

## Natalia Firsova Research Proposal

“It is a gross self-deception to believe that without the achievements of the age of the Rights of Man any one of us, including the most conservative, can go on living his life.”  
(Max Weber, 1978: 1403)

**Key Question:** In Russia the moderate trend has been observed since 1995 towards greater subjective sense of freedom and control of own’s life. At the same time, according to the widely-cited Political Rights and Civil Liberties indices calculated by Freedom House, the trend of measured freedom had the opposite direction. This also holds true for the majority of Economic Freedom indices published by the Heritage Foundation; for the exception of Trade, Fiscal, and Monetary freedom, coinciding in growth over time with the subjective feeling of freedom by an average Russian.

The question then is: How can this paradox be explained? If the evidence could be found that the meaning of freedom among the Russian public differs significantly from other countries, further investigation could offer an explanation of why the transition towards democracy has been different for Russia compared to other Post-Communist countries.

**Specific Contribution:** This research is intended to contribute to two distinct bodies of literature. First, to the debates on consumption by testing the proposition that freedom in the contemporary society has transformed into freedom to consume (Bauman, 2007). Second, to the modernization theory debate. As Welzel and Inglehart have argued, mass liberty aspirations had an impact on democratization of societies (Welzel and Inglehart, 2005). Our contribution to this discourse could be the problematization of liberty aspirations: taking a closer look at a particular society and trying to understand what people mean by freedom might be instrumental in gaining insight of what kind of liberty they have aspired to and gained.

### Theoretical Framework:

Freedom in the sense of individual *autonomy* is different from, but related to *situational freedom* (Levine, 1981: 16) in the form of political rights, civil liberties and free markets. Accents on what is most important for individuals could differ from society to society and over time. According to Zygmunt Bauman, it is freedom to consume that has lately gained most importance. At the first glance, the paradox of the simultaneously rising subjective freedom in 1995-2005 Russia and the falling scores of its political and civil freedom, as measured by Freedom House, supports Bauman’s idea, if we find that trade, fiscal and monetary freedoms – the only ones among measured economic freedoms by Heritage Foundation that have increased in a given time period– as the mostly desired by public opinion. Part of the explanation could be that lately, after undergoing a crucial transition Russian society is less normative, allowing individuals to have and articulate autonomous materialistic interests. The additional/alternative explanation could be offered by generational shift, if the evidence found of the youngest generation as increasingly showing the most subjective freedom over time.

### Core Variables and Hypotheses:

Major dependent variable is the subjective sense of freedom, measured by the World Values Survey (WVS)

score as an answer to the 'How much freedom of choice and control' question on a 1-10 scale<sup>1</sup>.

The following order of inquiry is suggested in order to address the key question. First, the hypothesis whether freedom indices under consideration are correlated with the subjective sense of freedom in all countries for which data are available in 1981- 2008 will be tested. If positive correlation is found, the next question would be: Why there seem to be none (or even negative) in the case of Russia in 1995-2005.

Second hypothesis to be tested on the 1995-2005 Russian sample: for the people who feel that they are free, political rights and civil liberties are not as important as economic ones.

Dependent variable: subjective sense of freedom

Regressors of interest: the most important aim of respondent<sup>2</sup> and aim of country<sup>3</sup> - dummy variables for each category of response

Controls: socio-demographic and geographical variables

Null hypothesis: 'give people more say', 'protecting freedom of speech', and 'people have more say about how things are done' dummies are positive and significant, while 'fighting rising prices' and 'a high level of economic growth' are insignificant.

Third hypothesis to be tested on the 1995-2005 Russian sample: Generational shift has an effect on changing of subjective sense of freedom over time: younger generations feel that they are more free and have more control than the older ones, gradually increasing the mean subjective freedom overtime in Russia.

Dependent variable: subjective sense of freedom

Regressor of interest: age (or age group)

Controls: other socio-demographic and geographical variables

Null hypothesis: coefficient on age - negative

### **Analyses and Modeling:**

1. Compute correlation coefficient between country level average WVS score of subjective freedom and two aggregate indices of freedom (measured by Freedom House and Heritage Foundation) for

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<sup>1</sup> A173. Some people feel they have a completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them. Please use this scale where 1 means "none at all" and 10 means "a great deal" to indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out.

<sup>2</sup> E003. If you had to choose, which one of the things on this card would you say is most important? And which would be the next most important? First choice 1 "Maintaining order in the nation"; 2 "Give people more say"; 3 "Fighting rising prices"; 4 "Protecting freedom of speech".

<sup>3</sup> E001. People sometimes talk about what aims of this country should be in the next ten years. On this card are listed some of the goals which different people would give top priority.

Would you please say which ones of these you, yourself, consider the most important? First choice 1 'A high level of economic growth', 2 'Strong defence forces', 3 'People have more say about how things are done', 4 'Trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful'.

all countries and for groupings of countries. If correlation coefficient is not significant, than there is no paradox to explain.

2. Run OLS regression analysis for the second and third hypothesis. If Null hypotheses are not rejected, our initial propositions are wrong.

### **Targeted Data Base:**

World Values Survey 1981-2008 Official Aggregate v.20090901, 2009. World Values Survey Association ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)). Aggregate File Producer: ASEP/JDS, Madrid.

Freedom House indices ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)).

Heritage Foundation Economic Freedom Indices ([www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org)).

### **Roadmap:**

After downloading the data bases of interest, the time range of data for the first step of analysis should be selected on the basis of availability of variables under consideration. Also, if no correlation is found for all countries selected, countries might grouped on the bases of GDP per capita, or existing classifications of OECD members, post-communist countries, etc. for further investigation.

If after running planned regression analysis on the 1995-2005 WVS Russia sample the evidence is found that public opinion tends to prioritize economic freedom over political and civil liberties, additional cross-country or cross-cultural (e.g. between groups that demonstrate high and low levels of subjective freedom) analysis might be planned.

### **Literature to read:**

Bauman, Zygmunt. 1988. *Freedom*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2007. *Consuming Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Berlin, Isaiah. 1969. *Four Essays on Liberty*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Davis, Mark. 2008. *Freedom and Consumerism: Critique of Zygmunt Bauman's Sociology*. Ashgate Publishing.

Levine, Donald N. 1981. Rationality and Freedom: Weber and Beyond, *Sociological Inquiry*, 51, 1, pp. 5-25.

Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Knopf.

Welzel, Christian and Inglehart, Ronald. 2005. 'Liberalism, Postmaterialism, and the Growth of Freedom'. *International Review of Sociology*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 81-108.

Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society*. Vols 1-2. Berkley: University of California Press.

### **Statistical techniques to learn or improve:**

Ordered probit regression seems a good complementary tool for OLS regression analysis in this study. I could benefit from taking a course on this one.