



Alexander Kalgin

How Economics and Sociology Contest the Meaning of “Social Inequality”. The Russian Case

SCRIPTS Working Paper No. 35

SCRIPTS

CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE

Contestations of the Liberal Script

CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE “CONTESTATIONS OF THE LIBERAL SCRIPT (SCRIPTS)”

SCRIPTS analyzes the contemporary controversies about liberal order from a historical, global, and comparative perspective. It connects academic expertise in the social sciences and area studies, collaborates with research institutions in all world regions, and maintains cooperative ties with major political, cultural, and social institutions. Operating since 2019 and funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), the SCRIPTS Cluster of Excellence unites eight major Berlin-based research institutions: Freie Universität Berlin, the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, the Berlin Social Science Center (WZB), as well as the Hertie School, the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW), the Berlin branch of the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS), and the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO).

SCRIPTS WORKING PAPER SERIES

The SCRIPTS Working Paper Series serves to disseminate the research results of work in progress prior to publication to encourage the exchange of ideas, enrich the discussion and generate further feedback. All SCRIPTS Working Papers are available on the SCRIPTS website at www.scripts-berlin.eu and can be ordered in print via email to office@scripts-berlin.eu.

Series-Editing and Production: Dr. Anke Draude, Isabela De Sá Galvão, and Carol Switzer

Please cite this issue as: Kalgin, Alexander 2024: How Economics and Sociology Contest the Meaning of “Social Inequality”. The Russian Case, SCRIPTS Working Paper No. 35, Berlin: Cluster of Excellence 2055 “Contestations of the Liberal Script (SCRIPTS)”.

Cluster of Excellence
“Contestations of the Liberal Script (SCRIPTS)”
Freie Universität Berlin
Edwin-Redslob-Straße 29
14195 Berlin
Germany

+49 30 838 58502
office@scripts-berlin.eu

www.scripts-berlin.eu
Twitter: [@scriptsberlin](https://twitter.com/scriptsberlin)



CONTENTS

Author

Abstract

1	Introduction	3
1.1	The Russian paradox: extreme inequality without social protest	3
1.2	Summary	4
1.3	Historical origins of the hegemony of economists in Russia	5
1.4	The guiding intuition	6
2	Theoretical framework	7
2.1	Root metaphors in science and conduct	8
2.2	Root metaphors as a source of vocabulary for conceptualising social inequality	8
3	Methodology	11
4	Results	12
4.1	“Social inequality” in the public discourse	12
4.2	Disciplinary domains in expertise	13
4.3	Modern contestations of the hegemony of economists	15
4.4	Content analysis of media	16
4.5	Social inequality on TV and Radio, a qualitative analysis	19
4.6	Demand for sociological expertise on social inequality	23
4.7	Limitations	23
4.8	Implications and further research	24
5	Conclusion	24

References

AUTHOR



Alexander Kalgin is an economist and a sociologist. He worked as an associate professor at the HSE University in Moscow, Russia, from 2010 to 2022, as a postdoctoral researcher at IOS Regensburg from 2021 to 2022, and held the position of a senior visiting researcher at Cluster of Excellence SCRIPTS, Free University of Berlin, between 2022 and 2023. Currently, he works as a Senior Analyst at Constructor University Bremen. His academic interests include the sociology of science, the sociology of inequality, and the sociology of education. He has published actively in the fields of public administration and corruption studies. His PhD thesis, defended at the University of Birmingham, UK, explored the strategies of data manipulation in government statistics in Russia.

akalginall@gmail.com

How Economics and Sociology Contest the Meaning of “Social Inequality”. The Russian Case¹

Alexander Kalgin

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the expert discourse surrounding “social inequality” in Russia, analysed with a focus on the role of two academic disciplines: sociology and economics. These disciplines are the main social sciences contributing to expert analyses of social inequality. In Russia, economists dominate in expert discourse (as judged by their predominance in TV and radio). Sociologists contest this domination in certain sub-fields, including social inequality. Quantitative analysis of TV and radio coverage from 2000 to 2022 shows that the topic of “social inequality” is highly sensitive and its use is highly moderated with respect to the political situation of the moment. According to content analysis of federal and regional news for all groups of experts, the most prominent danger of social inequality is social upheaval. This may be designated as the universal imaginary of the “Russian revolt”.

Keywords: social inequality, Russia, economics, sociology, expertise, debates

1 INTRODUCTION

This project was originally designed to be implemented in pre-2022 Russia and aimed to map the emerging field of public debates on social inequality. Events since February 2022 have altered the context drastically, and the issues of interest have become overshadowed by the conflict in Ukraine. For this reason, to illustrate the potential of the theoretical framework, we limit our data collection to pre-February 2022. This boundary is relevant because of the constitutional voting of 2020 that coincided with a significant intensification of social justice debates.

¹ We would like to thank our colleagues from the SCRIPTS Cluster of Excellence at the Freie Universität Berlin for their constructive comments. Particularly, we thank Katharina Bluhm, Alexander Libman, Thomas Risse, Sergei Akopov, and the participants of the BIRT Colloquium for their contributions.

1.1 THE RUSSIAN PARADOX: EXTREME INEQUALITY WITHOUT SOCIAL PROTEST

According to the Russian Constitution, “the Russian Federation is a welfare state, policies of which are directed towards creating conditions for a dignified life and free human development”. Yet, Russia is one of the most unequal countries in the world in terms of income and wealth. A recent study by Russian economists showed that about 70% of national wealth is concentrated in the hands of 5% of the population and inequality is growing (Mareeva/Slobodenyuk 2018). Russia is at the top of the ranking of wealth concentration (Credit Suisse 2017). The number of billionaires in Russia is staggeringly high and the share of wealth concentrated in their hands far exceeds the figures for other developed states, which stands at 40% in Russia, 5-15% in Germany, France, and the USA (Mareeva/Slobodenyuk 2018). At the same time, according to the official statistics of the Russian government, over 20 million people (13.5% of the population) are living below the poverty line, which is (according to the minimal standard cost of living) about 12’000 roubles a month (about 160 dollars).

Yet, public discourse in Russia does not appear to provoke any widespread indignation around the issue of inequality. What may seem outrageous to an external observer seems to be tolerated by the Russian public with either stoicism or apathy. We probe the roots of such an attitude by studying the discourse around social inequality. We look at how often social inequality is mentioned in the news and connect this to the electoral cycle. We also look at the discourse in the media from the

perspective of different academic disciplines that supply experts who make the pronouncements on social inequality, focusing on economists and sociologists. In a second step, We map the alternative perspectives that are currently emerging – sociological, political, and philosophical – and the contribution of their advocates to the discussion of the issues of social inequality in Russia.

1.2 SUMMARY

This study explores the public discourse on inequality in the Russian media through the disciplinary affiliation of experts invited to comment on issues of inequality. Overall, economists dominate the expert scene, but sociologists are also represented, particularly when discussing non-economic aspects of social inequality. Among sociologists, one can identify two “camps” – subjectivists and structuralists. These two camps differ in the emphasis they place on different aspects of social inequality and the language they use. The structuralists are closer to the economists and speak about “objective” causes and consequences of social inequality, whereas subjectivists speak about perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences of inequality. Structuralists overwhelmingly dominate the expert presence in media coverage of inequality. The voice of subjectivists is barely heard and remains restricted to their academic publications or a close circle of expert “roundtables” on specialised issues such as disability, inclusion, or school education.

The subjectivists tend to use language rich in highly-charged concepts such as hatred, envy, and justice. There is no apparent demand for such expertise from the technocratic bureaucrats in government agencies. Thus, this expertise largely remains in the academic domain or informal media such as opposition channels and offline gatherings.

The presence of social inequality debates has been unequal over time. Interest in the topic of social inequality typically grows in the year preceding a presidential election. Thus, the highest peak was in 2012, when Vladimir Putin was returning to the presidency and used social inequality as a highly potent tool to criticise the incumbent president. It was actively used in 2012 but not in 2018, when Vladimir Putin was elected to his fourth term. Thus, we argue that this potent weapon normally wielded against the incumbent has not been used recently because the incumbent is Putin. It would have meant that he did not manage to overcome social inequality in his previous term. This dynamic of the discussion of social inequality demonstrates the highly managed (manipulated) nature of the Russian mainstream media outlets. TV, Radio, social media, and the press demonstrate the nature of the problem of social inequality, which is a powerful tool that can ignite public outrage.

Structuralist sociologists are in demand in the media, and their language is almost indiscernible from that of the economists. Whereas subjectivists barely appear in the mainstream media. Based on interviews with subjectivist sociologists, we conclude that their expertise could potentially be in demand by politicians. And this tells us something about the nature of politics in modern Russia. Politicians do not generate the demand for a potentially potent discursive tool. We argue that this is because, in Russia, there are no politics in the Western sense. There is no pluralist democracy in which such powerful discursive tools could be used to win rhetorical political struggles or propose new policies and party programmes.

As a result of the absence of active politics, there is no demand for the inflammatory language of critical sociology. Instead, there is a demand for the more neutral and depoliticised language of structuralist sociology and economics.

The key metaphor that emerged from our content analysis is “social explosion”, an upheaval that inevitably results from rampant social inequality. This is the dominant metaphor across all groups of experts and among journalists. It alludes to the classical imaginary or the “Russian revolt” from classical Russian literature. In “The Captain’s Daughter” Alexander Pushkin writes: “Не приведи Бог видеть русский бунт — бессмысленный и беспощадный” (May God grant we never again see the Russian revolt – so senseless and pitiless) (Пушкин 2008: 220). This study presents five pieces of empirical data:

1. Quantitative analysis of the dynamics of the use of terms related to social inequality for the period 2000–2022.
2. Quantitative analysis of the disciplinary dominance of economists and sociologists on selected topics for the period 2000–2022.
3. Qualitative analysis of one debate on social inequality between an economist and a sociologist.
4. Qualitative content analysis of news items mentioning “social inequality” on TV and Radio for the period 2000–2022 for sociologists and economists.
5. 2 interviews with the “subjectivist” sociologists on the role of sociology in the discourse on social inequality.

1.3 HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE HEGEMONY OF ECONOMISTS IN RUSSIA

The dominance of economics in the policy discourse is not unique to Russia. The same has been observed in the US (Wolfers 2015). One article in the New York Times inquires: “What if Sociologists Had as Much Influence as Economists?” (Irwin 2017). In Russia, in the early 1990s, reforms were implemented (or proposed) by a group of politicians with predominantly economic education, including Egor Gaidar, Evgeniy Yasin, Grigory

Yavlinsky, Anatoly Chubais, Stanislav Shatalin, to name a few of the most prominent figures.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that economic reforms and the transition from a planned economy to a market economy were the backbones of the Russian transition away from its Soviet past. This transition was headed by a group of young intellectuals familiar with modern Western economic theories and attempted to implement them in what was termed the “shock therapy” approach.

This particular emphasis is not to say that the camp of economists has been united on issues of social policy. There has been a conservative wing, the most prominent representative of which is probably the economist Sergey Glaziev. However, at the core of the transition of Russia to a market economy in the 1990s were liberal reforms conceived by the liberal wing of economists. These reforms secured the hegemony of economists in debates on social issues.

Since the 1990s, we can observe a general trend – the discourse surrounding matters of social policy and the role of government regulation has been dominated by liberal economists. The overwhelming majority of Russian prime ministers have had higher education diplomas or postgraduate degrees related to economics or finance. Speaking very broadly, we can say that discussions of the transition of Russia away from its Soviet past have largely been steered by people who embodied the general ethos of economics. According to Stephen Collier (2011), in 1990, teams of Soviet and American experts discussed and proposed reforms to the Soviet social policy and welfare state architecture. He observes that “The Americans were academics and high-level technocrats with backgrounds in international security and international economics. Among their prominent spokespeople [was] [...] Jeffrey Sachs, a specialist on international trade and stabilisation” (Collier

2011: 117). Thus, it can be seen that the reforms were guided by economists from the very inception.

The point we aim to make is that this over-reliance on the language of mainstream economics has resulted in many avenues of debate being completely excluded. Many themes cannot be discussed productively because of the hegemony of economics and economic experts seen by the media and often by the audience as the only legitimate experts on issues of governance. Expertise emerges if there is a demand for it. The demand for the inflammatory language of critical sociology could come from political actors in a vibrant pluralist democracy. However, in the Russian case, the natural avenues of rhetorical competition are clogged by political censorship of the media and thus, only the impoverished language of neutralised economics and structuralist sociology is heard.

As a result, the people have not been given the chance to appreciate the complexity and depth of the modern conceptions of Western liberalism, including the pivotal role of the welfare state, the values of equity, dignity, recognition, solidarity, belonging, and social rights, and are instead limited to the narrow discussion tunnel of tax rates, minimal wage, mortgage rates, GDP growth, inflation, and so forth.

Among the central problems of the Soviet Union, economic problems were perceived as dominant, and their solutions were seen as lying in the realm of economics. It should be noted that economic education in the Soviet Union was very specific. Even those economists who later became active proponents of Western mainstream economics received their first education in Marxism and published their early works with a Marxist perspective (see, for example, Кузьминов 1990; Радаев/Кузьминов 1987; Радаев et al. 1989). Marxism has strong metaphors centred around such concepts

as alienation, exploitation, and expropriation that are foreign to mainstream economics. Nonetheless, the episode with American economic consultants who shaped early economic policies is highly relevant.

1.4 THE GUIDING INTUITION

One observes in Russia that discussions of domestic social, economic, and political controversies are dominated by the language of economics and articulated in economic terms. Economists have “hegemonised” the arena of expert discussions of many issues, including social inequality. On the issues of distributive justice and inequality, the vocabulary used is very limited and predominantly economic. However, new agents have recently entered the public arena with their specific vocabularies. We study the debates on distributive justice in Russia from the perspective of the epistemological assumptions of experts involved in such debates.

In the months preceding the federal vote on constitutional amendments in July 2020, the discussion of the framework of the welfare state in Russia intensified. These discussions, held on federal media in independent news outlets and social media, highlight a certain structure of the Russian public intellectual landscape. There is a growing politicisation of the scholarly community; traditional domains of economists are being invaded by new experts, including political philosophers, sociologists and political scientists, and anthropologists. The classic Russian distinction between the “TV party and the Internet party” seems to have acquired an epistemological dimension. In traditional political science studies of Russia, one speaks about the TV party – the people who watch state television and vote for the ruling party, and the “internet party” – the younger generation that gets their news from the Internet and votes for the opposition. The new divide may be characterised as epistemic.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section we present the theoretical framework that draws on the concept of “root metaphors”. We then provide examples of the use of root metaphors for “vocabulary extension” in sociology and economics and the importance of root metaphors in policymaking.

We draw on the concepts of “hegemony” and “articulation” (Gramsci 1971) and on the field theory of Pierre Bourdieu (Hilgers/Mangez 2014). To theorise the conceptual difference between economics and sociology, we turn to the philosophy of science and the concept of “root metaphors” (Black 1962, 1979; Davidson 1978; Rorty/Hesse 1987; Stepanov/Ermakova 2016).

A theoretical reflection is in order. It may seem natural to designate some problems as “economic” and assign them to “the economists”, who are supposed to be experts in problems of such nature. However, this is not natural but rather a result of the monopolisation of certain areas of discourse by an interest group. We rely on two theoretical traditions for this argument – the first by Bourdieu and the second by Antonio Gramsci.

According to Gramsci (1971, 1992), it is the role of “organic intellectuals” to “articulate” social issues and problems. Before a problem is articulated, it cannot be appropriated by any group. Once articulated, named, and framed, it becomes available for appropriation by one or another power group. The very act of articulation already frames a problem or phenomenon in a certain context and links it with other problems and phenomena. Problems can be re-articulated and appropriated by another group. This theoretical tradition continued through the works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau/Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2005) in the post-structuralist theory of discourse.

Bourdieu offers a method of “radical doubt” and reconstruction, showing that seemingly natural social structures are, in fact, the result of power struggles between interest groups. Once the struggle is over, its result becomes ossified and no longer transparent; one cannot see the preceding fight of interests that shaped the outcome through an ossified social fact. Thus, for us, it is important to bear in mind that there are no “natural economic problems” that need to be appropriated by “the economists”. Any problem is a field of contestation, and until it is ossified, it can be re-articulated and re-appropriated.

Gramsci and Bourdieu have intersecting themes, as has been previously demonstrated by Michael Burawoy (2012). The Gramscian concept of hegemony resonates with Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic domination. In his volume of essays, *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci (1992) contrasts “a political struggle and a military war”: a military war has an end, after which there is peace; political struggle, on the other hand, never ends, the opponents always continue to try to rise and re-establish their lost positions (Gramsci 1992: 218). We extend this analogy to the “epistemological struggles” – a phenomenon is never ultimately appropriated by a discipline; there is always a process of contestation going on. For example, psychologists try to re-articulate issues of consciousness in a way that frames them as “psychological” in nature, but then, neurobiologists attempt to re-articulate the phenomenon of consciousness in biological terms and appropriate it to their discipline.

Similarly, the struggle continues between sociologists and economists for the explanation of social phenomena. How should one see education? Is education a commodity (a good) that can be sold and purchased? Or is education a function of the organism of society by which it reproduces? (Konstantinovskiy et al. 2012). If education is a good that is sold and purchased on the market, then high-quality education is expensive

and rare, something which many want to buy and subsequently, the criteria for the quality of good education are related to the balance of supply and demand. If, on the other hand, education is a function of the social organism, then the qualities of a good education are quite different – it is the kind of education that allows the social organism to reproduce itself, something that provides a steady flow of socialised graduates who take their places in the ever-progressing row of generations. Likewise, one can see welfare state policies through the prism of various metaphors and from different epistemological perspectives.

2.1 ROOT METAPHORS IN SCIENCE AND CONDUCT

This study links epistemology and practice via the concept of “root metaphors”, as Hans Blumenberg (2010: 14) observes: “[b]y providing a point of orientation, the content of absolute metaphors determines a particular attitude or conduct; they give structure to a world, representing the non-experienceable, non-apprehensible totality of the real”. Blumenberg’s key idea is that at the bedrock of one’s interpretation of the world, one can detect a certain “absolute” metaphor that one uses to make sense of the world. These metaphors are at the pre-theoretical level and for this reason, they are called either “absolute”, or “root” (Kurakin 2014), or “basic” (Kurakin/Filipov 2006), or “terminal” (Konstantinovskiy et al. 2012). George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s seminal work “Metaphors we live by” (2008) differentiates between “ontological” and “structural” metaphors, observing that science is a special case of using a consistent set of metaphors. David Konstantinovskiy, Viktor Vakhshain, and Dmitry Kurakin (2012: 33) attribute the origin of the term “root metaphor” to Stephen Pepper (1942). According to Lakoff and Johnson (2008), sciences are built around a set of consistent metaphors. It is to this idea that this study turns. Scientists deliberately learn to see the world through the lens

of a specific set of metaphors. Economists see exchange everywhere, sociologists spot power relations or group solidarity, and evolutionary biologists tend to explain the world in terms of natural selection (Hardin 1968). Moreover, they underline the fundamental importance of metaphors making sense of the everyday world, stating, “It is as though the ability to comprehend experience through metaphors were a sense, like seeing or touching or hearing, with metaphors providing the only ways to perceive and experience much of the world” (Lakoff/Johnson 2008: 239).

Max Black (1962) describes the fundamental way a metaphor works in his book on the role of metaphors in science. The metaphor highlights some aspects of the object while hiding others. If something is brought to the fore, then something is hidden:

Suppose I look at the night sky through a piece of heavily smoked glass on which certain lines have been left clear. Then I shall see only the stars that can be made to lie on the lines previously prepared upon the screen, and the stars I do see will be seen as organized by the screen’s structure. We can think of a metaphor as such a screen and the system of “associated commonplaces” of the focal word as the network of lines upon the screen. We can say that the principal subject is “seen through” the metaphorical expression — or if we prefer, that the principal subject is “projected upon” the field of the subsidiary subject. (Black 1962: 41)

2.2 ROOT METAPHORS AS A SOURCE OF VOCABULARY FOR CONCEPTUALISING SOCIAL INEQUALITY

2.2.1 SOCIOLOGY AND ECONOMICS AS EPISTEMOLOGICAL RIVALS

In their seminal work, Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan (2017) introduced a typology of research paradigms that can be productively used to illustrate the main assertion of this paper. The

authors categorise various research projects into a 2x2 matrix with the following axis: purpose (radical change vs incremental “functional” improvement) and view of reality (objectivist vs subjectivist). “Functionalist” research aims to explain the situation in question and suggests marginal improvements to mend the identified problems. Research aimed at radical change, on the other hand, is motivated by the desire to challenge the status quo in significant ways and propose new alternatives. After conducting an insightful review of sociological writings, Abbot (2007) concludes that from many sociological pieces, one can infer a certain general emotion – outrage – that animates the writer, “outrage is inevitably a dominant emotion in a discipline that has made inequality its most important single topic for many decades” (Abbott 2007: 93).

At the risk of oversimplification, we venture to suggest that a significant share of modern mainstream economics research may be classified under Burrell and Morgan’s functionalist type. It favours incrementalism and gradual marginal improvement of the existing status quo by targeted policy interventions. At the same time, in sociology, imagining an alternative state of affairs, a state that could have been, is now commonly held to be one of the virtues of a student of sociology. A readily available example is Pierre Bourdieu’s (1994) method of radical doubt and reconstruction of the origins of social order. These two worldviews – one of incrementalism and one of radical imagination – may inform not only scholarly debates but translate into public discussions and contribute to the expansion of the very language we use to articulate the political, social, and economic problems we face.

2.2.2 ROOT METAPHORS OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIOLOGY

Broadly speaking, among the most influential economists in Russia, there is a predominance of

those who belong to the tradition of new institutional economics,² which has borrowed heavily from the neighbouring disciplines of sociology and psychology. Yet even this “extended economics” (Faguet 2011) remains within the fundamental framework of economics, built upon the axioms of (rational) choice and methodological individualism. Institutional economics preserves and extends the “root metaphor” of economics, where social life is seen as a series of exchanges and transactions. The basic axiom of economics is that individuals make choices in their self-interest by comparing costs and benefits and that, in this calculation, they are driven by incentives.³

On the other hand, classical sociology was built on the fundamental axiom of solidarity. Georg Simmel, Emile Durkheim, and Ferdinand Tönnies explicitly explored the effects of solidarity in human life. For Martin Buber (1970), the key concept was the “I-Thou relationship”, and for Alfred Schutz (1970), one of the key concepts is the “We-relationship”. Even Adam Smith (2010), commonly portrayed as the founding father of economics and the champion of self-interest, devoted his first

2 Alexander Auzan, the dean of the Department of Economics of Moscow State University; Yaroslav Kuzminov, the rector of the Higher School of Economics; Sergey Guriev, the former rector of the New Economic School; Konstantin Sonin, former vice-rector of the New Economic School and the Higher School of Economics, to name a few.

3 A similar argument is made by David Graeber when he criticized the extension of market metaphor beyond economic theorizing to actual policymaking and moralizing: “The idea that there is something called “the market” is not so very different. Economists will often admit this if you ask them in the right way. Markets aren’t real. They are mathematical models, created by imagining a self-contained world where everyone has the same motivation and the same knowledge and is engaging in the same self-interested calculating exchange. Economists are aware that reality is always more complicated; but they are also aware that to come up with a mathematical model, one always has to make the world into a bit of a cartoon. There’s nothing wrong with this. The problem comes when it enables some (often these same economists) to declare that anyone who ignores the dictates of the market shall surely be punished or that since we live in a market system, everything (except government interference) is based on principles of justice: that our economic system is one vast network of reciprocal relations in which, in the end, the accounts balance and all debts are paid” (Graeber 2012: 115).

treatise, “The Theory of Moral Sentiments”, to the pivotal role of empathy in human society. Yet, economics dominates the debates on inequality in Russia, leading to narrowing the focus of such discussion to quantitative measures, such as income redistribution, minimal wages, or pensions. Most importantly, it has resulted in remarkable incrementalism and a lack of “utopian imagination”.

Russia is not the only place where economics dominates policymaking. Daniel Hirschman and Elizabeth Popp Berman (2014: 779) observe that economics has been described as “the most politically influential social science”. They ascribe this to “the role of economics in the cognitive infrastructure of policymaking, including the diffusion of economic styles of reasoning” (Hirschman/Berman 2014: 779). This view resonates with our focus on pre-theoretical metaphorical foundations of academic disciplines. “Styles of reasoning” in sociology and economics are different, and this leads to a different articulation of problems and policies.

2.2.3 METAPHORS IN POLICYMAKING

Elinor Ostrom points out the dangerous role metaphors can play in policymaking. She reviews the effects of the widespread acceptance of the concept of “the Tragedy of the Commons” by Garrett Hardin (1968). Policymakers who do not have time or desire to delve into the intricacies of academic debates tend to adopt powerful metaphors non-critically and devise policy interventions based on such reception. Ostrom (2015) gives an example of a fishery minister who claims that “fishery IS a tragedy of the commons, thus we MUST introduce quotas and licenses” or “the pasture IS a prisoner’s dilemma, therefore government intervention is required”. Ostrom cautions against such leaps from theoretical abstractions to policymaking, but for our purpose, it is useful to note this tendency of powerful metaphors to shape the reasoning styles of policymakers. The

change of root metaphors is like Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “duck-rabbit” (2010) – one phenomenon can be seen in different ways depending on the paradigm. So, for example, education can be seen both as a commodity and as a function of the organism of society. These different aspects will have different policy implications.

2.2.4 EXAMPLES OF VOCABULARY EXTENSION

A recent call for papers by the Faculty of Social Sciences of Tampere University in Finland may be used as an illustration. The authors plan a collection of papers entitled: “Experiencing Society: Lived Welfare State” (Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences 2020). The very title points at a shift in emphasis: from “objective” measures of income and wealth to the “lived experience” of the welfare state. The authors aim to “broaden[ing] the scope of welfare state research and revitaliz[ing] the study of society and change by allowing new conceptualisations of past and present” (Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences 2020). Such efforts of the scholarly community are illustrative of the kind of language expansion that we are emphasising. Numerous welfare-focused think tanks operate in Scandinavian and other European countries and are frequently affiliated with sociology or social policy university departments. The issues of inequality are studied not only through the lens of economics but with a wider methodological perspective.

These efforts have the potential to ultimately translate into a more nuanced language of policymaking and public discussions. As John Maynard Keynes observed:

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little

else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back (Keynes 2013: 383).

This quote should be extended beyond economists and political philosophers to all “academic scribblers” (and other intellectuals, as Gramsci suggests). But it is our interest in this project to explore the interplay and contributions of two social sciences most familiar to me: economics and sociology. They bear significant similarities, as both study the interaction of people in society but have fundamentally different core assumptions.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study relies on quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative section utilises a relatively simple methodology to analyse the discourse around social inequality in Russia. Data were extracted in August 2022 from the Medialogia database (Медialogия n.d.), which archives a significant share of Russian media sources and allows for advanced search. We were interested in two core questions:

1. What are the dynamics of the use of the term “social inequality” over the last 22 years?
2. How are the term “social inequality” and related terms used in conjunction with mentioning sociologists and economists?

For the quantitative analysis, we selected the periods from January 2000 to February 2022 (ending 23 February 2022). The logic behind this selection was to cover the period after Putin first became president in 2000 and before the start of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in February 2022. Thus, the period covers all terms of President

Putin, the term of President Medvedev, and the vote on Constitutional amendments in 2020. Our approach is similar to that taken by Justin Wolfers (2015) of the New York Times, who estimated the relative dominance of experts by the number of times their professions were mentioned in the news (and found that economists dominate).

The qualitative section used the same database to extract the full text of TV and Radio programmes that mention the terms “social inequality” and “economist/sociologist”. The texts were downloaded and analysed using MAXQDA qualitative analysis software. Terms and repeated themes were coded and categorised to describe and elicit the dominant “root metaphor(s)”. A selection of vivid quotes has been compiled to illustrate the working of underlying metaphors. News items were extracted from Medialogia (Медialogия n.d.) for the period from 01 January 2000 to 23 February 2022. The following search criteria were used: “social inequality” and “economist” (172 hits) and “social inequality” and “sociologist” (94 hits). Some items were duplicated and were removed.

For the paradigmatic example, we turn to one prominent debate between an economist and a sociologist in which the subject of inequality stands out. The debate was called “Do we need to fight inequality?” (Kapelyushnikov/Yudin 2019), took place in the Sakharov Center, and was accessed via YouTube.

To estimate the relative prominence of sociologists and economists on issues of social inequality, we followed a simple process. A pool of terms was compiled that relate to social inequality and the welfare state (see Table 1). For each term, three numbers were assigned: the overall number of mentions in the database, the number of mentions in conjunction with “sociologist”, and the number of mentions in conjunction with “economist”. The logic behind this approach is that a

large proportion of the news mentions are interviews with an expert. These interviews customary begin with an introduction of the invited speaker, for example, “today we are addressing our question to the economist Ivan Ivanov”, or “today, in our studio, we are speaking with the sociologist Petr Petrov”. Thus, by defining the search query to include the terms “social inequality” and “sociologist” simultaneously, we get the number of news mentions that turned to sociologists for their expertise.

However, not all news items are related to interviews with experts. If reports are cited, then mentioning an economist or a sociologist indicates the general direction toward which the journalists sought the expertise. For example, in speaking about poverty, if a journalist turns to a report produced by “economists of the World Bank”, we conclude that economics dominates because the first point in the journalist’s search for expertise is a report by economists. Through this content-analysis exercise, we attempt to estimate the relative predominance of sociologists and economists in the field of expertise. The only indicator we rely on is the frequency of appearance of sociologists and economists in the news related to social inequality.

4 RESULTS

4.1 “SOCIAL INEQUALITY” IN THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE

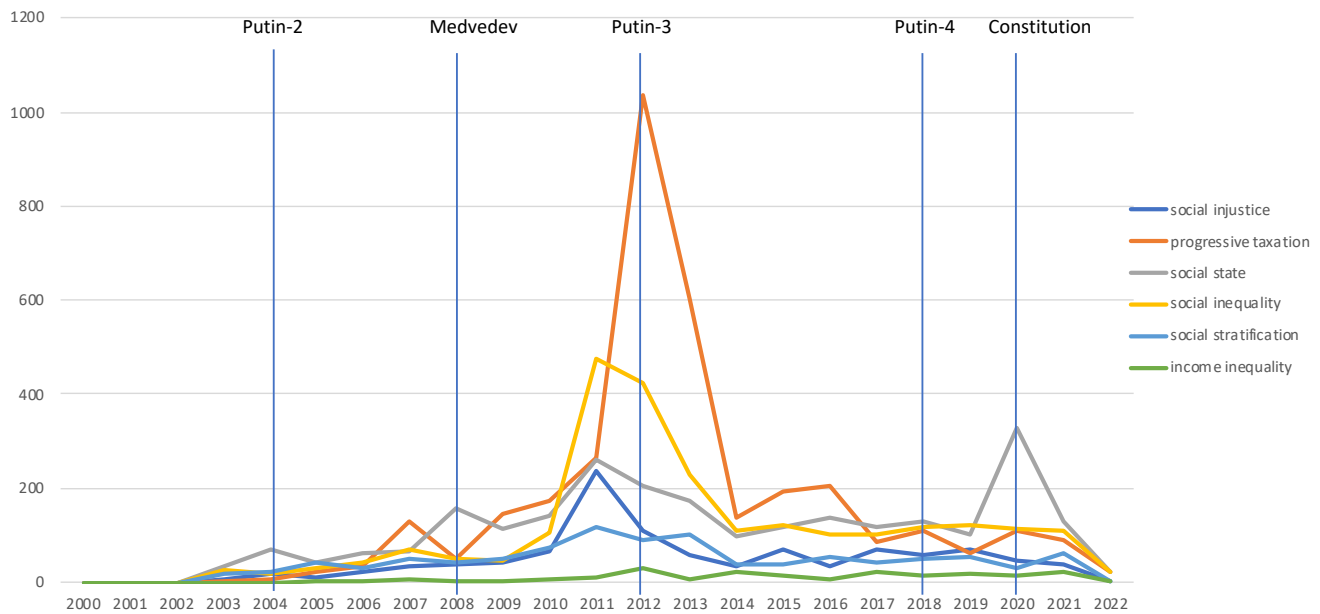
In this section, we present the results of qualitative and quantitative analysis of the discourse surrounding the issue of social inequality in Russian media. Two competing perspectives are presented: the sociological and the economic ones. Quantitative analysis of Russian media is supplemented by thematic qualitative analysis of selected sources. The deficit of sociological expertise is highlighted.

It is important to make a methodological note here. In contrast to other studies that attempted to endow social policy with its rightful place between economics and sociology (Sidorina 2005), we do not attempt to analyse the content of the field of social policy. We look at the media to find which experts dominate the field of expertise on social policy. Our approach is, therefore, sociological, not epistemological, or philosophical. We do not inquire into what problems social policy is concerned as a discipline or what methods are more important for social policy studies. We only look at who makes pronouncements on issues of social policy, broadly speaking and on social inequality as the top issue of social policy. By analysing the discourse in the media, we can find who is considered a qualified expert on the issues of social policy, in general, and social inequality, in particular. These experts are given the opportunity to make their pronouncements in the media, thus informing the discourse. We highlight that it is important to distinguish the philosophical analysis of social policy as a discipline from a sociological analysis of the discourse on social policy issues. The latter is of interest to us in this study because through it, we can assess the relative “power” of the dominance of the two sciences that interest us: sociology and economics.

Figure 1 presents the usage of the terms related to social inequality and the broader term of the welfare state, revealing the dynamics that stimulated the use of these terms. The key finding here is that social inequality and related concepts were invoked more frequently in the years directly preceding presidential elections and the constitutional vote. We can see the rise in the frequency of mentions for all years in which presidential elections took place. We will call these dynamics the “intensity of discussions of social inequality”.

Another finding is that not all presidential elections had the same intensity of discussion of social inequality. Thus, for example, we observe the

Figure 1: Mentions of social inequality terms in Russian TV and Radio, with election dates



most pronounced increase by far in 2012 when President Putin came back to power. That year, all terms related to social inequality were discussed with the highest intensity. On the contrary, in 2018, when President Putin got elected for his fourth term, we see virtually no increase in the intensity of the discussion of social inequality. Subsequently, we see a minor increase in 2020 when the amendments to the Constitution were voted upon in a referendum.

We interpret these differences as a sign of highly managed discussions in the Russian mainstream media. Here we only have the numbers for the TV and Radio, and they represent a highly managed subset of the media. Putin's government progressively tightened its control over TV and Radio. Thus, we can interpret this graph as a manifestation of the manipulation of the media by the government. According to this interpretation, in 2012, it was important to raise hopes for a better future and invoke social inequality as the key evil that the new (and former) president would combat. In 2018, on the other hand, when the same president was the incumbent, the media were not allowed to discuss the topic again, as it could have negative implications for the current

president because the problem would seem to not have been solved. Therefore, social inequality may be seen as a rhetorical weapon closely linked with such powerful imaginary dangers as the "social explosion" and social upheaval.

4.2 DISCIPLINARY DOMAINS IN EXPERTISE

It is important to note that the only indicator we rely on is the frequency of appearance of sociologists and economists in the news related to the subject of social inequality. Thus, we use journalists as our metric. Journalists need to produce a piece of news. In doing so, they seek expert comments from several speakers. For us, it is important to know who journalists turn to in their search. Who is on the top of their list, for example, for a piece of news on poverty? Or on social inequality? Is it a sociologist or an economist?

In our case, we see that in the selected period, economists were mentioned 66'186 times, and sociologists 22'661 times. So overall, economists appear on the news 2.92 times more frequently than sociologists. This gives us a general threshold against which we can compare all our search terms. We take this economist-to-sociologist ratio

as an indication of the relative dominance of one discipline over the other – the higher the ratio, the more dominant the economists; the lower the ratio, the more dominant the sociologists.

For example, we see that for the term “social survey”, we see almost complete domination by sociologists, whereas for the term “inflation”, economists overwhelmingly dominate. Table 1 presents the findings of the content analysis for each term with the respective share and dominance ratio, colour-coded so that pink represents the terms dominated by sociologists, yellow represents a contested region, and blue represents the domain of economists.

We see that the most general term – “inequality” – is in the contested region. “Income inequality” belongs to economists and “social inequality” to sociologists. The terms related to money – maternity capital, progressive taxation, mortgage, budget, and social benefits – all belong to the domain of economists. Whereas such core sociological concepts as “solidarity”, “values”, and “social capital” appear deep in the sociological domain, along with “dignity”, “envy”, and “social justice” – the concepts important for the sociology of emotions.

Table 1: Relative dominance of sociology and economics on selected terms

Terms	Total	Economist	Sociologist	%econ	%soc	Econ/soc ratio
social survey	28'844	1'115	3'795	4%	13%	0.29
public opinion	51'000	2'146	5'164	4%	10%	0.42
sense of inequality	8	1	2	13%	25%	0.50
community 1 (общность)	4'259	225	261	5%	6%	0.86
social class	172	19	22	11%	13%	0.86
family	455'534	3'999	3'879	1%	1%	1.03
inclusion	804	13	12	2%	1%	1.08
envy	5'188	295	261	6%	5%	1.13
social capital	372	57	49	15%	13%	1.16
values	50'058	3'508	2'547	7%	5%	1.38
society	225'310	10'993	7'851	5%	3%	1.40
development	452'576	6'977	4'738	2%	1%	1.47
solidarity	9'000	977	657	11%	7%	1.49
social injustice	1'059	57	38	5%	4%	1.50
stratification	201	23	15	11%	7%	1.53
justice	66'583	2'456	1'505	4%	2%	1.63
family support	2'543	46	28	2%	1%	1.64
social inequality	2'432	172	94	7%	4%	1.83
social problem	8'176	657	356	8%	4%	1.85
dignity	32'511	1'497	811	5%	2%	1.85

Terms	Total	Economist	Sociologist	%econ	%soc	Econ/soc ratio
poverty	11'400	2'040	1'008	18%	9%	2.02
economic inequality	391	50	24	13%	6%	2.08
integration	54'086	1'577	700	3%	1%	2.25
social stratification	993	136	60	14%	6%	2.27
inequality	4'959	794	347	16%	7%	2.29
social policy	19'181	1'411	593	7%	3%	2.38
social state	2'500	342	136	14%	5%	2.51
community 2 (сообщество)	54'671	5'112	1'997	9%	4%	2.56
unions	23'263	1'609	620	7%	3%	2.60
pension age	29'085	1'648	607	6%	2%	2.71
the minimal standard of living	10'425	1'018	362	10%	3%	2.81
maternity capital	31'427	481	161	2%	1%	2.99
economic stratification	19	3	1	16%	5%	3.00
education	206'938	9'223	3'010	4%	1%	3.06
labour rights	1'691	71	23	4%	1%	3.09
progressive taxation	3'478	262	84	8%	2%	3.12
budget	97'114	12'464	3'154	13%	3%	3.95
income inequality	197	48	12	24%	6%	4.00
social benefits	99'507	3'118	760	3%	1%	4.10
welfare state	20	5	1	25%	5%	5.00
stimuli	15'619	2'681	448	17%	3%	5.98
mortgage	19'126	2'560	409	13%	2%	6.26
inflation	87'844	9'147	1'238	10%	1%	7.39
economist all		66'186				
sociologist all		22'661				2.92

>2.92 dominance of Econ

4.3 MODERN CONTESTATIONS OF THE HEGEMONY OF ECONOMISTS

Post-February-2022 Russia cannot be analysed in the same way as pre-February 2022. The gap is due to a rapid and abrupt crackdown on independent media, some of which were relevant for our analysis as they hosted alternative speakers on social issues. We, therefore, attempt to provide evidence of our propositions from pre-2022 material.

In this study, we focus on the most prominent speakers who most vividly illustrate the project framework's potential. For illustration, one prominent debate between an economist and a sociologist on the subject of inequality stands out. The title of the debate was "Do we need to fight inequality?" (Kapelyushnikov/Yudin 2019) and the participants were the sociologist and political philosopher Grigory Yudin (Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, Shaninka) and the prominent Russian economist Rostislav Kapelyushnikov (Russian Academy of Sciences, HSE University).

This debate was organised by the Sakharov Center and broadcast on YouTube. Each speaker had 30 minutes to deliver his presentation and then participate in a round of Q&A. This debate is suitable for this study because it demonstrates the key intellectual moves typical for economists and sociologists in a condensed form. The very fact that such prominent speakers engaged in a debate on inequality in the Sakharov Centre conveys the importance of the subject and the perceived implicit conflict between sociological and economic perspectives. The organisation designed the debate to pit the economic perspective against the sociological view. And the choice of sociology as a rival to economics is symptomatic.

4.3.1 THE ECONOMIST'S PERSPECTIVE

Kapelyushnikov builds his entire argument around the problem of measuring quantitative inequality and shows that different economists use different statistics and arrive at different conclusions depending on whether they include taxes and transfers or not. He concludes that it is impossible to speak about inequality, and it is not possible to demand to fight it because it is so elusive. No one can be sure that it exists.

For our purposes, it is relevant that he begins to argue about quantitative inequality from the very start and then almost dismisses any discussion of qualitative inequality as non-scientific. According to him survey respondents tend to speak about qualitative inequality, but this approach is not what economic science should do. Instead, it should focus on qualitative outcomes: income, wealth, and spending.

In discussing inequality in the US, he provides statistics of transfers and taxes that show that for those who receive social benefits, it is not rational to start working because their income would increase only by a very low percentage. So, it is rational for them to stay on benefits. Kapelyushnikov

has a typically reductionist approach – inequality is reduced to measures of income, wealth, and spending, and a rational choice model is used to predict the actions of individuals.

4.3.2 THE SOCIOLOGIST'S PERSPECTIVE

On the contrary, the sociologist Grigory Yudin dismisses all controversies with statistical economic data out of hand and focuses on the “perception of inequality”. Do you feel, he asks, that we live in an unequal society? The key concept for Yudin is “dignity”. “People in Russia deserve a dignified life”. He describes a situation in which a person from the province comes to Moscow and experiences the “consumption style” of the Muscovites. This person then goes back home and tries to maintain the same lifestyle because their sense of dignity depends on the ability to live with a certain consumption style. They can only do this by taking loans and ending up deeply indebted. At the same time, Russians routinely see on the media how filthy rich some sportsmen, politicians, and civil servants are. This creates a perception of inequality that cannot be brushed aside with statistical tricks. For this reason, the sociologist concludes, we do not need to be concerned with whether statistics are faulty or correct, but we need to fight inequality to ensure the dignity of the people. He dismisses the quantitative aspect of inequality and focuses entirely on the qualitative. These two accounts provide a paradigmatic case of the clash of disciplinary perspectives. One is grounded in attempts to quantify and measure inequality, and the other focuses on the qualitative aspect of perceived inequality.

4.4 CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA

In this section, we provide a historical overview of the hegemony of economists and examples of modern contestations of this hegemony. Using the Medialogia database (Медиалогия n.d.), a search was made to illustrate that economists

and sociologists indeed use the indicated root metaphors in their expert pronouncements.

4.4.1 SOCIOLOGISTS AND POLITICAL SCIENTISTS, SPEAKING ON INEQUALITY

The following quotes from Medialogia are examples of the way sociologists and political scientists use root metaphors.

Natalia Tikhonova (HSE University), sociologist (OTR 2017, our translation):

The main problem is not whether there will be protests. **The danger of inequality is first of all that solidarity is lost, the sense of belonging to a community is lost and generally, social indifference develops** (здоровый пофигизм). That is, active forms of reaction can be different – it can be a social protest, it can be an economic protest, it can be increased interethnic aggression, it can be increased external migration, and so on, that is, an exit from one’s country, and it is limited to the minority. But this passive form of reaction, **when your country ceases to be your country** – will affect the majority.

Grigory Yudin, sociologist and philosopher (Yudin 2016, our translation):

First, **inequality has risen sharply** in the last forty years in the vast majority of countries, and even if the middle and working classes have increased their prosperity, **with it, they have strengthened their sense of the injustice of the social order.**

Ekaterina Schulmann, political scientist (Schulmann/Zhukov 2020, our translation):

And the **inequality infuriates people.** And it is understandable. It is a source of very great tension all over the world. First and foremost, **visible inequality and demonstrative inequality.** And transparency has made everybody visible. Therefore, what used to be hidden behind a high fence is now open, and people are irritated by this.

Ekaterina Schulmann, political scientist (Schulmann 2019, our translation):

Here we have universal literacy gradually creeping up, that is, **inequality is becoming visible.** Everyone becomes literate, they stop respecting the baron’s sacred right to eat better than themselves. And the baron does not know this yet, so he posts his demonstrative consumption on Instagram and thereby **incites class hatred against himself** without knowing it.

4.4.2 ECONOMISTS SPEAKING ON INEQUALITY

A recent illustration may be taken from a discussion held on the OTR channel (Russian federal state-funded media) between Oleg Shibanov, an economics professor at the New Economic School, and Sergey Obukhov, a political scientist and a senior member of the Russian Communist Party (OTR 2020a). The topic in question was progressive taxation. From 2001 until 2020, Russia had a flat income tax scale. Everyone was paying the same rate of 13% income tax. In the months preceding the vote on the constitutional amendments in 2020, debates surrounding this policy intensified because the government’s rhetoric emphasised the expansion of the welfare state as one of the cornerstones of the amendments. This promise led to a renewal of interest in a long-discussed move towards progressive taxation.

Communist Party member Sergey Obukhov proposed a radical change: total exemption of those living below the poverty line from income tax (according to federal statistics, there are over 20 million such people) and a corresponding increase in the income tax for the wealthiest (he offered calculations made by his party’s analysts). The economist Oleg Shibanov authoritatively replied: “No, it will not balance, it is unrealistic” (OTR 2020a, our translation), and after a short controversy over who is more qualified to analyse government statistics, the discussion withered. It did not go

into the possibilities of political change of priorities of expenditure, or reallocation of funds to support the poor or the need for the state to ensure universal access to basic services (such as health and education) to provide opportunities for the underprivileged that they do not have because of poverty; or that the flat rate may be seen as contradicting the value of solidarity between fellow citizens. In short, the argument was reduced to the simple zero-sum game: we have to maintain our expenditure and its structure; you suggest a radical reduction in tax revenue by exempting the poor from income tax; this will not allow the state to cover its expenditure; therefore, it is impossible.

This TV discussion is symptomatic of the current situation with policy debates in Russia. The hegemony of economics, despite its representatives often belonging to the liberal market camp, actually supports and reinforces the status quo in Russia and contributes to the disenchantment of the population with the only form of liberalism on offer. After all, as Ludwig von Mises (1949: 10) observed in his economic treatise *Human Action*, “It is true that economics is a theoretical science and as such abstains from any judgment of value. It is not its task to tell people what ends they should aim at. It is a science of the means to be applied for the attainment of ends chosen, not, to be sure, a science of the choosing of ends”. Yet, we see a widespread application of the expertise of economists to matters far beyond their formal disciplinary boundaries. It is as if, as Amartya Sen (2001) observed, the goal of GDP growth has replaced the Aristotelian ideal of achieving the good life (*eudaimonia*).

Evgeniy Gontmacher, economist at the Institute of International Economy and International Relations Russian Academy of Science, in a speech on the television show “25-j chas” (25th Hour) on channel TV Centre broadcast on 8 September 2011 (Медialogия n.d., our translation) stated:

Yes, absolutely. We have – if you take the average income of the 10% richest people and the average income of the 10% least wealthy, the poorest people –17 to 1. That means **clogged social lifts**. Look at England. Yeah, there’s been a lot of unrest there recently. Social. Why. Because these **people, who are at the bottom, found themselves locked in this situation**. They just don’t have any prospects in life to get out of this bottom, so... [the TV presenter prompts the expert: Q: There is such a term as justice. It would be nice to have...]. Yes, justice. It’s coming to the fore now.

Here we see that the expert was speaking about social mobility – using the metaphor of the lift (elevator) – as the main problem of social inequality and only the prompt from the TV presenter led him to use the term justice. We interpret this as no accident. He was speaking with the conceptualisation he had in mind – that social inequality blocks social mobility, which is its main problem. Life prospects, life chances, life trajectories – he speaks in these terms. This example corresponds to the general emphasis of economics on choices, chances, and constraints.

Vladimir Karacharovskiy, economist and associate professor of the Department of Applied Economics, HSE University (OTR 2020b, our translation) shares his view:

If we introduce a **progressive scale**, I absolutely agree, it should have a moral function, and it should show the measure of justice in society. Even if we lose a large part of the assets of the rich, which they received unfairly, on the remaining assets we create a fair system of distribution, and the economy will win. **The economy will win because the right incentives will be created**, rather than those incentives that are based on, well I won’t say fraud, on a completely unfair distribution of, mind you, socialist property.

The expert highlights the importance of progressive taxation in creating the right economic incentives. The expert also refers to moral function

and justice, but in a way that subordinates these concepts to the concept of the right incentives for productive economic activity.

4.5 SOCIAL INEQUALITY ON TV AND RADIO, A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

News items were extracted from Medialogia (Медialogия n.d.) for the period from 01.01.2000 to 23.02.2022. The following search criteria were used: “social inequality” and “economist” (172 hits) and “social inequality” and “sociologist” (94 hits). Some items were duplications and were removed. For both samples, the peak frequency was in 2011, which coincides with the run-up for presidential elections leading to the third term of Vladimir Putin. The news was downloaded into a Word document and imported into MAXQDA for coding.

4.5.1 RESULTS OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

News items were coded with open coding and then classified into the following categories:

1. Types of inequality
2. Dynamics and structure of inequalities
3. Measures to address inequalities
4. Causes of inequality
5. Consequences of inequality
6. (For sociologists only) Attitudes towards inequality

For sociologists, a subset of codes has emerged that relates to the attitudes of people towards inequality. These codes are highlighted in yellow in Tables 2 and 3.

Among economists, there is an overwhelming dominance of income inequality as a news theme (34 excerpts). At the same time, for sociologists, the largest number of hits related to the topic of inequality is education, mainly in schools. We can say that this is a recurrent theme – sociologists are invited as experts on the issue of inequality

in schools, kindergartens, and inequality of access to universities. Economists are not invited to speak on the topic of school inequality to the same extent.

Overall, structuralist sociologists have an overwhelmingly higher representation in the news. Subjectivists, who speak about feelings and attitudes towards inequality, constitute the minority (18 excerpts). These subjectivist sociologists speak about the reaction of the poor to the demonstrative consumption of the rich, such as anger, stress, envy, humiliation, and a sense of injustice caused by inequality. Separately, some excerpts were assigned to journalists and political scientists. In all groups of experts, we can trace recurring themes. For example, social inequality is believed to be a trigger or a cause of “social explosion” (upheaval) through political polarisation and marginalisation of the poor.

In the news, one root metaphor stood out as the most prominent. It is not a scientific metaphor but points to the collective imaginary. It is the metaphor for the “Russian revolt” (русский бунт). In all groups of experts, we see that social upheaval – using the term “social explosion” – is the most frequently mentioned expected consequence of rampant social inequality in Russia. This finding points directly to the hypothetical “social contract” between the people and the rulers in Russia: you get stability in exchange for political rights. The key value of stability is threatened by the mythical “Russian revolt” that can result from social inequality. This is the key metaphor that is disseminated in the mainstream media.

Table 2: Codes for mentions of “social inequality” on Radio and Television by sociologists and economists

110	Sociologists	152	Economists
29	Types of inequalities	54	Types of inequality
10	income, rich and poor, behaviour, opportunities	34	income
5	Equitable inequality, risk-taking, entrepreneurialism	8	income inequality and inequality of opportunity!
3	different types of inequality	4	wealth
2	chances, opportunities in life	1	The gap between rich and poor
		2	Inequality of opportunity and poverty
2	income disparity	2	country rating
1	savings		
1	unequal access to resources	1	regional disparities
1	between generations	1	economic
1	types of inequalities – different measures\! social inequalities in rights	1	unequal access to social benefits
		1	inequalities in access to social benefits/ barriers to HEIs
		1	social inequalities in education
27	dynamics and structure of inequalities	10	dynamics and structure of inequalities
27	At schools and universities	4	consumption inequality
8	school inequalities, elite schools	2	excessive inequality
4	school amplifier inequality	1	the metaphor of a skyscraper of humanity with different flats
3	Discrimination at school, violence	1	Ginny coefficient
2	Violence in the community, poverty in school	1	inequality – income – the disappearance of the middle class
2	access to education	1	increasing inequality
2	school uniform		
2	Education as a reproduction of inequality		
1	less involvement in school self-governance		
1	access to education		
1	school – social lifts		
1	School and kindergarten income inequality		

110	Sociologists	152	Economists
8	measures to address inequalities	32	measures to address inequalities
3	progressive tax	8	inequality as a priority problem
2	Poverty alleviation, economic growth	7	taxes
		4	progressive tax
2	sociology vs. inequality. congress to win	3	government priority
1	healthy society alignment	2	visible smoothing at the expense of credits
		2	tackling inequalities – redistribution
		1	National projects
		2	The common man should be at the centre of policy
		1	income growth does not lead to equity
			because of poor government policy
		1	Public policy should be aimed at reducing inequality
		1	remedial measures – anti-vouchers for state property
6	causes of inequality	13	causes of inequality
2	the pandemic (coronavirus)	3	Reforms in the 90s
1	capitalism		oligarchs
1	global processes – inequality is only growing	2	cheap labour drives inequality
1	Fertility differences	2	Soviet past
1	There is no recognition of injustice and no curative measures for inequality	1	Inequality is a consequence of the global crisis
		1	IMF advice – poor results in Russia
		1	consequence of competence
		1	the consequence of economic management
22	consequences of inequalities	43	consequences of inequalities
9	social explosions, social tensions	8	social tension due to inequalities
6	positive and negative guise (face)	3	the social contract – the break-up
2	immorality as a consequence of inequality (everything for success)	6	political turmoil
1	rich officials (with business) because of inequality	7	poverty
1	political polarization	4	development (positive)
1	capacity constraint	1	positive and negative guise (face)
1	life expectancy	2	! social lifts freeze due to inequality
1	Social inequality loss of solidarity	2	negative moral judgement
		1	no savings with high inequalities
		1	The inequality factor of uncomfortable living
		1	incentives
		1	risk
		1	volatility factor

110	Sociologists	152	Economists
		1	crime immigrants
		1	longevity
		1	unemployment
		1	Inequality and fertility
		1	human capital
18	Attitudes towards human inequality (Subjectivist sociology)		
3	sense of injustice		
1	people's reactions to perceived near inequalities		
2	the demonstrative behaviour of the super-rich		
2	The poor culture of the rich		
1	the rich and the poor on the roads		
1	Anger, nationalism		
1	happiness factor		
1	as a social problem		
1	as a stress factor		
1	feelings of envy, humiliation		

Table 3: Codes for mentions of “social inequality” on Radio and Television by journalists and political scientists

4	Journalists
1	social explosion
1	political polarization
1	Inequality and dignity, happiness
1	apparent inequality
1	class hatred
7	Political scientists
3	Inequality as a cause of social upheaval and revolution
1	polarisation social explosion
1	social explosion
1	the demonstrative behaviour of the rich
1	fair inequalities for efficiency
1	Inequality – the semi-feudal system in Russia
1	progressive tax

4.5.2 ROOT METAPHOR OF THE «RUSSIAN REVOLT»

The analysis of the news has demonstrated the presence of another root metaphor. This one did not belong to any particular group of experts but was shared by all – it is the metaphor of “social explosion” or social upheaval (also expressed as “social tension”, the collapse of the social compact). This metaphor may be related to the universal Russian trope of the tragedy of a “Russian revolt” (русский бунт). Thus, social inequality is dominantly used in the media to invoke the emotions of fear and anxiety that would result from unresolved social tensions and would lead to a “social explosion” in its many guises, including revolutions, ethnic clashes, and civil unrest. These are implicitly contrasted with the stability that the current regime hails as its main achievement.

4.6 DEMAND FOR SOCIOLOGICAL EXPERTISE ON SOCIAL INEQUALITY

The sociologists interviewed for the study concurred on the existence of the two roughly defined camps in Russian sociology: the “structuralists” (структурщики) and “subjectivists” (субъективщики). Those belonging to the structuralists camp mostly use quantitative methods and research macro-level issues, such as poverty, inequality of income between different groups. On the other hand, subjectivists mostly use qualitative measures and look at less “tangible” issues, such as emotions, feelings, and perceptions of inequality by individuals or small groups. The two interviewed sociologists associated themselves with the “subjectivist camp”.

The division of the two sociological camps corresponds to our initial intuition of root metaphors. Structuralist sociologists produce narratives more like those of economists, than those of subjectivist sociologists. According to the interviews, structuralist sociologists are more in demand among

policymakers than subjectivists. The subjectivists often find it hard to make their voices heard and they are not deliberately invited by journalists to speak on issues of inequality. Partially it is this resemblance with the economists in styles of reasoning that contributes to the greater popularity of structuralists as experts.

One important theme touched upon in the interviews was the demand for sociological expertise from political actors. The respondent agreed that the language of sociology (she quoted Erich Fromm and generally Marxist thought) has the potential to supply policymakers with powerful narratives and vocabulary. But according to her, currently there is no demand for it in Russia because there is no real politics.

On the other hand, the demand from technocrats in government and the bureaucracy at all levels is for the language of the “structuralists” and the economists. These experts speak the same language as the bureaucrats and generate sufficient expertise for them to utilise in drafting strategies, laws, and policy reports.

4.7 LIMITATIONS

The key limitation of this study was the fact that the format of news reports seldom allows speakers to unpack their ideas thoroughly. In the Russian mainstream media, there is a certain tendency to present material at a fast pace, with many speakers often interrupting each other. The format does not allow for a careful elaboration of one’s assumptions; thus, it was hard to find texts in the mainstream media that would allow one to uncover the root metaphors that underpin the speaker’s thesis. We mitigated this obstacle by turning to a more elaborate genre of one-on-one public debates where discussants were explicitly given 30 minutes to elaborate their view of inequality. Here, at once, the difference between an economist and a sociologist became apparent.

To comprehensively account for root metaphors, one would need to analyse a corpus of much longer texts where such metaphors manifest. This material could be a selection of academic papers, lectures, or speeches. We have attempted to do this with the analysis of a debate on social inequality between an economist and a sociologist. A wider corpus of such texts would be useful.

4.8 IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The paper suggests a novel approach to analysis discourse on social issues. The perspective of root metaphors and epistemological backgrounds of experts involved in public debates on social issues offers a productive way to trace the role of social sciences in social life. The research shows that disciplinary affiliation of experts does indeed shape the discourse they produce. This study is a pilot attempt to demonstrate the heuristic potential of our approach. Further research may build on this foundation in several directions. First, methodologically more sophisticated methods of discourse analysis may be used, including neural networks and machine learning to analyse large amounts of data, including in social networks. Second, other disciplines – psychology or biology for instance – may be added with their sets of dominant root metaphors and internal structure of their fields. Third, theoretically more detailed elaborations on the role of experts may be used based on, for example, sociology of expertise with Bourdieusian or other conceptualisations.

Overall, the aim of this study has been achieved. We have demonstrated that there are recurring patterns in the discourse produced by experts with certain disciplinary backgrounds. Also, we have linked these patterns with underlying root metaphors of respective disciplines and showed that these root metaphors manifest in expert opinions, speeches, and interviews. The next important task that we see here is to show if these

patterns of discourse convert into actual policies. This would require not only a theoretical conceptualisation of the role of experts in policymaking, but also empirical study of the link between policies and expertise. We see this as one potential further development of this work.

5 CONCLUSION

This study aims to demonstrate the importance of the epistemological background of experts who make pronouncements on issues of social inequality. Experts articulate problems and solutions that later find their way into policy documents and shape government regulations and interventions. The paper presents the results of the analysis of current and historical discourse in Russian media, considering economics and sociology as two rival disciplines when it comes to problems of inequality. Economics stresses *quantitative* inequality, and sociology emphasises the *qualitative*. In the realm of sociology, there are two camps: structuralists (the majority) and subjectivists (the minority). The demand for their expertise is not equal. Structuralists dominate the mainstream media (TV and Radio), whereas subjectivists are mainly limited to their academic discussions. The language of subjectivist sociology could be in demand by opposition politicians, but as Russia lacks a pluralist political system, this demand does not materialise, and the expertise of subjectivists has no pathway to reach the popular audience.

The analysis of the dynamics of using the term “social inequality” and related concepts shows that it was actively used in the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections but has not been actively utilised since. We interpret this as evidence of the potency of the theme of social inequality as a rhetorical weapon against the incumbent. It could be used when the incumbent was Dmitry Medvedev but was not allowed to be used in the later elections when Vladimir Putin, as the incumbent,

stayed in power. The analysis of disciplinary domains has shown that inequality is a contested concept – social inequality belongs to the domain of sociologists, and income inequality to the domain of economists. Thus, the initial intuition of the study is not fully supported. Sociological voices are heard when it comes to social inequality, even though such pivotal reforms as progressive taxation or the pension age are predominantly discussed by economists.

We have shown how sociologists (and political philosophers) approach the issue of social inequality differently due to their disciplinary assumptions and root metaphors. We also have shown that despite these differences in the mainstream Russian media, one metaphor is predominantly associated with social inequality: “social explosion” or “social upheaval”. We link it to the shared imaginary of the catastrophic “Russian revolt” (русский бунт) that is evoked to entice fear of endangering stability that is the chief pillar of the Russian state.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, Andrew 2007: Against narrative. A preface to lyrical sociology, *Sociological theory* 25(1): 67–99.
- Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences 2020: Call for Papers for edited collection on Experiencing Society. Lived Welfare State, Tampere: Tampere University, <https://research.tuni.fi/hex/cfp-experiencing-society-lived-welfare-state/> (accessed 01 October 2022).
- Black, Max 1962: Models and metaphors. Studies in language and philosophy, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Black, Max 1979: How metaphors work. A reply to Donald Davidson, *Critical Inquiry* 6(1): 131–143.
- Blumenberg, Hans 2010: Paradigms for a Metaphorology, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre 1994: Rethinking the state. Genesis and structure of the bureaucratic field, *Sociological theory* 12(1): 1–18.
- Buber, Martin 1970: I and Thou, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Burawoy, Michael 2012: The roots of domination. Beyond Bourdieu and Gramsci, *Sociology* 46(2): 187–206.
- Burrell, Gibson / Morgan, Gareth 2017: Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis: Elements of the sociology of corporate life, London: Routledge.
- Collier, Stephen J. 2011: Post-Soviet social: Neoliberalism, social modernity, biopolitics, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Credit Suisse 2017: Global Wealth Databook, Zurich: Credit Suisse.
- Davidson, Donald 1978: What metaphors mean, *Critical inquiry* 5(1): 31–47.
- Faguet, Jean-Paul 2011: Development management. Study Guide, London: University of London.
- Gramsci, Antonio 1992: Prison notebooks (ed. with an introduction by Buttigieg, Joseph A. and transl. by Buttigieg, Joseph A. / Callari, Antonio), New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gramsci, Antonio 1971: Selections from the prison notebooks, New York: International publishers.
- Hardin, Garrett 1968: The Tragedy of the Commons, *Science* 162(3859): 1243–1248.
- Hilgers, Mathieu / Mangez, Éric 2014: Bourdieu's theory of social fields. Concepts and applications, London: Routledge.
- Hirschman, Daniel / Berman, Elizabeth Popp 2014: Do economists make policies? On the political effects of economics, *Socio-Economic Review* 12(4): 779–811.
- Irwin, Neil 2017: What if Sociologists Had as Much Influence as Economists?, New York: The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/upshot/what-if-sociologists-had-as-much-influence-as-economists.html> (accessed 14 April 2023).
- Kapelyushnikov, Rostislav / Yudin, Grigory (2019): Nado li borot'sja s neravenstvom? Sovmestnye otkrytye debaty Fonda Egora Gajdara i Saharovskogo centra (Do we need to fight inequality? Joint open debates of the Egor Gaidar Fund and Sakharov Center), Moscow: Egor Gaidar Fund, <http://sakharov.gaidarfund.ru/articles/3173/tab3> (accessed 01 October 2022).
- Keynes, John Maynard 2013: The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Konstantinovskiy, David L. / Vakhshain, Viktor S. / Kurakin, Dmitry 2012: To the analysis of pre-theoretical foundations of the sociology of education: explication of root metaphors, *Educational Studies Moscow* (4): 22–39.
- Kurakin, Dmitry 2014: How Root Metaphors Structure Meaningful Life by Means of Emotions. Theory and Empirical Illustration from the Sphere of Academic Ethics, CCS Working Paper No. 8, Center for Cultural Sociology, New Haven: Yale University.
- Kurakin, Dmitry / Filippov, Alexander 2006: The possibility of the corporation: towards a sociological description of the university, *Neprikosnovenniy zapas* (4-5): 48–49.
- Laclau, Ernesto 2005: On populist reason, London: Verso.

- Laclau, Ernesto / Mouffe, Chantal 1985: *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso.
- Lakoff, George / Johnson, Mark 2008: *Metaphors we live by*, London: University of Chicago Press.
- Mareeva, Svetlana Vladimirovna / Slobodenyuk, Ekaterina Dmitrievna 2018: *Neravenstvo v Rossii v mezhdunarodnom kontekste. dokhody, bogatstvo, vozmozhnosti (Inequality in Russia in the global context. Incomes, Wealth, Opportunities)*, *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya. Dannye. Analiz. Diskussii* 1-2(126): 30–46.
- Mises, Ludwig von 1949: *Human action : a treatise on economics*, London: Hodge.
- Ostrom, Elinor 2015: *Governing the commons*, Cambridge: Cambridge university press.
- OTR – Obschestvennoe Televidenie Rossii (Public Television of Russia) 2017: *Pravda*, Moscow: OTR, https://otr.webcaster.pro/iframe/feed/start/api_free_8cca7e0296d345d63ad55f4d060ddc62_hd/5_1155337629/13caa09185ab4154b1f3dfa4fc55c208/4643352181?sr=61&icons=0&type_id=&width=100%25&height=100%25&lang=ru (accessed 14 April 2023).
- OTR – Obschestvennoe Televidenie Rossii (Public Television of Russia) 2020a: *Otrajenie - Osvobodit' bednyh ot nalogov ne udastsja – 1 (Reflection - Tax exemptions for the poor will not work - 1)*, Moscow: OTR, <https://otr-online.ru/programmy/segodnya-v-rossii/edinyy-nalog-dlya-bednyh-i-bogatyh-eto-spravedlivo-41637.html> (accessed 14 April 2023).
- OTR – Obschestvennoe Televidenie Rossii (Public Television of Russia) 2020b: *Otrajenie - Osvobodit' bednyh ot nalogov ne udastsja – 2 (Reflection - Tax exemptions for the poor will not work -2)*, Moscow: OTR, <https://www.skolkovo.ru/interviews/osvobodit-bednykh-ot-nalogov-ne-udastsya/> (accessed 14 April 2023).
- Pepper, Stephen C. 1942: *World hypotheses. A study in evidence*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rorty, Richard / Hesse, Mary 1987: *Unfamiliar noises, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 61(1987): 283–311.
- Schulmann, Ekaterina 2019: *Status*, Season 2, Episode 34, Moscow: Echo of Moscow, <http://worldcrisis.ru/crisis/3371556> (accessed 14 April 2023).
- Schulmann, Ekaterina / Zhukov, Egor 2020: *Uslovno Vash (Conditionally yours)*, Moscow: Echo of Moscow, <http://worldcrisis.ru/crisis/3559142> (accessed 14 April 2023).
- Schutz, Alfred 1970: *Alfred Schutz on Phenomenology and Social Relations* (ed. by Wagner, Helmut R.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sen, Amartya 2001: *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks.
- Sidorina, Tatiana 2005: *Social policy – between economics and sociology (Socialnaya politika – mejdu ekonomikoy i sotsiologiei)*, *Obschestvennye nauki i sovremennost* (6): 111–120.
- Smith, Adam 2010: *The theory of moral sentiments*, New York: Penguin Books.
- Stepantsov, Pavel / Ermakova, V 2016: *Метафорические и Метонимические Стратегии Социологического Теоретизирования (Metaphorical and Metonymic Strategies of Sociological Theorising)*, SSRN Electronic Journal, Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig 2010: *Philosophical investigations*, Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Wolfers, Justin 2015: *How Economists Came to Dominate the Conversation*, New York: The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/24/upshot/how-economists-came-to-dominate-the-conversation.html> (accessed 01 November 2022).
- Yudin, Grigory 2016: *Populistskiy povorot (The populist turn)*, Moscow: Vedomosti, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2016/06/07/643870-populistskii-povorot> (accessed 14 April 2023).
- Кузьминов, Ярослав Иванович 1990: *О вульгарных тенденциях в политической экономии, Истоки (Вопросы истории народного хозяйства и экономической мысли)* (2): 4–32.

Медиалогия – Мониторинг СМИ и соцсетей (Medialogija – Monitoring SMI i socsetej) (no date): [Medialogia database], Moscow: Medialogia, <https://www.mlg.ru/> (accessed 01 October 2022).

Пушкин, Александр 2008: Дубровский. Капитанская дочка, Moscow: Детская литература.

Радаев, Вадим Валерьевич / Кузьминов, Ярослав Иванович 1987: Отчуждение труда при социализме. Характер, основные формы, пути преодоления (Alienation of labour under socialism. Nature, main forms, ways of overcoming it), Moscow: Institute of Economics of the Academy of Science of the USSR.

Радаев, Вадим Валерьевич / Кузьминов, Ярослав Иванович / Набиуллина, Эльвира Сахиповна / Субботина, Татьяна П. 1989: Отчуждение труда. история и современность (Alienation of labour. History and modernity), Moscow: Ekonomika.

RECENT SCRIPTS WORKING PAPERS

- No. 11** 2021 Jared Holley
Recovering the Anticolonial Roots of Solidarity
- No. 12** 2021 Bastian A. Betthäuser, Nhat An Trinh, and Anette Eva Fasang
The Temporal Dimension of Parental Employment. Fixed-Term Contracts, Non-Standard Work Schedules, and Children's Education in Germany
- No. 13** 2021 Kevin Axe, Tobias Rupprecht, and Alice Trinkle
Peripheral Liberalism. New Perspectives on the History of the Liberal Script in the (Post-)Socialist World
- No. 14** 2021 Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Carsten Wegscheider, and Steven M. Van Hauwaert
Supporting and Rejecting Populist Parties in Western Europe
- No. 15** 2022 Rona Geffen
The Timing of Lives: The Role of Standard Employment in Income Mobility and Co-residential Unions in Early Adulthood
- No. 16** 2022 Jan-Werner Müller
Liberal Democracy's Critical Infrastructure. How to Think about Intermediary Powers
- No. 17** 2022 Johannes Petry
Global Financial Reallocation towards China: Implications for the Liberal Financial Script
- No. 18** 2022 Jan-Werner Müller
Still the "Fourth Power"? Rethinking the Press in Liberal Democracies
- No. 19** 2022 Albert Cullell Cano
The Chinese Peacebuilding Script: A Pragmatic Contestation of the Liberal International Order
- No. 20** 2022 Silviya Lechner
The Responsibility of Global Governance Institutions: Towards a Kantian Conception of the Current Liberal Order
- No. 21** 2022 Sébastien Tremblay
Homosynchronism and the Temporal-Memory Border: Framing Racialized Bodies, Time, and Mobility in German Queer Printed Media
- No. 22** 2022 Jürgen Gerhards, Lukas Antoine, and Rasmus Ollroge
The Liberal Script on Military Humanitarian Intervention and How Citizens around the World Support It. Results from a Comparative Survey in 24 Countries
- No. 23** 2023 Anne Menzel
Situating Liberal Rationality. Unacknowledged Commitments in Progressive Knowledge Production and Policymaking
- No. 24** 2023 Georg Simmerl
Liberalism and Critique. Why it Is Unviable to Analytically Position a Liberal Script in Opposition to its Contestations
- No. 25** 2023 Bastiaan Bouwman
Postwar Displacement, Liberalism, and the Genesis of the International Refugee Regime
- No. 26** 2023 Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse
The Liberal Script between Individual and Collective Self-Determination
- No. 27** 2023 Agnes Blome and Miriam Hartlapp
Contesting Unequal Group Representation. Can Deliberative Participatory Fora Cure Representation Gaps in the Legislature
- No. 28** 2023 Jürgen Gerhards, Lukas Antoine, and Rasmus Ollroge
The Liberal Script on State Sovereignty and the Admission of Immigrants. Do Citizens Distinguish between Voluntary and Forced Immigrants?
- No. 29** 2023 Jessica Kim, Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal, Hector Cebolla Boado, and Laura Schimmöller
Inhibiting or Contributing? How Global Liberal Forces Impact Climate Change Scepticism
- No. 30** 2023 Daniel Wajner
Delegitimizing International Institutions. How Global Populism Challenges the Liberal International Order
- No. 31** 2023 Steven Livingston
The Nature of Beliefs. An Exploration of Cognitive Science and Sociological Approaches to the Crisis of Democracy
- No. 32** 2023 Jiwei Ci
States, Scripts, and Democratisation
- No. 33** 2023 Heiko Giebler, Lukas Antoine, Rasmus Ollroge, Jürgen Gerhards, Michael Zürn, Johannes Giesecke, and Macartan Humphreys
The "Public Attitudes towards the Liberal Script" (PALS) Survey. Conceptual Framework, Implementation, and Data
- No. 34** 2023 Tanja A. Börzel, Valentin Krüsmann, Julia Langbein, and Lunting Wu
Colliding Scripts in Asia? Comparing China's Belt and Road Initiative and the EU Global Gateway Strategy
- No. 35** 2024 Alexander Kalgin
How Economics and Sociology Contest the Meaning of "Social Inequality". The Russian Case



All SCRIPTS Working Papers are available on the SCRIPTS website at www.scripts-berlin.eu and can be ordered in print via email to office@scripts-berlin.eu



Hosted by:



In Cooperation with:



The Cluster of Excellence
“Contestations of the Liberal Script (SCRIPTS)”
is funded by:

