain from reproduction in the educational system and obtain additional opportunities for further development. For this reason, the second purpose of this study is to examine the process by which the sociology of consumption emerged as a university subject and a course within degree programs in sociology in Russia.

The third and final purpose of this article is to study the academic community that engages with topics relating to the sociology of consumption, namely, their academic identification, their sense of belonging to the community of consumption scholars and their expert opinion on the current situation and perspectives on the sociology of consumption in light of its institutionalization in Russia.

Following the logic described above, this article is divided into three parts. The first part discusses developments in consumption research in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. The current position of the sociology of consumption in the curricula of Russian universities is described in the second part. Finally, the academic community that studies consumption is examined. In the conclusions I reflect upon peculiarities of the institutionalization process in Russia.²

sociological forums; organizing sociological associations and academic sociological centers; introducing general and professional sociological education; establishing academic degrees and positions in sociology” [Glotov 2010: 127]. Glotov applied this concept to sociology as a discipline but it also can be applied to sub-disciplines. According to Glotov, there are multiple indicators of the institutionalization process. In this article, the institutionalization is considered on three dimensions: the establishment of a research field, university discipline and academic community in Russia.

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Methods and materials

Publications and expert interviews form the data analyzed in this study. The publications examined include general and topical sociological journals such as *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya (Sociological Studies)* (1974–2013), *Zhurnal sotsiologii i sotsial'noy antropologii (Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology)* (1998–2013) and *Ekonomicheskaya sotsiologiya (Journal of Economic Sociology)* (2000–2013). Beginning with the journal's debut issue and ending with the final issue of 2013, each journal was searched for articles that discussed the phenomenon of the sociology of consumption. Moreover, publications in other magazines on social and humanitarian subjects (for instance, *Sotsiologicheskii zhurnal, Neprikosnovennyi zapas, Logos, Teleskop* etc.) were screened for such articles using a search engine. Apart from scientific journals, books on consumption, lifestyle and the meaning of material objects in society were used as source material. The books were selected on the basis of a library list of topic classifications.³ In addition to articles and books, 15 university curricula from throughout Russia were examined. (See Appendix 1 for the list of curricula.)

Expert interviews form the other component of the data analyzed. (For the list of interviewees see Appendix 2.) Sociologists of different generations who combine research activity with lecturing at universities comprised the interviewees in this research. The interviews were carried out in three Russian cities (Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and Novosibirsk) at four universities (the Moscow and Saint-Petersburg campuses of the Higher School of Economics, the Saint-Petersburg State University and the Novosibirsk State University). There were several reasons for choosing these universities, the most important one being that they are educational institutions where research is highly prioritized. Both campuses of the Higher School of Economics and the Novosibirsk State University have the status of National Research University, whereas the Saint-Petersburg State University has the status of Federal University. Both these statuses give the right to receive additional funding from the state budget for research projects. Furthermore, each university chosen for this study has either a faculty or a department of sociology comprising a group of researchers who engage with topics related to the sociology of consumption and who lecture on similar subjects. Among the experts interviewed are Ph.Ds in Sociology, Doctors of Sciences in Sociology and Philosophy, Senior Lecturers, Assistant Professors and Professors; a Department Head and Deputy Head of Department and a Deputy Dean of Faculty.

There were eight interviews taken in total. The briefest interview lasted 40 minutes and the longest lasted 90 minutes. Although interview questions (approximately 25) were modified for each expert, three general categories are distinguished: (1) questions about research activity and professional interests; (2) questions about teaching experience; (3) a discussion of the current state of the discipline in Russia.

1. Sociology of consumption as a research field

The evolution of the sociology of consumption goes hand-in-hand with that of Russian society and sociology in general. The rise of sociological research on consumption⁴ as a separate research field can be divided into two major stages, with several minor periods within these stages.

1.1. Sociological studies of consumption in the Soviet Union

The 1920s can be called the *pre-theoretical stage* of the sociology of consumption in Russia. During this period, sociology experienced a certain prominence, as Vladimir Shlyapentokh states: “In the 1920s Soviet applied sociology achieved a high level. It borrowed from the cutting-edge methods of statisticians (*zemskaya*

³ The libraries searched were The National Library in Saint-Petersburg and the Novosibirsk State University library.

⁴ Here I purposefully replace “sociology of consumption” with the umbrella term “sociological research on consumption” since studies that were the basis for the future research field could be shaped within the framework of other fields.

statistika)” [Shlyapentokh 2006: 38]. Budgetary research explored how the budgets of peasant households were formed, how much money peasants earned and how they spent the money they earned (see: [Il’in 2008: 6; Mironov 1999]). For example, A. N. Chelintsev in 1919 studied the consumption of peasant families in the Tambov region. He analyzed a way of consumption (*uklad potrebleniya*) that was measured by the level of consumption (*uroven’ potrebleniya*) and explores the connection between the level of consumption and productivity (see: [Mironov 1999: 35–39]). L. E. Mintsin 1927 studied income, its amount and structure, and consumption of the unemployed, comparing unemployed people with employed people. For example, early researchers measured calories and investigated the content of meals from the viewpoint of needs that should be satisfied (see: [Mironov 1999: 319]).

1.1.1. The first wave: the 1960s

After a long period of dormancy under Stalin, sociology in the Soviet Union experienced a renaissance under Khrushchev. Boris Firsov and Boris Doktorov, among others, called this period the “second birth” of the discipline [Firsov 2001; Doktorov, Kozlova 2009]. During the 1950–60’s, the discipline was “topical, polemical, dynamic [even more so] than such a respectable discipline as history” [Symonovich 2009: 16]. At that time, sociology was split into branches and topics differently than today [Firsov 2000: 156]. Consumption was neither a separate part of the discipline nor a topic of major importance. Nevertheless, as early as the late 1960s, works devoted to consumption began to be published as books and articles in the major sociological journals of the Soviet Union.

At least two major approaches to the study of consumption during that period can be identified.

I call the first approach the **generational approach**. This approach is exemplified by Boris Grushin’s and Valentin Chikin’s large-scale survey project, published as two books, *Face of a Generation (Litso pokoloniya)* [Grushin, Chikin 1961], *Confession of a Generation (Isповed’ pokoleniya)* [Grushin, Chikin 1962] and as a series of books by Grushin *Four Lives in the Mirror of Public Opinion. Essays on Russians’ Public Consciousness in the Times of Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev and Yeltsin [Chetyre zhizni v zerkale obshchestvennogo mneniya. Ocherki massovogo soznaniya rossiyan vremen Khrushcheva, Brezhneva, Gorbacheva i Yeltsina]* reprinted in 2001. The sample comprised 17,556 young people (below the age of 30) who were reached through a questionnaire placed in the newspaper *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*. This research was not devoted to consumption as such, yet it touched on the topics of philistinism and personal style in regard to the younger generation of Soviet people.

In reply to the question on attitude towards their own generation, young people claimed to be pleased with their generation (83.4%), but criticized the philistinism they perceived among some Soviet citizens [Grushin, Chikin 1961: 16]. 3,000 respondents condemned the excessive attention towards personal appearance, style and western trappings. 16.6% mentioned stylish youth (*stilyagi*) in their responses, acknowledging the existence of this controversial youth subculture⁵. Researchers provided quotes from interviews, for example: “I don’t like <...> that some young people aspire for all things from abroad: boyish haircuts, ugly narrow trousers and short skirts, etc.” (Gasieva, 30, factory worker and external student) [Grushin, Chikin 1962: 198]. The reason for the criticism of stylish youth lay in the fact that in Soviet society, appearance was closely connected to inner self. Excessive attention to one’s appearance and to all things western was therefore evidence of a corrupted inner self. There were many instances where respondents expressed anger towards those who liked bright shirts and fashionable haircuts [Grushin, Chikin 1961: 45]. The researchers asserted that “a culture of

⁵ *Stilyagi* is a youth subculture, which appeared on the streets of Soviet cities as early as the end of the 1940s. These were younger people who “had their own ‘style’, which was an interpretation of American rock’n’roll styles and their own jargon.” They were defined as “youth-as-victims-of-western-influence” in the dominant discourse and viewed as evidence of westernization. See: Pilkington H. (1994) *Russia’s Youth and Its Culture. A Nation’s Constructors and Constructed*, New York: Routledge. p. 48.

behavior” is important; one has to distinguish between good and bad taste. From this point of view, the loss of a sense of moderation was problematic, but also the inability to acknowledge beautiful and modern things, such as clothes, art, furniture or dances. Besides, if the Soviet industry were to function better and produce more bright and cheap fabrics, there would not be that many young people copying western lifestyles and fashions [Grushin, Chikin 1961: 45]. The researchers concluded back then that people, as they age, would care less and less about fashionable style and appearance; therefore, there was no need for alarm concerning stylish youth.

The second approach, which I call the *quasi-critical approach*, was developed in the book by Zhilina and Frolova *Problems of Consumption and Personality Development (Problemy potrebleniya i vospitaniya lichnosti)* [Zhilina, Frolova 1969]. This book offers a comparison between consumption in socialist and capitalist societies, applying the principles of Marxism. Although this book does contain criticism towards capitalist society and also towards socialist society, this criticism was done in line with Soviet ideology. Therefore, I call this approach quasi-critical. The research investigated mass consumption and its role in personality development in the Soviet citizen. The sample comprised 1,740 families (schoolchildren and their parents) in the town of Chelyabinsk. The interviewees were stratified according to their rank in the professional hierarchy.

Several findings of this research are of interest. For example, despite the official ideology of equality, the authors underscore that, at the then current stage of socialism’s development, individuals and groups remain unequal in the sphere of consumption. The inequality is justified by the fact that people earn and consume according to the amount of work they do [Zhilina, Frolova 1969: 8]. Surprisingly, only 17 people only out of 1,740 said they did not care about material things, as socialist ideology would have prescribed them to do [Zhilina, Frolova 1969: 51]. The rest of the interviewees found material things to be a meaningful and important part of life [Zhilina, Frolova 1969: 56].

Several other issues were analyzed: desire for new things (almost 90% of the interviewees admitted to dreaming about novelties); attitudes towards saving money; motives for purchases of new things; attitudes towards abundance. As a result, it was found that the Soviet people were aspiring materialists who would have gladly accumulated possessions, had they been given the opportunity; they dreamt about new things — cars, fridges and furniture — and did not care much for asceticism; they preferred to buy and own things rather than to borrow them. The major motive for purchases was comparison — not to be worse than their peers. Researchers, in turn, explain this as evidence of collectivism. In general, this research represents a comparison of Soviet norms against “real” attitudes to consumption and material things. Although it is influenced by ideology, nevertheless the research provides captivating data on consumption at the time and can be considered as a starting point for the sociology of consumption in Soviet Russia.

At the end of the 1960s the longitude research project *Taganrog I* was launched with the purpose of investigating family consumption and its structure. This project represents research devoted to *typologies of consumption*. The results and the final report of this research are not publically available [Uroven’ zhizni... 1971], which was rather typical for sociological research at the time. This approach was applied in other research conducted later, which I will discuss in a subsequent section.

1.1.2. The second wave: the 1970s and 1980s

In the 1970s and 1980s, several major approaches to the study of consumption can be identified. The general framework was the structural functionalism approach. Different phenomena were studied using this framework. First, consumption was explored from the point of view of a *socialist way of life*. The category “way of life” was considered as a set of activities in the spheres of labor, consumption, everyday life (*byt*), and social and

political domains [Narodnoe blagosostoyanie... 1988: 85]. “In the 1970s, studies of issues pertaining to life style became more visible, especially in big cities. Several sociologists in Leningrad teamed up around the topic *The Socialist Way of Life as a Subject of Complex Social Research (Sotsialisticheskiy obraz zhizni kak ob’ekt kompleksnogo sotsial’nogo issledovaniya)* with A. S. Pashkov as the research project’s leader. The results were published in a volume entitled *Urban Way of Life: Evidence from a Complex Social Study (Obraz zhizni naseleniya krupnogo goroda: opyt kompleksnogo sotsial’nogo issledovaniya)*” ([Boronoev 2008: 67; see also: [Pashkov 1988]). Despite the ideological expectation to explicate and promote a unified normative socialist way of life for all Soviet people, the research uncovered diversity, affirming a plurality of lifestyles that differed in their proximity to the normative Soviet model [Narodnoe blagosostoyanie... 1988: 85].

Discussion of the notion that there is diversity of lifestyles found its venue in publications that engage with *typologies of consumption* as in *Taganrog I* project. The second stage of the longitude research *Taganrog II* (1977–78), led by Natalya Rimashevskaya, questioned the ideological premise of mature socialist society being a society of equals within various spheres of life, including consumption. In actual fact, constant shortages of consumer goods, and the absence of equal access to them, led to differentiation among consumers.

In their paper, Rimashevskaya and Levkova identified two approaches to consumer behavior based on needs [Rimashevskaya, Levkova 1978]. The first approach, *normative*, was limited to a certain abstract concept of needs taken from physiology, psychology, hygiene, architecture, and the like. The other approach, *statistical*, was based on the postulation that consumers optimize their behavior according to their needs. The scholars emphasized that the second approach should be taken for exploring the peculiarities of Soviet consumption.

Using data collected from 106 families in Taganrog and applying quantitative methods of analysis, scholars distinguished two groups of consumers on the basis of income. The low-income group of consumers consumed according to basic needs and there was no variety of consumer patterns among them. The high-income group consisted of three sub-groups having various patterns of consumption. The first sub-group comprised households of three or more people, often with children living at home. Consumption in this sub-group was oriented toward sustaining the family (e.g. furniture, home appliances, relatively high food expenditures). The second sub-group had the highest expenditure rate for food and the lowest for durable goods. This type of consumption was called “physiological” or “naïve.” The third sub-group among the high-income group had the lowest level of food expenditures and the highest rate of expenditure for books, magazines and entertainment. They also spent more on musical instruments, radios, and related items. This last sub-group was called “intellectual” [Rimashevskaya, Levkova 1978: 139–141]. In summary, the research showed that similar income does not necessarily result in a similar structure of consumption and a similar lifestyle in socialist society [Rimashevskaya, Levkova 1978: 141].

The socialist consumer market was a significant subject of study of the Soviet sociologists in the waning days of the Soviet Union. Despite the stereotype that the Soviet state did not allow criticism, sociologists were able to critically approach many phenomena, including the market. First, they analyzed the channels of selling consumer goods from the point of view of consumer policy and management of supply and demand. Soviet officials acknowledged that the market was in a condition of shortage and this fact was voiced in sociological research. Studies of alternative channels for acquiring consumer goods (black markets, informal farmers markets) were published (for example, see: [Sidorov, Smirnov 1990]). It was concluded that the black market relieved some of the effects of shortages and that the access to consumer goods led to a diminishing of social differentiation [Guzanova 1989: 74; Sidorov, Smirnov 1990: 101].

As for the management of retail trade, in order to understand how to locate stores in the most rational way, sociologists interviewed people in order to discover factors influencing their choice of stores [Rukavishnikova, Sapozhnikova, Khazova 1990]. Sociologists also explored the amount of time consumers spent to get to a

store [Goloshchapov 1981: 147] and it was found that consumers preferred to buy groceries near to where they live or work. As for nonfood items, it was learned that consumers preferred to buy them in city centers rather than in remote areas. For the case of Moscow, studies showed that both types of stores were equally attractive for consumers. It was also concluded that as commodity circulation grew, it would be necessary to build larger shopping centers [Bobkov 1985: 85–86]. Moreover, Muscovites expressed a desire to buy nonfood items in department stores located in the neighborhoods where they lived, hence, a need for such stores would be also claimed [Rukavishnikova, Sapozhnikova, Khazova 1990: 99].

Second, sociologists explored and categorized the mechanisms of the socialist consumer market. In the project *Taganrog II* several types of demand were identified. First, *effective demand* (*platezhesposobnyy spros*) comprised the money a person had at his disposal to spend. Second, *delayed demand* (*otlozhennyy spros*) consisted of the money that would be spent, depending on the availability of a consumer good at a particular moment [Narodnoe blagosostoyanie... 1991: 140]. Third, *realized demand* (*realizovannyy spros*) was the money already spent of consumer goods [Narodnoe blagosostoyanie... 1991: 145]. There can be fully-satisfied demand and not fully-satisfied demand, depending on the level of satisfaction of a consumer [Narodnoe blagosostoyanie... 1988: 78–79].

Scholars talk about consumer behavior on the socialist consumer market and identify *impulse buying* as a consumer strategy that is at work when a consumer buys anything available for sale, no matter if he planned to buy it or not. Impulse buying in the context of shortages has almost nothing in common with that of the capitalist consumer market. Nevertheless, researchers interpreted this practice in a positive way, since it served as evidence that the demand for novelties was being satisfied to some extent [Narodnoe blagosostoyanie... 1991: 149]. Several other specific practices were mentioned in publications during this period, for example, *consumer migration*, meaning to travel to better-supplied cities for the express purpose of buying consumer goods [Narodnoe blagosostoyanie... 1991: 154–155] and *forced purchase* (*vynuzhdannaya pokupka*) to describe purchases made solely due to an item's momentary availability rather than a consumer's plan [Dukarevich 1987].

During the 1970s, **household possessions** was a popular subject of study. An example of this line of research is M. H. Titma's and T. I. Sildmäe's (1979) study conducted in Soviet Estonia. They considered household possessions to be an important part of the everyday life of the Soviet people and consequently were interested in exploring the factors affecting differentiation in them. The hypothesis was that differentiation was caused not only by income but also by differences in lifestyles and needs.

The research contained information about the structure of material possessions and then made a link between categories of possessions and social characteristics of the interviewees, using the method of taxonomy that was broadly applied in consumption research at the time. These typologies were quite rough, though, since nuanced characteristics of possessions were not taken into account, namely, the age of the object, the producer, the brand name, or style.

Later on, in the 1988 study *Urban Way of Life: Evidence from a Complex Social Study (Obraz zhizni naseleniya krupnogo goroda: opyt kompleksnogo sotsial'nogo issledovaniya)* scholars, in turn, took into account nuances related to material possessions. They concluded that it was not enough to know whether or not a person owned a TV, it was important to know what kind of TV it was, whether black-and-white or color, stationary or portable, with or without a videotape recorder and remote control, and so forth [Pashkov 1988: 208].

The structure of consumption was also explored from the point of view of **material well-being**, not limited to income, but also including household possessions. In a study by Protasenko, conducted in (then) Leningrad, people of four professional categories were chosen for analysis. Those categories were qualified workers,

engineers, teachers and service sector workers. For the most part, the engineers and teachers had higher education, and qualified workers and service sector workers had a secondary education. Protasenko suggested that education is a significant factor in differentiating a *culture of consumption* (*kul'tura potrebleniya*) [Protasenko 1985: 102]. She found the number of household possessions (*imushchestvennaya obespechennost'*) to be quite high in all groups. Personal income does not correlate with the number of household possessions, while the aggregate family income does. The higher the aggregate family income, the greater the number of household possessions. Hence, such factors as the aggregate family income, amount and quality of accumulated possessions (acquired in the past) and social characteristics of the family (socio-professional status, number of dependents) influence the structure of household possessions. The author also ground-breakingly acknowledged the significant role played by the *culture of consumption*. Fashion, advertising, spontaneous desire, as well as the momentary availability of consumer goods affected consumer patterns. Moreover, the author noted a widespread obsession with material objects (*veshchism*) among the population studied. Such attitudes were mostly visible among the service sector workers who tended to consume prestigious and expensive things because of availability of goods at their work places in deficit economy [Protasenko 1985: 109].

Fashion became a legitimate subject of analysis by Soviet sociologists in the mid-1970s. For example, Leonid Petrov considered fashion a form of communication from a socio-psychological perspective: "Fashion is approached from the point of view of social communication, as a special way of transmitting social information" [Petrov 1974: 3]. Identifying major functions of fashion, namely, identification with peer group, imitation, communication and aesthetics [Petrov 1974: 14–150], he emphasized that fashion is not an individual fad, but a social process. In 1980 Alexander Gofman posed his concept of fashion, according to which the structure of fashion contains fashion standards, fashion objects, fashion meanings and fashion components; the latter including fashionable behavior and actors participating in fashion. He described values intrinsic to fashion, splitting them into two groups: attributive values (up-to-dateness, playfulness, conspicuousness, universality) and denotative or situational values (defined by the social and economic institution, class structure and a way of life of a particular society) [Gofman 1980: 60]. Gofman compared socialist and capitalist fashions. Under capitalism, fashion is classed, whereas under socialism the differentiation is based on age, profession, education and personality traits. According to Gofman, socialist people were not concerned about the premature ageing of novel things [Gofman 1980: 64].

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, sociology became a discipline that was taught at institutions of higher learning in Russia. The chairs of Marxian philosophy and scientific communism were transformed and renamed into chairs of sociology, political science and culturology (a local version of Cultural Studies). Sociology in this period during the 1990s was "pluralistic" in that many sub-disciplines and research areas appeared and began to develop in this period intensively [Zdravomyslov 2007].

1.2. *Current state-of-the-art: the sociology of consumption in Russia today*

At least two major approaches can be distinguished within the sociology of consumption in Russia today. The first, the *economic sociology approach* primarily deals with market research, consumer behavior and lifestyle and is usually based on quantitative data. The second approach, the *socio-cultural approach*, focuses on the culture of consumption, identity, and consumer habits. As a rule, researchers who take this latter approach apply qualitative methods. Although they have much in common, the two methods diverge in their definition of "consumption" and also by the choice of research subject. In addition, since the two approaches are rooted in different sociological schools, the proponents of these approaches ground their arguments in different theoretical foundations. The essential difference lies in the fact that one approach studies consumption as a field affiliated with economics, while the other links consumption with culture.

1.2.1. The economic sociology approach to the study of consumption

This approach is the one largely promoted by sociologists at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. In 2005 the key article by Vadim Radaev's *Sociology of Consumption: Major Approaches (Sotsiologiya potrebleniya: osnovnye podkhody)* was published in one of the most important sociological journals in contemporary Russia, *Sociological Studies (Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya)*. Radaev poses an economic sociology approach (*ekonomiko-sotsiologicheskii podkhod*) to consumption and considers consumption as "making use of the useful qualities of a good, whereby individual needs are satisfied and the value of the good is exhausted." ([Radaev 2005: 352]; see also: [Roshchina 2007b]). Hence, in this approach, consumption is considered from the point of view of needs, while referring to both economics and the Soviet approach to consumption. At the same time, Radaev emphasizes that the economic sociology approach to consumption differs from economics in that "economic sociology cannot be satisfied with such interpretations, since consumption is both a social and economic process" [Radaev 2005: 7]. From this point of view, sociology acknowledges motives beyond the individual desire to increase consumption. Among other motives are desire for power, prestige, to communicate or to compete. Individual consumer behavior is therefore not always rational; it can be impulsive or compulsive. The consuming individual is not independent from others in his or her consumption decisions; instead, he or she compares her activity with various groups and communities [Radaev 2005: 7–8]. As an institutional frame for consumer behavior, values also affect consumption. In sum, consumption is defined not only by income but also by many social factors embraced by both economic sociology and the sociology of consumption [Radaev 2005].

The key topics being addressed with the economic sociology approach are social differentiation, lifestyle and social and economic characteristics affecting patterns of consumption. For example, in her research *Differentiation of Lifestyles of Russians in the Domain of Leisure (Differentsiatsiya stily zhizni rossiyan v pole dosuga)* (2007) sociologist Yana Roshchina writes that "one of the main characteristics of each society is the way people live: what they eat, how they dress and what they do. Any society consists of various social groups and certain corresponding ways to behave" [Roshchina 2007a: 23]. In this research, Roshchina investigates consumer behavior patterns that she calls "lifestyles"⁶ in the domain of leisure. She applied quantitative analysis (factor and cluster) to analyze Russian household data taken from R-TGI (Russian Target Group Index), a global market research database. Based on the R-TGI data from 1,600 households, Roshchina develops a typology of eight lifestyles in Russia consisting of particular practices. Among these lifestyles is the "passive" type that comprises people who do not go out much, have no particular hobby, and who watch TV, read, or listen to the radio during most of their spare time. An example of an opposite lifestyle would be the "postmodern" type comprising people who are very active outside the home and have a great variety of ways to spend their spare time: they "do everything you can think of" [Roshchina 2007a: 31]. After identifying patterns of consumption, Roshchina explores social and economic characteristics of the consumers among all the types she found. For example, the "passive" type were generally older, had a low income and a low level of education. They usually had families, but the number of widows was also high. In contrast, the "postmodern" group was much younger, typically in their 30s, often single, with higher education and a relatively good income [Roshchina 2007a: 33–34].

Roshchina is the author of the first textbook in the field written in the Russian language, *Sociology of Consumption (Sotsiologiya potrebleniya)* [Roshchina 2007b]. Published in 2007 by the Higher School of Economics, Moscow, the textbook by and large promotes the economic sociology approach as its first section

⁶ The category "lifestyle" appeared in Russian sociology in 1998 in the journal *Sociological Studies*. The authors of the article, discussing a cross-cultural comparison of styles of life in Eastern and Central Europe, suggested to translate this category from English into Russian as "sociocultural style" (*sotsiokul'turnyy stil'*). See: Demidov A. M. (1998) *Sotsiokul'turnye stili v Tsentral'noy i Vostochnoy Evrope* [Sociocultural Styles in Central and Eastern Europe]. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, vol. 4, pp. 16–28.

is devoted to a review of economic theory of consumption as a starting point. The textbook also includes a section on consumer behavior in the context of marketing. In addition, the textbook embraces key sociological themes in the study of consumption and also summarizes views on the culture of consumption.

Imitation of goods on the market is currently the main research program of Zoya Kotel'nikova who focuses on the role of fakes (counterfeits, pirated copies). According to Kotel'nikova's hypothesis, not all copyright holders are necessarily fighting against the unlicensed copying of their product. This position stems from producers' dependence on symbolic consumption. For them, the proliferation of particular goods, even fake ones, adds to the brand's recognition among the consumers. Simultaneously, pirated goods act as a marketing tool that helps to consolidate loyal consumers of a brand [Kotel'nikova 2008]. Kotel'nikova also studies the role of technical equipment installed in shops to prevent robbery. Using a social constructionist approach to technology, the author investigates the implementation of both simple devices (electronic tags, sensing devices and stickers) and advanced anti-theft systems (electronic detection systems). The market functions of these devices include, apart from safety guarantees and control over consumers, the departure from "outdated" retail practices towards more modern ones. Regardless of the fact that the use of this equipment has recently become routine, it not only limits and constrains consumer behavior, but also becomes a topic of heated debate between retailers and suppliers in questions of who should pay for the investment in loss-prevention equipment and, when theft does occur, who should pay compensation for the loss [Kotel'nikova 2011].

Journal of Economic Sociology (Ekonomicheskaya sotsiologiya) is one of the main promoters of the economic sociology approach. In addition to the research mentioned earlier, articles adhering to this approach that deserve mention here are the piece on retail trade market development in Russia [Radaev, Kotel'nikova, Markin 2009] and the recent article on lifestyles [Gorban' 2013]. Due to its reliance on quantitative methods, research on inequality and well-being gravitates to the economic sociology approach and finds its venue in the journal [Byzov 2000; Davydova, Sedova 2004], as does research on consumption in different spheres, for example food and leisure [Roshchina, Martynenko 2014].

1.2.2. The socio-cultural approach to studying consumption

At least two sub-approaches can be distinguished within the socio-cultural approach to the sociology of consumption, *critical* and *constructionist*. To a certain extent, these approaches intersect with one another.

The current *critical approach*, so named for its criticism of modern capitalist society, was developed by Dmitrii Ivanov. In his exploration of consumption as an activity, a process of interaction with other people, a set of lifestyles and ways of thinking that facilitate the creation of identities and allows one to express his or her belonging to a group or community, Ivanov concludes that man is what he eats, owns, wears, drives, attends, watches and reads [Ivanov 2008: 30–31].

In his article *The Phenomenon of Consumption: A Critical Approach (Fenomen potrebleniya: kriticheskiy podkhod)*, Ivanov identifies neomarxism and postmarxism as the key paradigms in his approach. According to Ivanov, the Marxian scheme of structure and superstructure is turned upside-down in modern capitalist societies, namely, production no longer serves as the foundation of capitalist society; instead, consumption serves as both foundation and superstructure, that is, consumption is the new ideology [Ivanov 2001: 13]. Modern capitalist societies develop technologies to organize the process of consumption, such as shopping malls, which are called the "new means of consumption" (in comparison to the Marxian "new means of production"). Consumption as ideology achieved a certain prominence and was linked with the process of virtualization, or the dominance of images. Ivanov distinguishes between "modern" and "postmodern" consumers. "Modern" consumers live in social reality, and they perceive it as "given" and "real". The modern consumer's behavior is shaped by his status. On the contrary, the "postmodern" consumer is buried in virtual reality and easily uses brands and images to create (multiple) identities.

Ivanov's ideas and the critical approach flourish in his book *Glam-capitalism* (2008) in which he acknowledges the Frankfurt school's ideas, but also states that he is ready to use a post-critical approach to consumption by eliminating the search for a revolutionary subject or for forms of resistance to commodification and alienation inherent in Marxism ([Ivanov 2008]; see also: [Ivanov2011: 23]). Ivanov poses an original "general theory of glamour," asserting that glamour has become not only "an aesthetic and cultural logic" but also "the rationality of current capitalism" which aims to convert glamour into capital [Ivanov 2011: 48]. In a later article Ivanov states that the logic of glamour overtakes the logic of virtualization: overproduction of images, symbols, and virtual money result in ultimately catchy yet simple (glamorous) images that are easily converted into capital [Ivanov 2011: 47].

According to the *constructionist approach*, developed by Vladimir Il'in among others, the sociology of consumption is closely connected to the study of culture. This sociological approach also supposes analysis of social inequality [Il'in 2008: 9]. Hence, by merging together culture and inequality one can get a concept of identity, which an active agent constructs by means of consumption. Consumption, thus, is not only the process of satisfying one's needs, but a "social and cultural process implying an exchange of signs and symbols" in the context of identity formation [Il'in 1998].

This approach was first articulated in Il'in's book *Consumer Behavior (Povedenie potrebiteley)* published in 1998 and was further developed in a subsequent book *Consumption as Discourse (Potreblenie kak diskurs)* [Il'in 2008]. Il'in theorizes consumption as a creative process, rooted in social structure, that gives the individual both resources and rules for constructing an identity [Il'in 2008: 9]. Il'in calls this an "*action-constructionist approach*" (*deyatel'nostno-konstruktivistskiy podkhod*), so named because it supposes that the individual is actively involved in constructing his or her identity in relation to his or her own social characteristics and in the process of everyday life.

In *Consumption as Discourse* Il'in extends the approach and explores the current culture of consumption in Russia [Il'in 2008: 21]. He suggests that modern Russia is striving to become a consumer society. Citing Bauman and Baudrillard, he defines consumer society as a society in which the key activity is individual consumption mediated by the capitalist consumer market. Hence, such a society requires from its members that they play the role of consumers. Il'in reconstructs the changes in everyday life occurring in Russia as it moves toward becoming a consumer society. He considers such phenomena as shopping, tourism, fashion, advertising from the point of view of transformation, structure and function. He names globalization, localization, (and "glocalization"), Americanization, and McDonaldisation as some of the processes that one can observe in contemporary Russia. Another book by Il'in, *The Everyday Life of Youth in a Russian Megalopolis (Byt i bytie molodezhi rossiyskogo megapolisa)* [Il'in 2007], explains how the nascent consumer society affects various spheres of life among the youth in Russia: their professional strategies, private and public life.

Valeriy Golofast has studied material goods using the socio-cultural approach. He introduced the idea of analyzing the history of material goods from the point of view of modernization [Golofast 2000]. According to Golofast, material goods can be studied in the context of three historic periods having three distinct "regimes" of relationships between the individual and the good. The first regime is dictated by scarcity; a material good represents collective value. Soviet society is an example of this regime. Next, attitudes toward goods became more contextual; goods were perceived as helpers or partners in social interactions, a functional component of daily routine, and their replacement became regular. Important in this regard is the fact that goods were becoming plentiful and had begun to serve all sorts of private needs, not just primarily collective ones, as was experienced in the first regime. Russian society at the beginning of the 21st century is an example of the second regime. During the third regime, consumption was reevaluated; overconsumption started to be perceived as a destructive force that should be tamed. The characteristics of this new approach towards goods include a critical attitude toward a level of consumption seen as excessive, discipline, modesty, green consumption, care

for personal health, prudence and altruism towards the sick, poor and weak. Russian society after the financial crisis of 2008 and modern Western European societies are the examples of this regime.

The socio-cultural approach towards goods in Soviet and post-Soviet culture is described in a book edited by Olga Echevskaya *People and Goods in Soviet and post-Soviet Culture (Ludi i veshchi v sovetskoy i postsovetskoy kul'ture)* [Echevskaya 2005]. The authors of the book study peculiarities of the dominant discourse on goods, semiotics of Soviet and post-Soviet goods, normative and actual models of attitudes towards goods during the Soviet period as well as peculiarities of the way of life in modern Russia.

Galina Orlova suggests that discourse analysis should be applied when looking at consumer practices related to goods in Soviet times. In one of her articles on Soviet material goods, Orlova investigates various manipulations whereby goods are adjusted to human needs and refers to them as “little tricks” of a Soviet person [Orlova 2004]. The function of used goods in modern culture is analyzed by Olga Brednikova and Zoya Kutaf'eva who pay special attention to a particular context, namely, a flea market [Brednikova, Kutaf'eva 2004]. Rostislav Kononenko, in his article on antique and retro-cars, notes that the main function of these goods lies in the peculiarities of an old thing [to maintain a link between generations, for instance] rather than in such qualities as comfort or up-to-datedness [Kononenko 2009].

The socio-cultural approach to consumption studies is generally being developed in the *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology (Zhurnal sotsiologii i sotsial'noy antropologii)*, although certainly not exclusively here. Editors Vladimir Kozlovskiy and Vladimir Il'in prepared a special issue *Consumer Society: Social and Cultural Foundations*⁷ (*Obshchestvo potrebleniya: sotsial'nye i kul'turnye osnovaniya*) and are currently working on another special issue. Generally speaking, the research themes being addressed with the socio-cultural approach include: consumer society as a concept [Ivanov 2011; Kozlovskiy 2011]; Soviet and post-Soviet consumption practices [Echevskaya 2005]; the analysis of new retail formats [Ryzhova 2003; Zhelnina 2008; 2010; Mikhaylova, Gurova 2009; Novozhilova 2011]; consumption practices of the middle class [Gladarev, Tsinman 2009; Shpakovskaya 2009; Gurova 2012], the poor [Echevskaya 2011], the elderly [Elutina 2009], children [Novozhilova 2011] and other social groups such as migrants [Gurova 2013] or those who have chosen downshifting as their life strategy [Lisova 2008]. Consumption culture is explored in research on brands [Tarasov 2004; Zhudova 2007], on glossy magazine discourse [Lollo 2011]. Fashion is analyzed in works of Gofman [1994], Yatina [1998], Il'in [2007; 2008] and Gurova [2008]. The socio-cultural approach has been long developed via the regular conference organized by Il'in *Consumption as Communication (Potreblenie kak kommunikatsiya)* held annually at Saint-Petersburg State University.

As detailed above, although institutionalization of the sociology of consumption as a research field accelerated during the 1990s, its roots can be traced in social research on consumption dating back to the first decades of the 20th century. Analysis of both the formation and development of this field allows one to evaluate how the social processes were studied by scholars: how the themes of research were changing (from research on the mode of consumption to research on social structure, market and other phenomena linked to the culture of consumption); how the research methodology was developing (from calculations of statistical data on consumption to shaping theories and concepts on consumption); which approach dominated during a particular period (contrary to popular opinion, Soviet research on consumption was not limited to the structural functionalist approach and nowadays there is pluralism within two major approaches); which methods were applied (from statistical methods, quantitative surveys and typology models to interviewing and observations).

2. Sociology of consumption as a course within university degree programs

In this section, the sociology of consumption is approached as a course within a university degree program. In 2008 Roman Abramov and Marina Yumanova explored the structure of degree programs in sociology in

⁷ See: *Zhurnal sotsiologii i sotsial'noy antropologii* [Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology]. 2011, vol. XIV, no 5.

universities across Russia. Depending on the frequency of their appearance, they distinguished three groups of courses. The first group, “core courses” (*yadro*), was taught in 50–80% of the universities in Russia. Of the 21 core courses, the most frequent among them were Sociology of Culture (73%) and Research Methods in Sociology (82%). The second group was called “semi-peripheral” (*poluperiferiya*) and included 32 courses. The third group was the most numerous and embraced 141 individual courses taught in 1–15% universities. The third group was called the “frontier courses” (*frontirnye distsipliny*). As Abramov and Yumanova pointed out, “the frontier courses create the unique face of sociological education at each university, reflecting the professional interests of the faculty and the traditions existing there” [Abramov, Yumanova 2008: 85]. According to this research, Sociology of Consumption belongs to this last group of so-called frontier courses.

That the course Sociology of Consumption holds such a position in the degree program does not imply by any means that we should neglect it. First of all, one feature of the research conducted by Abramov and Yumanova needs to be taken into account: it was based on the educational standards of the previous (“second”) generation. According to these standards, the Ministry of Education prescribed 26 courses to the undergraduate degree program in Sociology. Sociology of Consumption was not among these courses, although it could be offered and taken as an elective. The standards implemented by the following generation, the “third” generation, approved recently, have compulsory and elective components. Sociology of Consumption may be taken as an elective course for credit towards a degree in Sociology with concentration on Economic Sociology (see below).

2.1. Sociology of consumption in curricula of the “third generation”

In 2011–2012 universities in Russia embarked on implementing the third generation of the Federal State Educational standards of higher education (*Federal'nyy Gosudarstvennyy obrazovatel'nyy standart*)⁸. According to these standards, the B.A. curriculum in sociology includes three cycles⁹: 1) humanitarian, social and economic cycle; 2) mathematical and natural-science cycle, and 3) professional cycle. The professional cycle is directed at preparing people for a professional career in sociology itself. It consists of two parts: required and elective courses. Required courses include such courses as Introduction to Sociology, History of Sociology, Contemporary Sociological Theory, Economic Sociology, Political Sociology, Social Psychology, Sociology of Governance and Methodology and Methods of Sociological Research. All other courses, including Sociology of Consumption, are elective courses. The degree programs may contain so-called “profiles” (similar to programs of concentration) such as Economic Sociology or Applied Methods of Sociological Research. The profiles comprise courses which combine several related disciplines. For example, the profile in Economic Sociology may include such courses as Economic Sociology-2, Informal Economics, Socio-economic Behavior of Households, Sociology of Financial Behavior, and Sociology of Consumption.

This two-fold structure creates a hierarchy of courses. The list of required courses illustrates a symbolic battle between various actors in the field of sociology. Apart from sociological theory and methods, there are four courses in the core of sociological curriculum: Economic Sociology, Sociology of Governance, Political Sociology and Social Psychology. The list reflects the interests of particular actors who participated in the formation of the new generation standards. Sociology of Consumption, nevertheless, gained its place in the third generation standards, which could enhance its institutionalization as a discipline in the university curriculum for sociology.

⁸ By “third generation standards” is meant the national educational standards for higher education in place since 2009. These standards have different purposes in comparison to the standards of the second generation. The third generation standards are aimed at formation of competences, whereas the second generation standards were aimed at formation of general knowledge and skills.

⁹ See: Federal State Educational Standard in Sociology (040100, qualification — BA in Sociology) 2010, pp. 10–11. Available at: http://www.edu.ru/db-mon/mo/Data/d_10/prm230-1.pdf (accessed on 26 February 2014).

2.2. How the sociology of consumption appears in university curricula

This part of the article is based on the expert interviews that were conducted. As experts concurred, courses relating to the sociology of consumption started appearing in university curricula in a big way in Russia at the beginning of the 2000s. The typical “biography” of this discipline under the old state standards was the following: it was taught under different names¹⁰ for several reasons. For example, due to demand for a course related to consumption, the professor taught principles of the sociology of consumption, but gave the course a title from the curriculum that was available. One of the experts told how he began teaching a course on consumption in 1997 under the name *Consumer Behavior (Povedenie potrebiteley)* to students in marketing. However, since he himself identified as a sociologist, he modified content of the course according to his own — sociological — approach:

I became interested in the sociology of consumption in the mid-1990s, when I was invited to teach the course Consumer Behavior. I agreed (to teach) because I just had won a fellowship and was going to spend time in the U.S. While there, I began to delve into this topic deeply <...> from the point of view of consumer behavior. Since 1997 I have taught the course Consumer Behavior <...>. And because I am a sociologist, I added a sociological perspective to marketing (3¹¹, prof., SPbSU).

Courses in the sociology of consumption were taught under different names also for administrative reasons. Since courses are assigned to chairs in Russia, if the course is assigned to one chair, but the expert on consumption works for another chair, it is not easy for him or her to be assigned to teach this course. One of the experts talks about such a situation: the expert started working at a university and proposed a course entitled Sociology of Consumption, but this proposal was rejected because this course was assigned to a different chair:

When I came here <...>, I immediately offered my course Sociology of Consumption. My proposal was denied because this course was assigned to a different chair... So, my course under this title didn't work. Since I worked at the chair of sociology of culture, I proposed (another course entitled) Cultures of Consumption. Talking about titles of disciplines, they were not rooted in my vision of the discipline, but in administrative circumstances. There is a curriculum and I have to fit in. Later, when I published my book, I began teaching Sociology of Consumption at the M.A. level (3, prof., SPbSU).

In the case described above, the Sociology of Consumption eventually changed its assignment from one chair to another. As one of the experts explains, this shift was also justified by the inner logic of the disciplines:

Sociology of consumption was a discipline assigned to the chair of management and planning, now assigned to the chair of sociology of culture and communication. And I would pay attention to this shift. It reflects the evolution of consumer practices and approaches to them. It is not just an economic phenomenon any longer, but cultural and communicative. And now many courses such as Sociology of Consumption, Sociology of Advertising are assigned to this chair (4, prof., SPbSU).

Third, if the sociology of consumption was already being taught at a university, consumption scholars there may suggest other courses in this field as electives under various titles. At the Higher School of Economics in Saint-Petersburg there was an attempt to create a module in the sociology of consumption consisting of several courses at different levels: from the introductory course *Sociology of Consumption* to the practical-oriented

¹⁰ In Russia, the courses prescribed to degree programs by the Ministry have fixed names. Electives have more variety and flexibility as the names can be given by course's author.

¹¹ See list of experts in Appendix 2.

course *Cultures of Consumption (Kul'tury potrebleniya)* and the advanced course *Theories and Methods of Consumer Research (Teorii i metody izucheniya potrebitel'skogo povedeniya)* at the M.A. level. Two courses were ascribed to the chair of sociology whereas the third course was assigned to the chair of methods and technologies of sociological research. One of the experts talks about the Cultures of Consumption course and what happened to it:

The first time, I taught it to senior 5th year students. And they were people educated in all areas [of sociology]. They already had taken Sociology of Consumption. I thought, it could be Sociology of Consumption-2 and I gave them many texts in English, very difficult ones, about localization and various national cultures of consumption. <...> I thought, during the Sociology of Consumption course they had already learned their own culture, and now they can take a look beyond. And it went well. Students read those difficult articles. <...> But then an administrative difficulty arose. The fifth year was eliminated (the “specialist” degree program used to last 5 years, but the fifth year was cancelled due to the transition to a B.A. (4 years) + M.A. (2 years) system — O.G.). Now we don't have it. And my course transformed into an elective for second, third and fourth year students, i.e., the students are at completely different levels. <...> And I had to quickly adjust the course (6, senior lecturer, NRU HSE, SPb).

As for a typical scheme for the course to be included in the curriculum, first, it can be added as an elective (*fakul'tativ or spetskurs*). Scholars describe how this works at Novosibirsk State University at the department of sociology: first, a course is discussed as a prospective elective course at a chair meeting. Then they allow it to be taught for the first time as an elective (*fakul'tativ*), and afterwards they solicit feedback on the course from the students. The feedback is discussed at the chair meeting and then, if approved, the course is added to the degree program and schedule as a special course (*spetskurs*). After a period of time on the schedule as a special course, it might be added to the curriculum as a core course. This is the scheme that was in effect under the educational standard of the second generation.

A course could also arise from a workshop, as one expert explains:

I was approached with a request to organize a workshop at the center for skill conversion (tsentr perepodgotovki). I confirmed by submitting a proposal. They were interested, but at the end it didn't work out for financial reasons. I transformed this workshop into a special course (spetskurs). <...> Because it was an elective, it was relatively easy (to add to the schedule) in the faculty of sociology. In this sense, they are liberal (4, prof., SPbSU).

2.3. Courses and syllabi

Access to lists of courses, course descriptions and syllabi at Russian universities is a serious challenge nowadays. At some universities, instructors are obliged to upload information about their courses on the Internet. Unfortunately, not all Russian universities follow this policy, which creates serious problems with access to information about how sociology programs are structured at a particular campus. As for syllabi, direct requests to instructors are rarely answered. First, the researchers are concerned about protecting their intellectual property and their work being properly cited. Second, sometimes scholars are reluctant to share their syllabus online since it is preliminary and expected to be modified during the term as it is being taught. Finally, drafting the syllabus and getting it approved by the head of the chair or department and by other responsible authorities is a complicated and bureaucratic procedure with numerous nuances. For this reason, instructors often do not draft any syllabus at all, which they admit in their interviews.

Fifteen syllabi are examined in this article (See Appendix 1 for the list of course titles analyzed). When searching and selecting the materials, special attention was paid to the course description, since any search based on the course title alone might have been misleading. That is, the course named “Consumer Behavior” might originate in either the sociology or the marketing disciplines. Course programs and syllabi as such could be a captivating subject for research; in this article, however, I will present only some general conclusions from my analysis of the syllabi in the sociology of consumption.

The courses selected for analysis are mostly targeted to undergraduates in Sociology, although there are also several within the Master’s degree programs.¹² The main purpose of the undergraduate courses offered is to familiarize students with concepts and theories on consumption as well as with empirical research in this field. Simultaneously, students should study methodology and learn methods for analyzing consumption. The purpose of the Master’s degree courses is more in-depth: for instance, to show the interconnection between the concepts of consumption and general sociological concepts and to develop creative skills (both oral and writing) for a better understanding of the culture of consumption. The syllabi of the courses relating to the sociology of consumption usually cover the following topics: consumption as a subject of research; peculiarities of the sociological approach to consumption in comparison to other disciplines; key theories and theoretical approaches to the sociology of consumption; macro-characteristics of consumer society; consumer culture; consumption, social structure and identity; and, finally, consumption in various spheres, such as food or clothing.

All in all, while the syllabi usually feature comparisons of approaches to consumption between economics, psychology and marketing, they rarely touch on cultural studies, even though this perspective provides plentiful insight into the sociology of consumption. Moreover, the theoretical basis of the courses is usually focused on classical concepts developed by Marx, Veblen, Bourdieu and Baudrillard. Notably absent is the history of consumption studies in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Similarly, the development of the discipline in different countries is overlooked. Thirdly, very few courses contain the practical component necessary for developing the skills needed to do applied research. Fourthly, the courses rarely draw on literature written in foreign languages. On the positive side, the content of the course syllabi is rather diverse and in some cases features a strong methodological component. However, the majority of the courses on the sociology of consumption are based on the textbooks by Roshchina and Il’in and, thus, the instructors are leading the discipline towards relative standardization.

2.4. Methods of teaching

New or emerging courses push scholars to use innovative teaching methods. In their interviews, experts emphasized a shift from the traditional “lecture plus seminar” scheme towards more interactive formats of teaching. This new interactive approach supposes that an instructor not only transmits knowledge but also acts as a mediator and facilitator in the process of acquiring and formation of competencies, as it is prescribed by the new national standards.

Ideally, courses on consumption impart the skills and knowledge needed to do applied research. Therefore, students are often given the tasks of developing a research program and carrying out a research project as a part of course work. Such a practical assignment forces the students to apply various research methods to obtain data, for example, by observation or interviews. The instructor can also assign creative tasks during the course, for example, to make and use video or photographs as tools of analysis. All in all, the teaching process has become rather flexible in terms of methods.

¹² See the list of course programs in Appendix 1.

Scholars aimed at increasing their online visibility widely use the Internet as a platform to not only upload course materials but also to communicate with students. For example, Vladimr Il'in maintains a website containing an extensive amount of material on the sociology of consumption (<http://www.consumers.narod.ru/>). Another website, *Sotsiologicheskie progulki* (Sociological Walks, <http://www.urban-club.ru/>), is maintained by the sociologist Anna Zhelnina and contains a reading list, visual materials, course syllabi, links and announcements. Some scholars use social networks, for example, sociologist Dmitrii Ivanov launched a group for the students in the Russian social network Vkontakte.ru called “glam-capitalism +” (<http://vkontakte.ru/feed#/club390698>). The group contains slides from lectures and various visual materials.

In general, experts welcome interactive methods of teaching but sometimes with certain hesitation. Experts criticize interactive methods, with its elements of entertainment, for converting students into passive consumers. In fact, the experts add, it is necessary for both parties — instructors and students — to be involved in a mutual process of teaching and learning.

3. Sociology of consumption as an academic community

In addition to a body of literature and a university subject, the sociology of consumption implies that there is a group of scholars who may (or may not) identify themselves as members of an academic community. Drawing on the interviews with experts, in this part of the article I will discuss the characteristics of such a community related to studies of consumption, namely, identity and the sense of belonging. I will also touch on some of the major dilemmas that the sociology of consumption currently faces, according to opinions of members of the community.

3.1. Academic identity

Three types of academic identities among the experts who took part in the research could be distinguished: 1) scholars who identify themselves with sociology of consumption as such; 2) scholars who have multiple identities and identify themselves with several subfields in sociology, and 3) scholars, who identify themselves with another branch of sociology but still do research on consumption.

The identity of the first type is presented in the following interviewee's words:

(F)or me now <...> consumption is the main focus [of research], while stratification and other related things, such as power and the like, take second place (7, assistant prof., NSU).

Formation of identity is considered as a process by this expert, it can be developed and changed over time:

First, I didn't study consumption “officially”, I studied social stratification. Social stratification and social status. And I saw consumption as a derivative of social inequality and, in fact, as its mirror. <...> Later, while I was working on my thesis, it was already clear (to me) that it was not social stratification but a different, yet neighboring, field (7, assistant prof., NSU).

This expert became involved in the sociology of consumption in the late 1990s when the discipline started to take off in Russia.

The second type of identity, the multiple identity, is presented in the following quotation:

I cannot say that I work in the field of consumption only. It's a kind of “urban mix”... Urban studies and this (consumption) run like a golden thread throughout everything I do. That is, I don't have

project purely devoted to consumption only, but every piece of my research has something about it (6, senior lecturer, NRU HSU, SPb).

When a scholar's main area does not belong to the sociology of consumption, this type of identity is presented in the third case:

Talking about sociology of consumption, I cannot say it's my prime area of specialization, because, first and foremost, I specialize in the sociology of professions, partly in the sociology of higher education and contemporary sociological theory (2, assistant prof., NRU HSE, Moscow).

In general, the experts recognize their impact in the field and mention several neighboring subfields intersecting with the sociology of consumption. Among these disciplines are social stratification and inequality, sociology of communication, sociology of culture and cultural studies, urban sociology, sociology of everyday life. In general, the variety of identities reflects perfectly the interdisciplinary character of consumption studies in today's sociology and of academic research in Russia generally.

3.2. *The sense of belonging to community of scholars of consumption*

Academic identity implies a sense of belonging to a particular community, for example, a community of scholars adhering to a particular subfield or school of thought. The question is whether such a community exists and how unified it is.

Summarizing the expert opinions on this question, the conclusion would be that such a community does exist; however, it is in a relatively early stage of formation. The community is also not cohesive; rather, it embraces independent scholars and experts in the field of consumption and at so-called "growing points" at different universities across Russia:

In Russia, the sociology of consumption as a discipline does exist, and there is a community of people, who work in this field, write articles and participate in conferences. Recently more interesting works have started to appear. <...> The level of conferences is not very high yet, but it has been growing, especially during the past two years. <...> Thus, the community is emerging, you can already see its contours (3, prof., SPbSU).

Besides Moscow and Saint-Petersburg other cities, such as Novosibirsk, Saratov, and Yekaterinburg were mentioned as "growing points" in the study of consumption. Nevertheless, full-fledged research centers or institutions or even research groups hardly exist anywhere. Rather, there are individuals in these cities and across the country at different universities who contribute to the field with the work they do.

Despite the existence of favorable conditions at certain universities, these universities still act as "growing points" only. For example, at Saint-Petersburg State University at least three scholars conduct research and teach courses in the field of consumption:

There are three people working on this topic in our faculty (3, professor, SPbSU).

There are separate authors, scholars, who made an impact. But they work independently from each other. [But] we work for the same faculty, so we communicate (5, assistant prof., SPbSU).

Scholars talk about the various forms of interaction they have with each other — they write joint reviews of students' theses, participate in conferences, team-teach joint courses but still conduct their research work

independently of each other. These three scholars, mentioned in the interviews, all belong to different chairs of the same university. As for other forms of collaboration between scholars located in different cities and institutions across Russia, they do exist, but are not highly intensive. One of the main reasons why consolidation of the community of scholars has not happened is the absence of a “charismatic leader” or a “strong promoter” of the discipline. Many scholars believe that development of the discipline fully depends on such force:

For a new discipline, I think, a strong promoter is needed, as it was for economic sociology back then. <...> It [economic sociology] wouldn't have been developed [to such extent] without Radaev and Volkov. This was a project with strong promoters. The same is needed for the sociology of consumption (2, assistant prof., NRU HSE, Moscow).

Comparison with a more successful subfield — economic sociology — and its leader Vadim Radaev often comes up in interviews:

Radaev is such a charismatic (person). A strong person who gathered around himself a kind of school. There is no one like him anywhere (6, senior lecturer, NRU HSE, SPb).

Currently, Vladimir Il'in is acknowledged by experts as a leader, but despite sufficient organizational, publication and other activities, he himself blames the lack of administrative effort that would be required to form a real community.

3.3. The key dilemmas of the sociology of consumption

A substantial part of the experts' interviews was devoted to current key dilemmas of the sociology of consumption.

Dilemma 1: interdisciplinarity

One of the dilemmas is embraced in the question of whether sociology of consumption should be a clearly sociological or an interdisciplinary course. On the one hand, the university curriculum constructs it as a sociological course that fits into a degree program following the educational standards in sociology. The sociology of consumption was not included in the standards of the second generation and because of that there was no official standard for it. Despite the ambivalent attitude to the standards, experts affirm that national standards enhance the institutionalization of the subfield in Russia. According to the new standards of the so-called third generation, the sociology of consumption could be included in a profile on Economic Sociology and this can help its institutionalization.

Some scholars can design their course as sociological and, at the same time, can be vague as to its purpose:

For me, it's a sociological course with the main question of what are the meanings of people's everyday lives. <...> For me, consumption is an instrument for exploring the essential questions, such as how to construct one's identity; how to tell oneself and others who you are. For me, it's a field with very a strong touch of philosophy (3, prof., SPbSU).

Other scholars see it as an interdisciplinary course since it relies on a question-oriented approach:

I believe everything should be interdisciplinary. I like the idea of “umbrella subjects”. Urban Studies, Consumption Studies — these are examples (6, senior lecturer, NRU HSE, SPb).

Despite the existence of the national standards, Russian instructors have a certain degree of freedom to develop their courses as they see fit, and they do prefer to exercise this freedom. They do not face any serious resistance when they tailor the syllabus, because the content of the course is the sole responsibility of the instructor who teaches it, and the head of the chair can turn a blind eye to the details of the course's syllabus. Therefore, the instructor can follow the latest developments in the research field and adjust his or her syllabus accordingly:

From the point of view of the university, it has to be a certain way. You are at the faculty of sociology; therefore you should behave properly. But I don't know... I don't think that anyone cares about this. At least, nobody picked on me because I added cultural and historical components to my course. Interdisciplinary teaching is better for people because they can see how to look at the topic from different perspectives, and they don't have this narrow view that we are sociologist and that's why we should do it only this way (6, senior lecturer, NRU HSE, SPb).

Third, scholars can design the sociology of consumption as an interdisciplinary course due to market demands. The market needs expert knowledge and a client will not care whether research is sociological or if it extends beyond this particular discipline:

It is forced to exist as an interdisciplinary field. In fact, the target audience does not need sociology. They need expert knowledge on consumption consisting of such components as sociological, marketing, managerial, psychological (knowledge). The sociology of consumption as such wouldn't be effective because it has certain limits. It's aimed at maintaining boundaries as a branch of sociology. <...> I see good perspectives for [an interdisciplinary course of] Consumption Studies (4, prof. SPbSU).

Dilemma 2: academic versus marketing research

At least three branches of the sociology of consumption can be identified: the academic branch, the non-academic (business) branch, and the analytical (research) branch. Each branch has its own target audience, which affects its content.

At universities, the target group for the sociology of consumption comprises scholars and students:

Academic research is usually a terra incognita that eventually stops being incognita. It's movement toward new spheres. In general, it creates and promotes new meanings (2, assistant prof., NRU HSE, deputy head of chair, Moscow).

In general, scholars do not see the academic discipline and the research field as estranged from the applied work conducted by marketing companies and think tanks. Rather, they widely use their experience, no matter its derivation, in their applied and consulting work.

In business, the client is interested in applied research of target audiences and current issues. In this case, the sociology of consumption has to draw on marketing concepts of consumer behavior:

I had to become familiar with the marketing concepts of consumer behavior. But we understand that they overlap with the sociology of consumption. For marketing companies, the most important things are the specific tasks and questions posed by the client. There is no opportunity to spend much time on research. There is neither the time, nor the resources, both financial or organizational, to develop in-depth and complex projects that go beyond a particular client's task (2, assistant prof., deputy head of chair, NRU HSE, Moscow).

Experts also emphasize that it is a mistake to think that marketing research is theory-free. Quite the opposite, this type of research uses theory, but rather as a source of inspiration for ideas or new techniques. In this sense, marketing research overlaps with the sociology of consumption in academia. Marketing research, as a form of applied research, also requires meticulous attention to methodology.

At think tanks, such as FOM (*Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie*) or the Levada Center, the approach lies between the academy and business, and the target audience can be either corporate clients interested in consumer market research or government officials or even the academy itself:

On the one hand, FOM focuses on pragmatic targets and practical objectives and on academic objectives as well. They positioned themselves as a strong think-tank, an intellectual think-tank for long time. And in this sense it has to produce new meanings. At FOM we apply concepts from the sociology of consumption, social stratification and sociology of innovations, take ideas from them, and use the resources of this huge think tank to get qualitative and quantitative data (2, assistant prof., deputy head of chair, NRU HSE, Moscow).

Dilemma 3: international versus local

In their interviews, experts discussed the main characteristics of the interactions between the local and the global community of the sociology of consumption. On the level of theories and concepts, the younger researchers express better connection with international sociology: they use theories and concepts and are aware of contemporary methodologies and methods. The older generation operate in much the same way, and they can also be aware of international trends, but due to their senior status and experience, they prefer to develop their own original concepts.

On the level of international interaction, scholars attend and present at international conferences. They also teach joint courses with international colleagues; however, such courses are organized in Russia, not abroad, and the international scholars are the ones who are invited. Among the invited scholars were mentioned the American sociologist George Ritzer, the British sociologist John Urry, and the American cultural theorist Stewart Ewan. Russian sociologists rarely serve as keynote speakers at major international events, but as participants they are welcomed. Despite the fact that western sociologist still serve as the main contributors in terms of ideas and findings, this situation has been gradually changing recently.

While not exactly well-connected to international sociology, scholars acknowledge that they also do not see the continuity of their research with the Soviet sociology:

From the Soviet sociology I personally took nothing (3, prof., SPbSU).

Honestly, I don't see any connection [with the Soviet sociology] because, it seems to me, I am not educated enough in the field of Soviet sociology (6, senior lecturer, NRU HSE, SPb).

To a certain extent, the lack of a connection to the Soviet sociology stems from the relative novelty of the discipline and lack of long-term legacy in Russia. Up to now, there is still no substantial review of the history of the Soviet sociology of consumption that would improve continuity in this field.

International grants and fellowships have played an important role in the collaboration between Russia and the West, especially in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s. As one of the experts said, he would not be the same sociologist today, had he not received international fellowships and grants.

4. The problems of institutionalization: discussion

The question of institutionalization of the subfield is controversial. As mentioned at the beginning of the article, sociology is peculiar for its sensitivity towards social processes and its ability to easily absorb new phenomena as subjects for research. As Abbot points out about sociology, “once such an area makes a claim for sociological attention, the discipline doesn’t have any intellectually effective way of denying that claim” [Abbot 2001: 5]. Therefore, experts have mixed feelings about the necessity for institutionalization of sociology of consumption as a subfield.

For example, there is an opinion, widely held, that up-to-date content is more important than the formal institutionalization; therefore there is no point in multiplying branches within sociology:

I don't really think there is a need to fight for institutionalization, for establishing organizational structures. It is more important to have substantial development of the content [of the discipline]. In a separate way or converging with other [fields]. <...> There are many branches of sociology that have been launched by now, and it is easier to become the “head” of a new branch just by adding “-ology” to something. There is nothing wrong with that. But I just do not pay attention to all these new “-ologies”. Many of them arose and then disappeared (1, prof., NRU HSE, Moscow).

Another opinion is that the sociology of consumption is a work-in-progress. The future fate of such branches that are not fully formed is not clear; many of them do fade away before they become institutionalized. In that sense, the sociology of consumption has good perspectives to fully develop because it is supported not only by the academy but also by market demand:

We see this weird situation where branches of sociology very quickly appear and then instantly disappear. In this case, the sociology of consumption will survive as applied market studies. It's good to connect a discipline to certain pragmatic knowledge that can be easily sold on the market. From this point of view, the sociology of consumption is more capable of survival than, for example, the sociology of professions (2, prof., deputy head of chair, NRU HSE, Moscow).

At the same time, the sociology of consumption is bound to compete with marketing, which is a difficult challenge because marketing is further developed in terms of applied research.

At this stage, the sociology of consumption in Russia has its peculiarities. One of them is that the discipline is quite individualized, and its development depends on the activity of individuals rather than institutional actors. The emergence of skilled research teams focused on consumption studies would be the next step of the discipline’s development.

Conclusions

This article focused on the process by which the sociology of consumption may become institutionalized in Russia. In this context, the sociology of consumption is understood as a research field, a body of literature, a university-level subject within an undergraduate or advanced degree program, and an academic community. The sociological literature on consumption was reviewed with the following questions in mind: How are approaches to the study of consumption changing? What are the questions being posed and what are the methods being used by sociologists in this endeavor? The path that the sociology of consumption has taken to become a university subject within the approved curricula was discussed. In addition, the article reviewed how a scientific community of consumption scholars came about, namely, how the members of this community

express their identity, what they generally think about the subfield, and, finally, how they see the current state of the subfield and its future.

Several observations were made in this article. The origins of consumption study in Russia were reviewed, followed by a discussion of the rise of the research field during the Soviet era. The evolution of the sociology of consumption in post-Soviet Russia was traced. One possible outcome of the historical review presented in the article is that it might motivate other researchers to pay closer attention to various aspects of the Russian tradition of consumption research, which while disrupted during the Stalinist regime, has historical roots that are a century old.

Next, the article reviewed the position of the subfield as a subject in the university curricula. Emerging in university curricula at the end of 1990s, the sociology of consumption currently occupies a stable position within the sociology degree programs at Russian universities. Until recently the subfield had vaguely-defined standards which, on one hand, hindered institutionalization. On the other hand, the absence of defined standards allowed instructors space for creativity, in particular for applying personal research interests, specialized knowledge and current trends. Interviews revealed that syllabi could be quickly adapted to accommodate social changes and new developments in the research. Third, interview data showed a strong conviction that the presence of a strong leader and united scientific community might contribute to developing the subfield. Presently there are only diffused “growing points” spread throughout the country where certain consumption scholars play a particularly key role in advancing the sociology of consumption.

The growth potential for the sociology of consumption lies in its further development, not only as a theoretical discipline, but also as an applied one. It is necessary to keep in mind, though, that it might be difficult to find a way to apply the socio-cultural approach practically. The subfield is also in stiff competition with marketing which has sharper methodological tools for carrying out applied research.

Perhaps it is sufficient to ask: “What is the point of studying the process of institutionalization for *any* new field? And, although there are many phenomena in modern society that require explanation, is it really helpful to constantly come up with new subdisciplines?” This is a reasonable point of view. However, institutionalization allows for both gaining prominence and expertise within a particular field of study and, most importantly, ensures its own further development and reproduction through achieving a legitimate position in the system of higher education. Hence, it does make sense to reflect upon and try to comprehend the process of institutionalization. This review, as such, could be regarded as another step forward in the institutionalization of the sociology of consumption in Russia.

Appendix 1

List of course programs

1. Alekseycheva A. N. (year not available) *Sociology of Consumption*. Ivanovo State Energy University. Available at: http://library.ispu.ru:8889/search?b_start:int=39&Subject:list=%D0%A3%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%B1%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8%20%D0%B8%20%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%8F (accessed on 28 February 2014).
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Appendix 2

List of interviewees

№	Affiliation	Position
1	National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow	Professor
2	National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow	Assistant professor, deputy head of chair
3	St. Petersburg State University	Professor
4	St. Petersburg State University	Professor
5	St. Petersburg State University	Assistant professor
6	National Research University Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg	Senior lecturer
7	Novosibirsk State University	Assistant professor, deputy dean
8	Novosibirsk State University	Assistant professor, head of chair

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