

# In memoriam YuriJ Levada

Saturday, the 29th of October 2006. It's an unusual warm autumn day for Russia. Our conference is located in the beautiful countryside of the Oka centre near Stupino. The Oka is flowing languidly between the wooded banks with a calmness that only Russia is able to grant to its streams.

YuriJ Levada, 76 years old, ascends the lectern at the conference room. He is the leader of the Russian team. He makes the inaugural address, 'The Walk of Russia to the Future', without the help of foils or power point presentations.

In his diction the allusion to the 'Peregrination through the Soviet Formation' is noticeable, its tracks and effects to date. Since the era of Khrushchev to Gorbachev and Putin he has explored the experiences and responses of the people to the Soviet and Russian society. The public opinion research, the soviet surveys describe the change and the continuity of the 'homo sovieticus'. Being brushed aside by Putin, he founded the Levada Center as his own institute.



**Since the sixties YuriJ Levada analysed how governance affected people during the Soviet period and after its collapse.**

**The 'homo sovieticus' and 'post sovieticus' are a lucid interpretations based upon a huge amount of quantitative data.**

**Levada has consigned a unique observatory of the world society in one of its unacquainted parts, in the Russian-Soviet formation.**



**Levada Analytical Center** (Levada-Center) was founded in 2002 by the core researchers of the former All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM). Levada-Center continues the research program its staff members started in VCIOM, and it is one of the largest full-service agencies carrying out public opinion and market research in Russia. Using nationwide representative samples, Levada-Center conducts monthly omnibus surveys, long-term survey projects, ad hoc surveys, and panel studies. A network of 37 affiliated regional research centers and supervisors in Russia and 15 affiliated companies in other ex-Soviet republics allow Levada-Center to conduct fieldwork all over Russia and the former Soviet Union. Levada-Center employs researchers with considerable expertise in sociology, economics, psychology, and marketing. Its specialists have received methodological training in Denmark (GALLUP), Netherlands, UK, and USA (ISR, University of Michigan). The Center publishes its findings in a by-monthly journal "The Russian Public Opinion Herald."

## Search for the turning point: Where does Russia go?

The Levada Center as observatory is singular. With rich data sources Levada worked on the 'homo post sovieticus': how do the Russian citizens live, feel and think after the collapse of the Soviet Imperium? What can be extracted from numbers about the life of a society?



Levada researched quantitatively and finalised his reports in a highly elaborated and qualitatively enriched interpretation. The question marks gained numeral, content-related and committed responses.

He knew sociology as profoundly as the men which it investigated, Durkheim, Max Weber, cultural anthropology, equally the workshop of the empirical positivism, the opinion research, Marxism.

The inaugural address of Yurij Levada beyond the river Oka was a sequence of sentences in rising and falling notes. He was seeking after the turning point - where is Russia going?

Thomas Hobbes would have been astonished, if he had listened to the last speech of Levada. His message from the observatory of the public opinion:

The wolves, let free, don't escape hastily to the liberty in which the individual predominates. They don't aspire as fast as possible toward the next paradise. They have got a complex of enclosure and wait, stay, try to forget, dream or drink and smoke simply too much.

Russia is on many paths, so Levada, and not on one way to the future. Data from the scientific research of the Levada Center affirm the statement. The categories 'I don't know' and 'I have not decided yet' attain amazing high values in Russian surveys, which concentrate on prospective matters, - particularly when these are crucial.

## Sociology within the image of men

The 'homo post sovieticus' sways in important political questions. 1994 for example, a quarter of the Russians was not decided, whether it perceived itself still as soviet-minded. In the year 2006 many couldn't yet decide, whether the October Revolution has been the decisive way for Russia. But the predominant majority agreed, that the revolution was 'good and positive'.

The cadence of Levada's speaking slow, quiet, hawing, repeating was at the same time part of what he wanted to express: The aim towards the ideals of a world wide civilisation, humanity and democracy is enlightening, but the paths to attain it are enigmatic and lie in the dark for a vast majority. Incertitude often leads to avoidance of darkness. For a long time trends are showing, that the 'back to the future' can't be reduced to the remaining quantity of fear and uncertainty; loss could be understood after a collapse. But Levada pointed out: "It is a perspective which is strengthening by the fusion of attitudes and mentalities."

We read in the data archives: Six out of ten felt themselves still soviet-minded in 2006. The 'homo post sovieticus' assigns these characteristics to his self-image as Russian. It encloses the history and the period of the Soviet time, it even can be reevaluated. The downsizing, the mutilation of the Russian people towards "grandeur" has grown since 1989. Russians describe themselves as open but simple, easygoing, anxious and modest. This internalised prostration is matching constant characteristics of the Russian self-perception: patient, helpful, reliable, unpractical. The Russian person is all but a wolf - rather a placid dancing bear?

The withdrawal of the moral responsibility from governance and state, from business, from the macro into the private sphere of the family and kinship - into the basis of the social capital in peripheries becomes clear in the 'homo post sovieticus'. Four out of ten believe that the commitment for the family is absolutely necessary, but only for one out of ten a moral conscientiousness towards the state seems important.

The power space is radically separated from the private space, today still stronger than at the end of the Soviet Union. The data of the Levada Center document the accrual from the Russian memory, which has swollen during the Soviet time: the strong patrimonialism of the state. The majority wants a strong state; paradoxically Leviathan has found his home in Russia. He is installed by big parts of the population itself. This mentality has a centre of gravitation: the wideness, bigness, the huge resources and the history of Russia.

## The 'longue durée' of dominance

### Stimmen Würdigungen

#### Памяти Юрия Левады

<http://www.levada.ru/levada.html>

21.11.06 Эхо Москвы  
Памяти Юрия Левады,  
А. Левинсон,  
Б. Дубин, Л. Гудков

20.11.06 Еженедельный журнал  
Образ и образец, Б.  
Дубин

20.11.06 Аргументы  
и факты  
Памяти Юрия Левады,  
В. Костиков

20.11.06  
Коммерсантъ  
Человек свободный,  
Л. Гудков, Б. Дубин

20.11.06 Профиль  
Левада-Центр, А.  
Архангельский

20.11.06 Новая газета  
Он держал перед  
нами зеркало

19.11.06 Ведомости  
Трагедия Личности,  
А. Олейник

16.11.06 Радио  
Свобода  
Скончался социолог  
Юрий Левада, Л.  
Седов, В. Рыжков

The portrayal of the 'homo sovieticus' by Levada is an analysis of a formation as the case study of Russia put on its feet. 'Forms of ruling and authority' work with human beings, create mentalities and shape persons. They keep the formation, if they succeed to mould personalities 'à la longue'. The lifespan of a societal formation outlasts its efficiency consistently. Ailing systems of ruling live on, regenerate, even if they don't perform the simplest things and even if the Titanic is sinking.

After his comments, Yurij Levada descended to the river Oka. What he was thinking or remembering in doing so, and how he liked the river is not known. He returned to the hotel not without physical troubles. In the evening he stayed with us at the festive dinner.

With agile eyes he proposed the toasts with vodka, encouraged us to continue the research and the collaboration between East and West. One month later he succumbed to a heart attack in his office.

How he, a pioneer of the sociology, appraised the indolence of the 'homo sovieticus', remains secret.

One impression is lasting and unique: Levada has questioned the broad population since Khrushchev and he never contented himself with statistical percentages. He continually worked on the interpretation - where are the paths of Russia to the future. When we met in Minsk, November 2002, he told us: *"To understand civil society means primarily to understand what people in peripheral regions are feeling."*

Zurich, 30<sup>th</sup> of December 2006

Hans-Peter Meier

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LOCLAB project

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### **Previous and ongoing projects**

*The Eastern European network was created by a series of conferences and projects since the early nineties. Important are the network- and joint research-projects:*

- **REGIONS:** The role of regions in transforming post-communist societies: Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine as cases for comparison (INTAS-1997-02025)
- **UKRAINE:** Regions in the Ukraine: dynamics, movements and politics (INTAS-94-3938)
- **GEORGIA:** How Georgians view democracy? (SCOPES FGEPj65810)
- **LOCLAB:** Dynamics and social impacts of the labour markets on local communities in Eastern Europe accelerated by the EU-Integration (INTAS-04-79-6799)
- **CHERNOBYL:** The Chernobyl generation. Life situations and perspectives in Gomel, Chernigov, Brjansk (SDC)

### **Project initiatives**

- **GOOD\_ELEPHANTS:** Transnational companies challenged by diverging societal contexts: social performance between Western, East-Central and NIS areas for Europe
- **YOUTHLAB:** Youth, labour markets and integration into local societies in Central Asian and Caucasian countries (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Poland).
- **REBUILDING:** Rebuilding the past for the future. The cultural heritage in people's mind compared between Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Bulgaria and Poland
- **NEW TOWNS** in Eastern Europe: Learning by comparing – a project initiative with ENTP (European New Town Platform)
- **HOW MANY WORLDS?** Joint publication project on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the World Society Foundation 2007 in Zurich (see Newsletter VII "How many worlds?")

***Papers and publications of the LOCLAB project:***  
[www.culturprospectiv.ch/upload/uploads/literature.htm](http://www.culturprospectiv.ch/upload/uploads/literature.htm)