

LOCAL HISTORY IN THE “NEW LOCAL HISTORY” FIELD OF RESEARCH

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The aim of this work is to summarize the experience involving the realization of the principles and methods of such field of research of contemporary historical science as “new local history” in the work of the scientific-educational centre (SEC) “New local history” of the North-Caucasus Federal University (NCFU). Therefore, the object of the work is this new for the Russian historiography direction and the subject is the main forms of activity of the SEC over the period of 13 years in the framework of the principles and methods of “new local history”.

Keywords: “new local history”, sociocultural situation, oral history, intellectual history, micro history, linguistic turn, anthropological turn, regional studies, historical biography, sources of local history

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of the “new historical science”, i.e. in this case, of the contemporary historical knowledge, local history acquires a new cultural context, in which it becomes an instrument of getting new knowledge. L.P. Repina wrote about it and pointed out two directions of studying local history – as the way of historical memory mobilization and as the means of historical knowledge acquisition on the basis of interdisciplinary, sociocultural and anthropological approaches (Repina, 2011).

We proceed from the fact that the process of the formation of notions with the metaphor “new” is accompanied by the rethinking of the classical science, which is determined by the metaphor “old”, and is an indication of the development of the contemporary scientific community. This was discussed in the introductory article of the internet conference (Malovichko and Bulygina, 2003). Rebecca Spang wrote about a similar situation, when she noted how rapidly “new” becomes “old” in the context of “total” history and micro history (Spang, 2003).

The activities and results of the SEC are based on the attempt to understand the nature of historical knowledge, its forms and how its epistemology is represented in the modern sociocultural field. This is the self-reflection of professional historians on their own actions. It is this sociocultural situation, which expressed itself in postmodernism and post postmodernism, together with the globalization that became the challenge for professional historians with their classical metanarratives,

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eurocentrism and universal schemes of historical processes. The Russian historian M.F. Rummyantseva believes that modern science demands self-determination in the field of the contemporary scientific knowledge, but not an assessment in the terms of “good – bad” of a historian (Rummyantseva, 2002).

This challenge of the time has demonstrated a considerably increased complexity of the modern world and the study of its past also demands a more varied set of research instruments and the new understanding of the job of a historian. Ewa Domanska noted that it was postmodernism with its extremes that helped historians realize the complexity and once again confirmed the nonlinear nature of the world and the borders of the historical cognition (Domanska, 1998).

The choice of the ways of the local history in the SEC was also influenced by the “linguistic turn” in humanities, which drew the attention of practicing historians to the problem of a sign and its interpretation, discursive practices as applied to historical science and the methods of the source text interpretation, all of which allowed to understand “the world interpreted in the consciousness (“my world” as the author)” (Ivanov, 2003; Karavashkin and Yurganov, 2003). The qualitative change of the society, science and education influenced the status of humanitarian knowledge. However, as O.M. Medushevskaya pointed out, “there is a key core element in this complex and unstable, dynamic balance. This is the analysis of the nature of cognitive activity, which is the criterion of the general state in humanities...” (Medushevskaya, 2002). F.R. Ankersmit believed that the shortcoming of the research practices of historians was the fact that they underestimate the role of theory in history as a discipline, that they “usually don’t trust historical theory” (Ankersmit, 1998). A similar situation is also described by P.Yu. Uvarov, who claims that historians are divided into two groups – theoreticians and practitioners: “Both groups of historians are silently drifting apart, further from each other” (Uvarov, 2003). This very striving for self-reflection in their specific research characterizes the participants of the SEC “New local history”.

However, professional historians are optimistic despite the attacks on their discipline. Back in 2003 Keith Jenkins claimed that “historical representations of the past inevitably fail”. It helps search for “new ways of historization/formation of the image of the past” (Jenkins, 2000).

2. METHOD

The idea of creating the scientific-educational centre “New local history” and its conception have resulted from the self-reflection of historians on the state of historical knowledge, national Russian history and history of the Russian regions and the opportunity for the competition of many historiographic practices. The beginning of the 21st century was characterized by the globalization, flourish of postmodernism and changes in the country. It is stated in the concept of the programme that “the interpretation of the sociocultural situation of the turn of the

21st century is connected to the transition from the concepts of globalization to the concepts of glocalization – the interpretation of the world as a whole in the integrity and variety of its components... Overcoming of a crisis involves searching for new methods of historical synthesis. The aim of the new historical synthesis is to interpret the modern sociocultural field in the integrity and variety of its components” (The conception of inter-university scientific-educational programme “Local history: Comparative approaches and methods of study”, 2015).

Unlike the sociocultural constructions of the universal historiography, the SEC set out the aim to interpret local communities as the subjects of the historical process. The adequate method of achieving this aim is the method of comparative source analysis. Besides, the new local history involves the clear determination of the object of the research and the ways of its analysis. On the one hand, the localization of the human society allows to penetrate the micro social processes. On the other hand, it is in the local community that the tendencies and processes of history are born, which can be seen in the living fabric of human existence. Another method of the realization of the project was “history from below”, which can be used when studying a local community through personal history and the main principle was the interdisciplinary one, when demographic, sociocultural, economic-statistical, legal, political and historical-geographical aspects are combined.

3. RESULTS

The concept “local history”, that the Centre followed, is defined by S.A. Gamayunov as “the history of the place, which is understood not as a territory, but as a “micro community”, the community of the people, engaged in a particular historical activity” (Gamayunov, 1996), and it corresponds with our ideas of this object.

It was important for us to identify the social role of an individual, the stereotypes of behaviour in the sociocultural, natural-geographical and geopolitical contexts of the inhabited space. At the same time an important part of the research of new local history is the study of the history of changes of the forms, structures and functions of the local space itself in the unity of the above mentioned contexts.

As a result, an important direction of the Centre became the complex study of local sources as the entire corpus of the sources of local history. Due to this, the macrosocial analysis of the national community is determined by the micro approaches to the hierarchy of locality. The activities of the SEC “New local history” are based on the latest achievements of the global historiographic practices. The interest in the problems of the area study, regional and local history is growing in the modern world. In recent years Russian historians have tried to self-reflect these notions, dividing them by functions in the context of the socio-oriented and purely scientific knowledge (Malovichko and Rumyantseva, 2012; Malovichko and Rumyantseva, 2013). Though we agree at large with the logics of the hypothesis of the scientists, we would like to remind that “pure science” is a myth, just as the

memorial history. That's why the question is more in the realization by a researcher of their "sociality" than in loud claims of their objectivity. This allows a historian to be more restrained by interpretation and historical synthesis.

Almost at the birth of the Centre the participants of the SEC faced the problem of the balance of academic and amateur knowledge. This is a common problem for local historians as evidenced by the reasonings of foreign colleagues. Margaret Bonney, for example, doesn't allow such a balance due to the primitivization of research. In her opinion professionals should initiate "arguments over new approaches and methods in local history" (Bonney, 2002). The founders of the SEC "New local history" admitted that researching local history opens up an opportunity for the competition of many historiographic practices.

With all social merits of area study to the collective memory, the most important for us is to reach the new level of knowledge of both national and world history through the diversity of regional historical descriptions. Adopting new approaches, as L.P. Repina noted (Repina, 2011), can be done in two ways. Using the first way, researchers announce a "new" stage of the progress of science by mechanically contrasting the new and the old types of historical knowledge. We consider another way to be more productive, when a historian searches for the new through self-reflection on the old historical knowledge, the role of a historian's personality in the process of cognition, the attitude of a researcher to the source and the set of research instruments. A self-reflecting historian inevitably faces the question about the level of scientificity and cognitive capacities of historical science, about the peculiarities of the connections between historical knowledge and a cognizer, the specifics of a historical narrative, the theoretical and empirical possibilities of the reconstruction of the past and the building of a historical description.

The Russian historiography, both professional and nonprofessional, to the fullest extent incorporated the classical tradition of the European modernist style science. The contemporary cognitive situation called for other approaches to understanding of the past than the conventional national and eurocentric practices could give. That's why "metanarrative styles" become "more and more implausible" (Jenkins, 2000). The crisis of the "old" historical science required self-determination of a professional historian in the sphere of the contemporary scientific knowledge and minimization of the value judgement: "A historian can either take the situation as it is and increase the entropy by dividing the field of a historical research into small pieces or search for the way out of the crisis of the historical metanarrative, and such a search is possible only on the ways of the methodological self-reflection" (Rumyantseva, 2002).

A historian's self-reflection on the object of the research in the context of local history inevitably comes across the concept "region". The most common geopolitical idea of a region is connected to its territorial, geographical and administrative characteristics as the etymology of this notion is connected to a

territory separated according to “the combination of some interconnected features and phenomena” (The large encyclopedic dictionary in two volumes, 1991).

Thus, the key factor for the history of a region is the territorial dimension and not the study of the connecting “combinations” and their context. From the point of view of “new local history” a region is the territory, where “micro communities” coexist and interact, the key features of which are the activities and relations of people in their social and personal mutual influence in the local space. Each such community is distinguished by relative autonomy, which allows, when studying local history, to see its peculiarities and unique manifestations, characteristic of this particular sociocultural field. At the same time such approach to the study of a region gives an opportunity to look at its inhabitants as part of macro communities and as representatives of the human community as a whole, opening local history into the all-Russian and world contexts. As Amato noted, local history is valuable due to the fact that it “satisfies an innate human desire to be connected to a place” (Amato, 2002).

Local history as “history of a place” is studied in this case on the basis of several, closely connected by common methodological approaches, directions (subdisciplines), which use various cognitive methods in the interdisciplinary space. This refers to the micro history, intellectual history, “new historical biography”, history of everyday life, oral history, sources and historiography of local history, which allow to understand the everyday social experience of every member of a local community in its historical reality. Studying the history of local objects allows to overcome the unificationary approach to national history, which relies on typicality’ as national history is to a much greater degree a collection of local historical experience than it is commonly believed (Malovichko and Bulygina, 2003).

Local history allows to write the collective biography of a local community of any level from family to country. One of the main principles of realization of such projects is polydisciplinarity, when demographic, sociocultural, economic-statistical, legal, political, linguistic, semiotic and historical-geographical aspects are combined. “New local history”, which studies all forms of human activity in a sociocultural space, sets the task of a historical reconstruction of different manifestations of concrete human lives and their correlation in a single historical space. This leads to the expansion and variety of subjects of historical works, getting a researcher closer to the opportunity of a broad historical synthesis and the creation on its basis of an open model of historical cognition and historical description.

A lot of the fields of research of the SEC are reflected in the practice of historical researches. From the point of view of theoretical works on the nature of historical knowledge a significant contribution to the activities of the Centre was made by Moscow scientists S.I. Malovichko and M.F. Rumyantseva, who were among the

originators of the Center together with T.A. Bulygina. They developed the theory of purely scientific and socially oriented knowledge, the concepts “area study”, “regional history”, “local history”, “new local history” and identified the main historiographic tendencies of studying local history (Malovichko, 2008; Malovichko, 2005; Malovichko and Bulygina, 2003; Malovichko and Bulygina, 2004; Malovichko and Rummyantseva, 2012; Malovichko and Rummyantseva, 2013; Rummyantseva, 2002; Rummyantseva, 2003; Rummyantseva, 2014). Their position is acknowledged and extensively used in scientific communities of a number of countries: Belarus, Ukraine, Poland etc.

The self-reflection on approaches to studying sources of local history in the context of urban everyday life has repeatedly appeared in the articles by T.A. Bulygina (Bulygina, 2013). In particular, she researched the sources of personal genesis, which are stored in local archives, paid a lot of attention to museums in the context of local history sources. The work with the sources helped identify the problem of the history of local everyday life and urban history.

The Center actively interprets the historical scientific paradigm “New local history”. In particular, one of the first attempts to identify and interpret the sources of sociocultural history of Stavropol territory during the Soviet period was the three volume edition of local history sources, edited by T.A. Bulygina (Stavropol territory Committee for Matters Concerning Archives, 2009; Stavropol territory Committee for Matters Concerning Archives, 2010; Stavropol territory Committee for Matters Concerning Archives, 2011). The unique feature of these collections is the fact that this history is represented by the voices of different representatives of local community, including the representatives of local authorities. The collection was acknowledged not only in Russia, but also in Germany. The position of “new local history” regarding the practical approaches to the study of local history sources is stated in detail in extensive introductory articles (Bulygina, 2013).

“New local history” looks at a region as a sociocultural space, where society and its culture are considered to be a single system, and its existence is conditioned by human living in the given historical and natural landscape and human efforts to change this landscape. The cross between social and cultural contexts in one research space can be found in the works of the Russian semiotic school. Based on the notion of culture as a semiotic space “which was considered not so much a territory in a literal sense as the specifically organized and “spot specific” fragment of the noosphere” (Ivanov, 2003), its representatives consider the geographical and territorial designation of space just one of the basic factors of sociocultural development of any local community. Yu.M. Lotman considered the notion of geographical space one of the forms of space design of the world in the human mind. That’s why in different historical circumstances there are different ideas about the contours of this space which are presented in historical sources differently depending on the character of the author’s general model of the world.

Together with such notions of local history as “cultural” and “social” there is also the notion of “border”. In our opinion, approaches of “the history of borderlands” give ample opportunities of using interdisciplinary approaches. Charles Loomis’ school (interdisciplinary group), which unites sociologists, political scientists, cultural specialists, linguists and psychologists, is an example of it (Loomis, 1974). The study of borderlands is carried out from the point of view of the diversity of cultural, economic, daily and geopolitical interactions of ethnic and micro social groups.

Looking at semiotic space as the space of culture, Yu.M. Lotman noticed the multi-layered character of the space pattern of the world of a person (Lotman, 1996). Hence, any sociocultural space has a lot of intersections inside, which form relatively autonomous spots, divided by imaginary lines, membranes, by something which is conventionally known as a border. At the same time the insuperable “difference of cultural areas” in historical and geographical dimensions is becoming more obvious. This cultural “difference” is accompanied by the strengthening of the intensity of cultural interaction. Such interaction, based on integration, is not substituted by assimilation. Stavropol scientists from the SEC also look at the notion of border in the context of cultural semiotics (Bulygina, 2011).

This concept gets a special meaning, since the research of the borders of such communities as “village” and “town” in their local forms allows to specify the character of creating a sociocultural space of a concrete industrial or agricultural district as the process of new local community formation. The study of borderlands looks promising from the point of view of social, economic and cultural contacts of different local groups from different ethnoses to dwellers of different blocks and parishes. This refers not only to the history of conflicts, but also to their interaction and mutual influence in daily life and creative activity. “New local history” is an extrovert type of knowledge, which “ensures that much needed tolerance is cultivated due to the understanding and accepting of other as the Other” (Repina, 2001).

One of the first Internet conferences organized by the Centre was devoted to the problem of cultural borderland (New local history: borderland rivers and the culture of the river banks, 2004). The authors of this edition have built this discourse into the context of new social history, new intellectual history and also imagology. That referred to the contact zones in the geographical and sociocultural aspects, to the binary character of “Native”/“Foreign” in local communities. For example, this referred to the ideas of “native” of Terek Cossacks, to the lands of openness and lands of local historiography, to the banks of geographical rivers as cultural contact zones, for example, to Stavropol grammar school for boys. Moreover, the thesis by E.V. Shumakova was defended in the context of cultural borderlands study (Shumakova, 2008).

4. DISCUSSION

“New local history” has defined its methodological preferences, without questioning the merits of area study it goes its own way in researching both a local and a more generalized people’s community. The issues of the collections of scientific papers “New local history” are the evidence of this (New local history. The collection of the scientific papers, 2006; New local history. The collection of the scientific papers, 2009; New local history: borderland rivers and the culture of the river banks, 2004; New local history: following the Internet conferences of 2007-2011. The collection of the scientific papers, 2014; New Local History: Methods, Sources, Metropolitan and Provincial Historiography, 2003). In them there are different opinions on local history, but the central part is the data connected to research practices and theoretical insights in the context of “new local history” approaches. These preferences of the SEC became evident in a number of these defended under the supervision of S.I. Malovichko and T.A. Bulygina (Ambartsumyan, 2010; Klopikhina, 2011; Oborskii, 2006; Strupoleva, 2007; Shumakova, 2008).

One of the fields of research of the SEC is oral history within which E.N. Strekalova develops acute problems of historical consciousness and historical memory. In particular, many dwellers of the Kuban and Stavropol territory were interviewed, who revealed the participants and eyewitnesses’ take on the Great Patriotic War at the present day, the specifics of family memory and the contemporary model of the war memory (Rebrova *et al.*, 2008; Strekalova, 2006; Strekalova, 2008; Strekalova, 2010). The direction of historical biography, which is actively developed by M.E. Kolesnikova, looks equally promising. Her works include the research of the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary community of local area researchers of the North Caucasus, which uses the methods of personal history (Kolesnikova, 2011).

As the Centre should carry out not only scientific and research, but also educational tasks, 9 years ago its workers developed a new educational discipline “new local history of a macro region”. Now this discipline is part of the curriculum and has been taught to master degree students first at Stavropol State University, then at NCFU and since 2014 as part of the network programme to master degree students of the Law faculty at Southern Federal University. Students get acquainted not only with the activities of the SEC but also with the foreign experience of research practices and theoretical developments on local history. Annually they prepare presentations in which they place the topic of their master’s thesis in the context of “new local history”.

Thus, from discussions about the object, methods and fields of research of “new local history” the participants of the Centre turn to research practices. In particular, the participants of the SEC K.R. Ambartsumyan, T.N. Kozhemyako and T.A. Bulygina in collaboration with the professor of Kharkov National University S.I. Posokhov in 2012-2013 realized the project of the Federal special

purpose programme “The Northern Caucasus in the sociocultural space of pre-revolutionary and Soviet Russia”. Apart from the scientific seminars, conferences and the collection of scientific papers on historical memory issued together with Saratov University, the reader “Native – Foreign” in the sociocultural space of the Northern Caucasus” is in print.

5. CONCLUSION

In the framework of contemporary world historiography of local history special attention is paid to urban history. For example, “Urban History Journal” is published at University of Leicester in England. Its editor Richard Rogers thinks that most of “interdisciplinary collaboration” can be seen exactly in the sphere of urban history. “Urban History”, in his opinion, stimulates discussions about historiographic and methodological problems of historical knowledge (Urban History Journal, 2015). “Institute of Urban History” in Stockholm has organized seminars on the Scandinavian local history every three years since 1970s. Their aim is to arouse interest in urban, municipal and local histories (Alsvik, 1993). “Journal of Urban History” has been issued in the USA for several decades and in recent times the research on urban history in the ecological context has been popular (Flanagan, 1996).

It is no coincidence that the next project of the SEC concerns urban history. The collection of documents on sociocultural history of Stavropol was issued, which is going to be revised and reissued. The concept of Stavropol history was developed from the perspective of “new local history”. This issue will be the first after the 40-year break and will use the approaches of micro history, personal history and new cultural and intellectual history based on the principles of interdisciplinarity and anthropological turn.

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