

Final Report: Junior Research Stay at Saint Petersburg State University

You Kyung Byun

Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Freie Universität Berlin

Economic Sustainability in Transition Economies

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In October 2018 I was given a unique opportunity to spend a month in Saint Petersburg State University (SPbU). My goal of the stay in SPbU was to investigate economic sustainability as well as to deepen my understanding in transition economies. As an economic anthropologist I believe economic sustainability is a precondition for sustainability in other fields. It provides a primary condition of individuals to sustain themselves in the society. Considering Russian economic transition since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the stay in SPbU was the most advantageous decision for my research interest. Having submitted my dissertation in informal economic practices of South Korea, this exchange also helped me greatly to widen my perspective of informal economies and to develop further research topics. One month is a relatively short term for an in-depth investigation of a society, but I believe it was enough time to grasp an overall impression. In the following report, I will describe my activities during the exchange and explain the main findings.

During my research stay, I was affiliated with the faculty of liberal arts and sciences (Smolny College) at SPbU. I was actively involved in the lectures and diversely interacted with the researchers and students of the university. For instance, I gave two lectures in the department of anthropology and Korean studies. The first lecture in the department of anthropology was hosted by Prof. Tatiana Shchepanskaya in the Smolny College on the October 2. 2018 (11 participants). This lecture was about gender issues in anthropology and my talk was about gender perspectives in Korean gift exchange practices and in doing fieldwork as a woman in a male dominated field. Students of this seminar were not familiar with informal economies in Asian countries, however showed great curiosity and interest in the lecture. The second lecture was held in the department of Korean studies on October 27. 2018 (14 participants). The lecture was in the seminar on Korean history taught by Prof. Sergei Kurbanov. My lecture was about the traditional practices of informal economy of Korea and its continuity in the current society. The opportunity to give

guest lectures helped me to gain experience in teaching and motivated me for pursuing an academic career. Beside these two lectures, I also participated as the main moderator in an organized discussion with students in the anthropological department on the October 26. 2018. This discussion was organized by Dr. Nikita Popov with 6 students of the same department. The main topic of this discussion was mostly related to my research interest, the informal economic practice in Russia, called *blat*. The participating students were in a higher semester of their master's degree in anthropology and actively debated about the main topic. For instance, we discussed how to define *blat* and how it is currently practiced. Students also gave suggestions on how to change the economic system in order to enhance sustainability in spite of informal exchange practices. Besides these formal events I conducted interviews with in total 9 individuals at the university including professors, teaching assistants, and students at least once. The interviewees include Prof. Danila Raskov, Prof. Alexei Novogilov, Dr. Andrey Kovsh, and Dr. Sergei Mokshev. I thank interviewees who were supportive in giving me information. Yuliya Rogozhina in the international research office also supported me for networking within the university. I believe that I fulfilled my role as an ambassador of the Free University in regard to the project of UAS, strengthened cooperation, as well as transferred my knowledge to the host university.

I identify everyday experience during my stay, such as housing, shopping, going out, and solving administrative tasks, also as an integral part of my research. Moreover, learning Russian, interacting with locals, and listening to their everyday life allowed me to better understand the current state of Russian society. The city was multicultural with relatively noticeable number of migrants and minorities. In particular I tried to grasp the economic life of individuals in St. Petersburg, such as how the city dwellers earn money, how they spend their income, what they are afraid of and concerned about in terms of economic shortage, and what their strategies are to overcome the difficulties. Since the collapse of Soviet Union, the country has undergone dramatic changes in social systems. However, the lack of coordination between the regulations and their realization was oftentimes mentioned as a main problem. Thus, a high number of interviewees insisted that a stronger rule of law implementation would improve their economic sustainability. In line with that, *blat* is currently more or less actively practiced. But some interviewees also argued the prevalence such an informal exchange system in other societies as well and stressed its positive dimension in reducing transaction cost. Based on my observation and interviews, it can be argued that the coordination of the system in each level is a decisive factor for sustainable economic development. And as each society is conditioned with different social and historical factors, we need to optimize such strategies to individual case. However, I cannot generalize my findings to other parts of Russia.

In sum, the exchange in SPbU through UAS was a valuable time for me to widen the perspectives in transition economy and to better understands the sustainable economic development. I wish to develop my insights into more precise research in the future.