

Social Challenges of Modern World (Case Study of the International Research Workshop)



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Social innovations in the modern conditions of the countries' development have acquired a special sound becoming a kind of imperative of the time as a response to growing social, environmental and demographic problems. The contribution of social practices to the growth of inclusion and social justice in society is provided by the expansion of access to public goods for vulnerable social groups and strengthening of civic participation in the life of the country. Social innovations are actively

developing in healthcare, social services, education, youth occupation and employment, migration, ecology, transport and mobility issues, energy consumption, etc.

Despite first elaborated attempts for a theory of social innovation, there are still issues related to development and implementation of social innovations in modern society; position of social innovations in terms of improving living standards; their contribution to innovation process of regions

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and countries, to the development of the territories' economy; the problems of creating conditions and favorable environment for development; creation of an ecosystem of social innovations; barriers and drivers of innovation processes; mutual influence of technological and social innovations; interaction of social entrepreneurs with government authorities, representatives of the media, business associations, the scientific community, investors; population willingness to digitalize social practices; potential for using digital social practices; impact of Industry 4.0 on society, etc.

These and other issues were discussed at the 1st International research workshop “*Social Challenges of Modern World: Actualization of Global and Regional Social Practices*” on May 18, 2021 conducted by the Vologda Research Center of RAS and the European School of Social Innovation (ESSI).

The workshop was attended by more than 30 scientists from Germany (Dortmund), Spain (Bilbao), Austria (Vienna), Australia (Perth), Russia (Moscow, Yekaterinburg, and Vologda) in the offline and online format, and more than 50 listeners watched the broadcast of the event on the official YouTube channel of the VoIRC RAS.

The participants shared the results of their research on the above-mentioned problems, expressed a number of promising areas for studying issues related to the innovative development of regions and countries, and identified points of common scientific interests in this field of research.

After greetings from the organizers of the workshop – the Director of the VoIRC RAS, Doc. Sci. (Econ.) *A.A. Shabunova* and Managing Director of the European School of Social Innovation (ESSI), Member of Management Board of the Social Research Center of the TU Dortmund University, Senior Researcher *Antonius Schröder* – moderator of the meeting, Leading Researcher of the VoIRC RAS, Cand. Sci. (Phil.) *O.V. Tret'yakova* introduced the participants to how the stated problems are covered on the pages of the academic

journal “Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast” which acted as the information partner of the workshop.

The scientific part was opened by *A. Schröder* who outlined the relationship between technological and social innovations. The speaker's presentation emphasized that “any technological or economic innovation is also a social innovation that is decisive, or at least jointly determines the effectiveness and efficiency, success and failure of the innovation”. This conclusion was justified by the presented empirical data of a number of projects of the TU Dortmund University combining technological and social innovations: ESSA, SPIRE-SAIS, COCOP, ROBOHARSH. *A. Schröder* outlined the prospects for the study which are caused primarily by the fact that “digital and green transformations require changes in social practices”, in particular, “involving stakeholders in the process of joint creativity taking into account economic, social and environmental consequences”. According to the speaker, it leads to “more acceptable and efficient technological solutions”.

Continuing thought about the new challenges of “digital transformation of society”, Deputy Director of the VoIRC RAS, Cand. Sci. (Econ.) *L.V. Babich* presented to the participants the social practice of the Research and Educational Center for Economics and Information Technologies on the development of a conceptual model of smart competencies of students. The author's model was developed by a team of researchers of the RFBR grant project no. 19-010-00811 “Smart education as a vector of human potential development of the younger generation”. The purpose of the project is to promote human potential development of the younger generation in the new digital reality. The model is based on key digital competencies for sustainable education.

The topic of society digitalization was also discussed in a joint report by the scientists of the Center for Studies of Civil Society and the

Nonprofit Sector of the NRU “Higher School of Economics” (Director of the Center, Head of the Department of Economics and Management in NGOs, Can. Sci. (Soc.) *I.V. Mersiyanova*, Senior Researcher, Can. Sci. (Phil.) *N.V. Ivanova*, Junior Researcher *A.S. Bryuhno*). They introduced the participants of the workshop to the first Russian Index of Digital Competencies of NGOs developed in the Center for Studies of Civil Society and the Nonprofit Sector of the NRU “Higher School of Economics”. The report concept was based on the “new innovation paradigm” that **A. Schröder** had voiced at the beginning of the workshop, and consisted in considering technological and social innovations as interrelated aspects of a single innovation process. The data obtained on the basis of the Index indicate a weak use of digital technologies by Russian NGOs. In addition, the “digital polarization” of the non-profit sector has intensified during the pandemic. The Index data showed that organizations that had previously used information technology in their activities continued improving their digital competencies, while organizations that had not previously used digital technologies were not ready to implement them during the pandemic. The speakers demonstrated the prospects of the Index of NGOs’ Digital Competencies as a tool to diagnose and evaluate innovations in the non-profit sector.

The representatives of the European School of Social Innovation emphasized the relevance of innovation assessment in their speeches. For example, Senior Researcher of the Social Research Center at the TU Dortmund University *M. Kohlgrüber* drew the attention to the consequences of mass digitalization, presenting four possible scenarios for future work in digital format and a classification of skills that will be required for work in the future. The scientist’s findings are particularly relevant for vulnerable groups (migrants, unemployed, female and elderly workers, as well as people with health problems).

To prevent their digital isolation, training providers and employers, according to the speaker, should teach the necessary skills and provide appropriate working conditions that will allow participating in (digital) training and working life. Skills needs must be adapted to regional innovation strategies characterized by specific sectoral and qualification structures, which requires customized training programs.

The logical continuation of the workshop topic was a series of speeches devoted to the problem of the ecosystem of social innovations. The results of an international study on the current state of the social innovation ecosystem were shared by ESSI Scientific Director, Director of the International Research Project Office at the University of Deusto (Spain), and Researcher *S.A. Caro-González*. She spoke about working out radically new approaches to a single “green”, social, techno-digital issues, and stressed the urgent need to accelerate the third, social transition, in addition to green and digital transitions which are more widely recognized by the international community at the present stage. Antonia **Caro-González** noted that “innovation, or the dual transition of European industry to climate neutrality and digital leadership, cannot be sustained without strong, responsive, responsible social and environmental participation”¹. Within the framework of the eco-centric society guidelines, the speaker presented 1) radically new tactics for the “how” (green, techno-digital), for the strategic “what” (green, social), for the purposeful “why” (green, social) and for the operational “how best” (green, social, techno-digital), 2) directions for responding to urgent radical challenges. Among these areas, there can be distinguished:

– shift to new (though ancient) principles of eco-centric, rather than ego-centric, behavior.

¹ Caro-Gonzalez, A. (Coord.) et al. (2021) ‘The MuskEUteers: The “One for all, All for one” triple transition – boundaryless green, social, techno-digital innovation’.

– activation of collaborative, responsive, responsible interaction against hierarchy as alternative models of management and distribution to overcome the unfair, unsustainable biased status quo generated by traditional established systems.

– stimulation of the transformative potential of all forms of collaboration (international, interdisciplinary, intersectoral, intergenerational) from the n-helix spectrum.

Senior Researcher of the Department for the Studies of Lifestyles and Standards of Living at the VolRC RAS, Cand. Sci. (Econ.) **A.V. Popov** highlighted the domestic experience of studying the ecosystem of social innovation. He noted the key components of the ecosystem approach to the development of social innovations, demonstrated the features of the social entrepreneurship development in Russia and around the world, and showed the methodological tools of the study on the basis of which there were evaluated the conditions for the development of social innovations in the regions in Russia and their features.

The scientists of the Institute of Economics of the Ural Branch of RAS, Senior Researcher of the Center for Social Economic Theory, Cand. Sci. (Econ.) **A. Yu. Veretennikova**, and Junior Researcher of the Institute of Economics of the Ural Branch of RAS, graduate student **K.M. Kozinskaya** spoke about the modeling of the formal institutional environment and its influence on the social entrepreneurship development. The main leitmotif of their research was the hypothesis that “to develop social innovations, the functioning of appropriate institutions is necessary not only on the part of society, but also on the part of the state”. State initiatives have a direct impact on the social entrepreneurship development, both from above – through draft laws and supporting institutions, and from below – by promoting mass initiatives in society. The scientists have found that socially-oriented activities in Russia’s regions are distributed unevenly which is caused by the functioning of

supportive institutional environment. The research revealed that for Russian regions, the availability of support measures is a more important condition for the development of social innovations than the territory’s investment attractiveness.

An essential factor to promote and expand social innovations in society is the attitude of population itself to them. In the case of specific jobs of a secondary school teacher, Deputy Head of the Department for Editorial-and-Publishing Activity and Science-Information Support of the VolRC RAS, graduate student **E.A. Kabakova** showed that in the teaching environment, there is a demand for innovations in the workplace and understanding of the essence of their innovativeness. However, the process of implementing innovations in specific jobs is not carried out as quickly as time requires.

Deputy Director for Research Work of the VolRC RAS, Cand. Sci. (Econ.) **E.A. Mazilov** showed the assessment of population readiness as a whole to perceive and use innovations. The idea of population’s conservatism in matters of innovation activity, as the study has proved, turned out to be quite fair in relation to the regional community. People are cautious about using new developments preferring to rely on the experience of others. Active use of technologies in everyday life is limited by availability of idle money for acquisition, a lack of need, or a lack of understanding of technologies / the principles of their operation (which generates certain distrust). At the same time, the speaker demonstrated that the region’s population is actively interested in the news of science and technology, especially in the areas closest and most understandable to the ordinary person: education, medicine, ecology.

Summing up the results, all participants noted the relevance of the topic, the importance and necessity to discuss the proposed range of issues related to the peculiarities of present and future social development, the problems of interaction between the state and society, current challenges

and threats of modern time, the transformation of the institutional environment, and promising areas of socio-economic policy. According to the Russian scientists, the participants of the meeting, the interesting and magnificent program of the workshop revealed new perspectives and new emphasis in the research analysis of social innovation. It is very important to maintain a

dialogue that will help to adequately represent Russian science in the international academic community.

All participants expressed hope for further active cooperation and exchange of research and organizational experience within the framework of the permanent international research workshop “*Social Challenges of Modern World*”.

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