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TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT AS A SUBJECT OF SOCIOLOGY IN RUSSIA

Neshitov Petr Yurevich
PhD, Associate Professor
Chirchik State Pedagogical University, Uzbekistan
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4484-9786

Abstract

Transport development in the contemporary world is subjected to the logic of technical progress and economical expediency. This causes several problems in different spheres of society. In order to amortize the negative by-results of transport development, there is the need for a social theory that would serve as a base for the elaboration of a complex system of criteria that bear the humanist direction of scientific and technical as well as economical thought. Scholars writing in Russian have had some achievements regarding the description and analysis of transport development related to a specific circumstance of selected territories, a concrete kind of vehicle, or a style of transport management. Meanwhile, they face difficulties using terminology and fail to rely on a hard theoretical basis. A review of publications on transport in Russian will identify the weak spots in terminological apparatus for the favor of its improvement. In addition, this may contribute to the international theory of transport.

Keywords: Transport, society, economy, policy, culture, sociology.

Introduction

Like any social phenomenon, transport evolves in accordance with the laws of social development. The effect of these laws determines the technical capabilities of vehicles, the shape of transport networks, and the intensity of transport communications. The level and direction of transport development depend on the economic, political, social and cultural state of society.

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In contemporary society, which is commonly called information society, transport plays a more prominent role than in agricultural or industrial society. The transport system is still a means of production and distribution, an instrument for the exercise of power, a condition for migration processes, a point of application of scientific, technical and artistic thought, however, the types and volumes of passenger and freight traffic have increased significantly compared to previous historical stages and continue to grow.

The main influence on the development of transport is the economy. Vehicles are on a par with such economic goods as food, clothing, housing, and with such types of capital as a factory, warehouse or store. At the same time, although the main incentives for expanding transport links are provided by the economy in its production and consumer dimensions, other spheres of society also generate a demand for the development of transport. For example, in some cases, the invention of new means of transport and the improvement of the road networks are driven by a political desire to strengthen control over home territory or preparation for outward expansion. In other cases, the restructuring of carriers is a consequence of increasing urbanization, and the construction of tourist routes corresponds to mass interest in historical and cultural heritage.

The development of the transport industry is associated with obvious achievements, but also problems in all spheres of social life. Traffic congestion leads to lost work time and increased economic costs. Due to spontaneous growth and disorderly regulation of transportation, the balance of civil rights and responsibilities that underlies a democratic society suffers. Oversaturation of cities with transport entails poisoning of air, water, soil, as well as noise, light, vibration pollution of the environment, and an increase in the number of diseases. Mass motorization and increased mobility of the population are causing the destruction of the culture of local communities, and the reconstruction of urban space promoting the needs of transport results in the fragmentation of architectural ensembles of historical significance.

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Scientific problem

Successful development of transport requires a sociological theory that would make it possible to plan the transport industry considering national, regional and global goals of social development, systematize already known difficulties, predict the emergence of new ones, and indicate ways to overcome them.

Transport industry researchers who are well acquainted with current agenda, actual engineering problems and solutions, economic, ethical, social, organizational, legal aspects of transport development, as a rule, do not bring their reflections to the stage of a mature theory built into the system of sociological knowledge. Specialists lack a stable and flexible system of concepts to describe, classify, and generalize facts of various kinds. Part of the reason for this is the authority of practitioners, entrepreneurs and officials, among whom there is a widespread belief that it is possible to understand the development of the transport industry only in empirical ways, by discovering some connections between transport and other phenomena of social life and solving problems as they arise. Partly, the responsibility for the state of transport theory lies with general sociology.

Method

For sociology, the concepts of social statics, which indicate the complete range and relationship of elements in the composition of a social system, and social dynamics, which describe the speed and direction of historical development, are of paramount importance. These concepts shape the context in which concrete statements on various social issues, including those related to transport, prove to be meaningful. Social statics and social dynamics together form the terminological apparatus that would underlie every rational investigation of transport, no matter whether it is a case description, statistics, or questionnaire, and outline rationally based transport policy.

This paper is an initial review of publications on the transport problem in Russian, making special accent on the notions of social statics.

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Results

Famous transport researcher G.A. Golts in his review of the doctorate thesis of S.A. Tarkhov on the problems of transport networks noted the role of "political, social, economic and cultural conditions" [1, p. 21], obviously related to the idea of four spheres of social life of the same name. In his original scientific research, he also uses other concepts, preferring, in particular, the analysis of the "socio-economic state", "socio-political situation", "socio-cultural state" [2, p. 28, 30], as well as "information, demographic, budgetary, agricultural and transport spheres" and "factors of an economic, social, demographic and political nature" [3, p. 152, 166].

Failure to apply concepts methodically makes them vague and leads to misunderstandings. An example of this is a statement, which is natural within the framework of "socio-economic" rhetoric. G.A. Golts argues that "gross domestic product (GDP) is an integral indicator that reflects the efficiency of the economy and society" [2, p. 25]. In fact, GDP, expressed in monetary terms, and not in statistics of birth rates or religious affiliation, is precisely an economic indicator, not social, not political, or cultural. However, if one interprets society as the totality of all spheres of social life with the economy as the determining basis, then it is acceptable to recognize GDP as the main indicator of a functioning of society. But this approach, like any other, imposes its own limitations on the construction of statements. Meanwhile, spontaneously inclined towards economic determinism, G.A. Goltz also believes that the idea that "culture is the primary basis of economy" is true [3, p. 152], which directly contradicts the proposition about the economic basis of social life.

Another prominent transport researcher S.A. Waxman faced similar conceptual difficulties. In his doctoral thesis, he notes the need to take into account in transport planning the influence of "restrictions of a socio-economic and technological nature", "economic, demographic, geographical, urban planning, transport and other factors", "economic, urban planning and environmental restrictions", channels of "social, information, economic, transport, engineering..." [4, p. 7, 8, 10, 12]. In numerous articles devoted to forecasting the development of the transport industry, he cites similar series of concepts that are

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not subject to a single construction principle, often incomplete, and constantly varying. The variability of the context causes the erosion of concepts. Feeling dissatisfied with this state of affairs, S.A. Waxman periodically returns to issues of terminology. In one of his later articles, he writes the following: "... once again the problem of creating a unified system of concepts and, as a consequence, mutual understanding among specialists arises..." [5, p. 29].

M.Y. Blinkin, scientific editor and author of the preface to the Russian translation of the influent book "Transportation for Livable Cities" of V. Vuchic, stands for the systematical approach in transport studies. Nevertheless, he actually exhibits the same tendency to make random enumerations instead of using a system of sociological concepts. Considering the complex urban idea, he identifies in it, in addition to transport, also "architectural, environmental, social, everyday, historical, cultural, recreational and many other aspects", moreover, he recognizes them all as "no less important" [6, p. 6].

In the historical observation, M.Y. Blinkin and A.N. Vorobjev trace the path to the adoption of certain technical terms in domestic transport science, such as the length of the road network, land area in roads, etc. These terms stay mere units of technical theory independent of higher social notions. The authors touch upon the problems of society only in passing, in connection with the current transport situation, suggesting that road reconstruction cannot be a solution for Moscow, since there will never be "enough territory, money or public consent" [7, p. 11, 14].

The historical research of motorization by S.R. Milyakin points out several factors impacting the process. Without specifically reflecting on a system of sociological notions, he argues that along with the level of income and geographical disposition, social factors as well as the supply of cars and government policy play a significant role [8, p. 151].

Y.P. Bocharov and his colleagues, studying road networks in different cities of Russia, in addition to issues of construction of transport corridors, pay attention to the coordination of local and transit development strategies, to the historical significance of urban spaces, and to the tourist attractiveness of cities with good pedestrian areas [9, p. 11, 12]. Moreover, their tasks include creating "a system

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of quantitative and qualitative criteria for assessing existing urban transport and communication corridors" [9, p. 3]. However, in the absence of a clear sociological theory, the creation of such a system is postponed.

In a sense, the approach that without any debate attributes transport matter to one sphere of society seems typical. So, A.S. Polyakov does his research as if transport belongs exclusively to economy. He views city roads as a means of "increasing the efficiency of using the economic potential" [10, p. 215], while the term "social-economic development" in his article actually has only a rhetoric meaning, because no social parameter has been introduced in the analysis.

The same conception of default economical nature of transport is present in the article of A.A. Chebotareva and E.I. Danilina. They uphold a new managing system of digital transformation of transport enterprise "with respect to the principles of the network economy" [11, p. 48]. Any other aspect of transport besides the economic one stays outside of this research.

According to M.E. Koryagin, mathematical models of urban transport systems "as a rule, take into account only one criterion for optimizing transport operation" [12, p. 8]. This, among other things, makes it difficult to understand how participants in the transport system (city, passengers, transport) influence each other. M.E. Koryagin also notes that there are difficulties in the integration of mathematical models of territorial and transport planning as both exploit too different instruments and indicators [13, p. 36].

The lack of certainty of sociological concepts is also prevalent in the voluminous work on transport planning by Y.V. Trofimenko and M.R. Yakimov. Here, the sociological background is blurred, as if it obeys the law of aerial perspective in conditions of high gas pollution. In one instance, the authors even follow V. Vuchik verbatim on the subject of urban transport: "It should not be suppressed; nor should it dominate the city's residential, cultural, social, industrial, and commercial activities" [14, p. 18]. Furthermore, they argue that city planning requires knowledge of "the traditions, geographical conditions of the development of a people, their culture and even religion" [14, p. 41]. They also note that cities "accumulate in themselves all the historical, cultural, religious, economic and other characteristics of a territory" [14, p. 54].

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Such unnecessary variation of sociological concepts relativizes the meaning of each of them and prevents one from considering the elements of reality corresponding to them as factors that have a certain weight, unchanged at least within one temporary state of the transport industry, and, accordingly, a calculable influence on the development of transport. As truly emphasized by Y.M. Kossoy, without a strict interpretation of the terms, "it is difficult to build a structural and terminological fundament for the classification of the basic concepts of the transport system... its objects, levels, qualitative characteristics and quantitative criteria" [15, p. 11].

Those who practice social philosophy, culture studies and neighbor disciplines on their part contribute to the transport theory. Thus, I.P. Berezovskaya and M.V. Ivanov show that "transportation systems ensured political, social, and economic consolidation of society" [16, p. 48] and then pay attention to the implications of transport in culture, which apparently roots in the theory of the four spheres of social life. Additionally, they discuss the "social hierarchy" and the "political, administrative, and economic hierarchy of society" in relation to transport [16, p, 49, 50]. In the earlier book, M.V. Ivanov investigated the cultural aspect of railway transport with the accent on psychological culture of passengers and conductors [17, p. 6]. The terminology of both texts overall appears empirically consistent. Yet, the absence of theoretical justification episodically leads to a disharmony in terms, for example, resulting in autonomization of the administrative from the political, which puts in question the exact number of spheres of social life seemingly already determined.

Much more loose terms figure in the philosophical essay on transport by E.Smotritsky. The terms derived from the four spheres of social life (economical, political, social, and cultural) spontaneously interact here with the notions of biological, ecological, or informational order [18]. Such uncontrolled growth of terminological apparatus appears to be a loss of knowledge than acquisition thereof.

As points of view on transport are multiple and various, there is a need to classify them. V.I. Kazakova describes the technical and philosophical approaches to the transport study in evolution and shows their advantages and disadvantages.

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Leaving the elements of social structure and particular indicators concerning transport indefinite [19, p. 47], she, however, advocates strong correlations between historical epochs (agrarian, industrial, post-industrial), ideological complexes, and generations of transport systems [19, p. 50].

Conclusion

Sociologists should come to the aid of engineers, architects, and economists who are capable of solving complex special problems, but admit inaccuracies in the field of the general theory of transport. To date, their participation has yielded modest results. Experts in technical problems of transport call for an interdisciplinary cooperation with representatives of social sciences, but this cooperation appears uncertain in the near future [14, p. 55].

In the absence of a specific conceptual context, discussions on the topic of transport are no more than plausible, and practical efforts to improve the transport industry, based on intuitively drawn up plans, take on a connotation of irresponsible experimentation at the expense of living and unborn generations. The job of sociologists is to show an example of consistent use of the conceptual apparatus. The first step on this path could be careful use in the analysis of transport problems of one of the already existing or independently formulated sociological theories, in which the concepts of social statics and social dynamics are clearly defined. Having brought the development of theory in the field of transport to its logical conclusion, as a second step, it would be possible to criticize the results obtained, identify bottlenecks in the conceptual apparatus and raise the question of its further perfection.

There is a rare example of the consistent application of sociological concepts in the study of transport in a lengthy report by the Moscow Higher School of Economics on the digital transformation of industries. Throughout the entire report, including the section “Transport and Logistics,” the authors of the report operate in terms of two spheres of social life, namely economic and social. However, the price for adherence to this conceptual apparatus turns out to be high: for the sake of the two-part scheme, education is classified as a social sphere [20, p. 34], policy is by default reduced to sectoral management, and culture is reduced

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to agricultural realities. Obviously, such a study can only be a first step towards creating a full-fledged sociology of transport.

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