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# **PSYCHOLOGY IN RUSSIA STATE OF THE ART**

**Scientific Yearbook  
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**Edited by  
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The forth issue of the annual series *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art* presents a collection of articles which reflect the current directions of theoretical and empirical research in Russian psychology. This volume samples a range of works on neuropsychology and psychophysiology, social psychology, clinical psychology, health and sport psychology, security psychology, developmental psychology and art psychology. This yearbook will be of interest to psychologists, philosophers, and educational researchers, as well as anyone concerned with the recent achievements of the psychological science.

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## INTRODUCTION

The year which passed since the last issue of this yearbook was published was marked by a considerable amount of activity by the professional community of Russian psychologists. This clearly reflects the growing role psychology as a discipline and a profession plays in the life of Russian society. Today, psychology has become very visible in Russia. It has made a miraculous transformation from a rather exotic – if not marginal – academic discipline to almost a mass occupation. The need for all sorts of psychological services (be it psychological help, consulting, or applied research) surely still exceeds the capabilities of the professional community of Russian psychologists. This imbalance creates many pressures for professional psychologists to weaken quality standards they follow in their day-to-day work and to trade scientifically sound psychological theories for ad-hoc invented explanations and questionable hypotheses. It is with content that the Russian Psychological Society (RPS) observes a re-orientation of psychologists in universities and in practice towards an increasing sensitivity to the use of scientifically validated methods and procedures. More importantly, Russian consumers of psychological services today often ask not for a quick remedy of a single problem, but are interested in a thorough analysis of the problem at hand in order to develop an integrated solution with a predictable chance of success.

Although psychology has surely secured and extended its niche in Russia, there are still some major challenges to be overcome. First, there is a constant pressure in Russia to improve the quality of psychological **education** at university level. On the one hand, Russian psychological education suffers from the very same generic problems as any other field of study in Russia – lean budgets, out-dated libraries, out-dated curricula, insufficient equipment with modern research tools, and a shortage of qualified teachers. On the other hand, a specific issue with psychological education in Russia stems from the fact that Russian/Soviet psychology was largely oriented toward basic research, with less attention given to educating psychologists-practitioners. Since the beginning of the 1990s psychologists-practitioners surely are the most valuable kind of psychologists on the labor market, and Russian universities had to create appropriate

study programs literally from scratch. Another major problem in Russian psychology is the quality of psychological services provided to the public. As the title of psychologists is not protected legally in Russia, the issue of **licensure** and **certification** of psychologists becomes an increasingly important item on the agenda of Russian policymakers and professional psychological community. A third challenge for Russian psychologists is to make psychology even more visible and to take more **responsibility** in shaping the decisions fallen in the name of the public well-fare. Psychological factors are clearly being more and more often considered in the public discourse in Russia, and it seems all to natural for psychology to present its educated opinion much more actively as it has done before.

All these challenges are being addressed today by RPS. Much attention has been devoted in the last year to improving the education of psychologists (both researchers and practitioners). This emphasis on education was determined by several factors, which temporarily opened unique opportunities for revising the structure and the process of psychologists' training in Russia. In the course of modernization of higher education in Russia, new educational standards were developed for all specialties taught in accredited Russian universities. The standards present basic requirements for the studies' structure, content and quality assurance procedures for any given specialty, which are to be fulfilled and/or exceeded by any university offering a corresponding degree. It is through the amendments to the educational standards that Russian system of psychological education could be positively changed in the most effective way. RPS has intensively cooperated with all stakeholders to implement its ideas about how to raise the quality of psychologists' training in Russian universities.

These developments have profited from RPS' engagement into the process of introducing the European certificate in psychology (EuroPsy), which is conducted by the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA). EuroPsy states minimal requirements for academic and practical training (supervision) of psychologists-practitioners. Following EuroPsy regulations, RPS has appointed a National Awarding Committee (NAC), which is responsible for creating prerequisites for EuroPsy introduction in Russia. The NAC's first task has been to check the fit between EuroPsy academic requirements and psychological curricula of Russian universities. It is not a simple task given that there are over 300 universities in Russia awarding a master level degree in psychology. However, a thorough inspection of the educational standards

for psychology (and their actual implementations at various top-level Russian universities) has shown that EuroPsy requirements are very well met. There were two areas in which Russian universities have a need to increase the intensity of students' training –academic skills and research methods. We are happy that upon this analysis amendments to psychological curricula at Moscow State Lomonosov University (which is the oldest and most known university in the country) to compensate for this misfit have been proposed and accepted. It is expected that all major Russian universities will follow this example in the nearest future.

Another major aspect of EuroPsy is the requirement to implement a system of supervised practice (supervision) in order to secure that students of psychology acquire sufficient practical skills and competences in solving real-world psychological problems. This requirement corresponds well to the on-going efforts by Russian higher-education specialists to make university training more case-based. Psychologists' training in Russia already incorporates a large amount of practical work. In the later semesters of the studies, students of psychology take part in various courses requiring them to work with clients/patients in real settings under the guidance of both a university professor and a skilled practitioner. The Russian system of supervision will be to a large extent built upon this part of university training. Two challenges that are to be met in this respect are to incorporate (1) the EuroPsy competence model and (2) a system of formal evaluation of supervision success into Russian psychological curricula. This work is currently underway in several Russian universities and is coordinated by the NAC. The NAC strives for its procedures being accepted by the EuroPsy's European Awarding Committee within the next year.

Introduction of EuroPsy in Russia is a part of RPS' strategy to secure acceptable quality of psychological services in Russia. To raise the quality of psychological services is extremely important in order to protect the customers and to improve the reputation of science-based psychology in the country. Various other efforts are currently being undertaken in this respect in Russia on national, regional and even organizational level. Two particular tendencies may be especially stressed in this short exposition. First, there is a rising concern in Russia (both within professionals and lay people) about ethical issues emerging in the context of psychological services' provision. Second, there is a rising sensitivity for the proper use of psychometric tests both in research and practice. RPS is involved in solving both of these problems. RPS has installed an Ethics

Committee and it is currently revising its Ethics Code to make it more compatible to the European Meta-Code of Ethics adopted by the EFPA. RPS has plans to facilitate the Code revision by running a national survey concerning ethical issues within psychology. It also plans to update the functionality of its website to make the presentation of ethical issues easier both for professional psychologists and for the general public.

The proper use of tests is a problem addressed by the permanent Commission for Psychodiagnostics of RPS. This Commission is closely cooperating with the International Test Commission (ITC). Major concerns are proper validation of newly developed instruments, unrestricted access to test materials, restrictions on test usage, and the problem of acknowledging authorship. In all these areas, a lot of work has still to be done. The activities of the Commission for Psychodiagnostics had recently mainly concentrated around developing a guideline for proper test usage in academic domain, which caused a lively debate within the professional community. Members of the Commission had also initiated – for the first time in Russia – a publication of a volume presenting many tests developed in the country, each supplemented by two reviews written by acknowledged Russian experts. It is planned to continue the publication of such volumes on a yearly basis. A highlight of the Commission's work was the conference *Contemporary Psychodiagnostics in the Period of Innovation*, held in September, 2010, in Tchelyabinsk. It had attracted a large audience and provided a forum to discuss many of above problems.

It should be mentioned that in general there is currently a strong debate in Russia about how psychological science can assist psychological practice in developing new and better methods for solving practical problems. A very large number of regional and national conferences and workshops devoted to this topic had taken place during the last year or will take place in the nearest future. In this respect, RPS can and will play a central role as a mediator between science and practice. To play this role is one of the primary objectives of RPS, which is facilitated by RPS covering both researchers and practitioners. One of the areas in which RPS could be especially effective is to organize the work of national and international experts in order to extract best practices in various applied domains. RPS will actively participate in *National Health* forum, which will be held in Moscow in 14-16 September, 2011. The main topic of the forum's program is cure and prevention of addictions. During the forum, RPS will organize several symposia, in which scientific and practical aspects of this particular problem will be discussed. RPS will also

make a searchable database of qualified practitioners accessible through its website, assisting potential clients in the selection of a reliable service provider. We hope that these events will attract public attention in Russia, and that the solutions found for the problem of addictions can be translated into other areas of psychological practice.

RPS observes that many of the most important challenges the Russian society faces today require a lot of psychological competence to be successfully met. These are – to name only a few – the problem of tolerance, the problem of extremism and terrorism, the problem of low life-quality, the problem of the drastic increase in health-related issues, the problem of information overload, the problem of learning disabilities, etc. All of these problems include a substantial psychological component and could be much better addressed if professional psychologists would regularly be involved in decision-making. It is important that a lot of these issues have already been extensively studied within Russian academic psychology. It is an exciting opportunity for RPS to integrate the scientific findings and to introduce them into the societal and political reality of contemporary Russia. This would surely be in full concordance with RPS obligation to serve the public good by disseminating appropriate psychological knowledge. The need for a stronger involvement of psychologists in solving many burning issues within Russian society is also being increasingly acknowledged by other professions.

In 2010, to organize research on innovative psychological technologies in the work with athletes, a new Division – Division of Sport Psychology – appeared in structure of RPS. This task is of special importance in the light of the upcoming XXII Winter Olympic Games in Sochi. Psychologists of RPS have been successfully working with junior and elite athletes in different fields of sport: synchronized swimming, soccer, diving, rhythmic gymnastics, short track, biathlon and pentathlon; the results of theoretical and empirical studies were presented at local and international conferences (15th Annual Congress of the European College of Sport Science, 11 International Sport Science Congress, etc.). The work of the Sport Psychology Division in RPS is not only supported by professional sport federations, but also by public sports schools and universities, which have evaluated implementation of sport psychology in educational practice as highly effective.

Overall, RPS is satisfied with the how the things went lately in Russian psychology. Although being a psychologist in Russia still sometimes means to be confronted with misbeliefs and prejudices about

the profession's methods and credibility, the situation is clearly improving today. Russian psychology has always been firmly rooted in an extremely strong academic tradition. This helped it not to lose its integrity and its distinctive flavor. The university training in psychology is being heavily modernized today and is harmonized with the most advanced international standards. Psychological research is intensified, and internationally Russian psychological science is more visible than it has been for many years. More important, there is a strong urge for practical application of validated psychological methods on the side of potential consumers of psychological services. This is received well by psychologists in the universities, which seem to have found the right balance between basic and applied research. RPS is looking forward for the these developments to progress to make Russian psychology as strong – and as practically useful – as it has long been expected to be by anyone who had happened to come in contact with it.

The present volume of the yearbook *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art* covers various research and applied fields within contemporary Russian psychology: methodology of psychology, general psychology, neuropsychology, developmental psychology, health psychology, organizational psychology and some others. Of course, the limited size of a yearbook constrains its content to be only a sample of the work done by psychologists in Russia. The sample should by no means be understood as representative in the statistical meaning of the term. However, by studying the yearbook the reader may still develop a feeling for some problems, methods and solutions which are currently in focus of interest of Russian psychologists. Moreover, the reader may develop a notion what the specific ways of Russian psychology are and how contemporary Russian psychology fits into the general context of international psychology.

The articles in the yearbook can be thematically organized in several clusters, and a reader who has happened to know some facts about the history of Russian psychology can easily detect many recurrent topics which are characteristic of Russian psychological science. For instance, a number of articles deal with the problems of neuropsychological diagnostics, as well as neuropsychological correction of the disabled. A specific challenge this traditional field of Russian psychology faces today is the introduction of quantitative methods and their right combination with the more qualitative methods Russian neuropsychologists has used for decades. The yearbook also contains a number of articles devoted to the general questions closely related to activity theory, cultural-his-

torical psychology and culturally-oriented educational psychology – all these are topics which are traditionally associated with Russian psychology and which were the target of considerable research efforts.

The content of the yearbook also allows the conclusion that Russian psychology is not stick to tradition but is strongly engaged in many research and applied activities in response to the challenges of the time. A large set of articles deals with issues related to mental health – a topic in which the importance of professional psychological advice is being more and more acknowledged by other health professionals in Russia. Another large set of articles deals with various problems related to security issues on the national, social and individual level. This engagement is only one example how Russian psychology may assist the Russian society in overcoming the problems it faces today. Diverse examples of research in other basic and applied fields are also presented in this volume. RPS and the editors of this yearbook hope that studying them will help the reader interested in the present of Russian psychology to assess its potential, to find differences and similarities between Russian, Western and any other psychology, and to make a thought or two about how approaches adopted by psychologists nationally or internationally may be combined to achieve a better understanding of humans. If this happens, the strategic aim of this yearbook is achieved.

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