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## A theoretico-methodological framework for post-Soviet historical science (from the 1990s to the early 21st century)

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### Abstract

The article aims to analyse the theoretico-methodological framework for post-Soviet historical science in the 1990s and at beginning of 21st century. The author of the article points out that this period saw significant qualitative shifts in renovating the theory and the methodology of history. However, along with positive aspects that include methodological pluralism, the development of new methods and approaches, there are excesses and problems that impede the development of historical science in the post-Soviet space. The article demonstrates that all methodological schools have the right to exist. There is a kernel of good sense in all of them, even in the subjectivist conception developed by the English historian and philosopher R.J. Collingwood, which questions the possibility of objective cognition of the past by means of historical science. The imposition of the "only correct" point of view by the West began in the last decade of the 20th century and is still felt in the development of modern historical thought. The author highlights the fact that only the combination of methodological pluralism and a tolerant attitude to different theoretico-methodological constructions should be viewed as the key to the full development of historical science.

### For citation

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### Keywords

Methodology of history, theoretico-methodological framework for historical science, post-Soviet space, methodological pluralism, civilisational approach, formational approach, Eurocentrism.

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## Introduction

The collapse of the USSR was one of the most important geopolitical events of the 20th century. It significantly influenced the further development not only of the countries of the post-Soviet space, but also of the world civilization as a whole, affecting various spheres of society's life, including the educational sphere.

In the system of social and humanitarian education, history has a special place, since it greatly contributes to the formation of the historical consciousness of people, the understanding of their place in the world, their belonging to this or that nation and civilization. At different stages of development, history has experienced ups and downs. There were changes in the theoretical and methodological basis of historical science. In the twentieth century, historians began to talk more and more about the possibility of applying different approaches and methods to the coverage and analysis of the history of mankind. It would not be an exaggeration to say that every scholar-historian was, to one degree or another, concerned with methodological problems. This refers to those researchers who categorically adhered to some single approach to analyzing the past.

### **Peculiarities of development of the theoretical and methodological basis of the post-Soviet historical science**

The problems of the development of the theoretical and methodological base of post-Soviet historical science attracted attention and were the subject of research of many specialists [Gurevich, 1993; Gurevich, Kharitonovich, 1998; Zashkrishnyak, 1996; Zashkrishnyak, 1999; Zashkrishnyak, 2004; Koval'chenko, 1995; Kolomiytsev, 2001; Kopusov, 2001; Kosmina, 2011; Medushevskaya, 2008; Mishechkin, 2008; Repin, 2012; Repin, Zvereva, Paramonova, 2016; Rumyantseva, 2002; Savel'eva, Poletaev, 2007; Sidortsov, 2010; Smekhovich, 2004; Smolenskii, 2008]. Various aspects of this problem are reflected in scientific monographs, textbooks and teaching aids, articles, reviews, critical remarks, etc. Most works show that during the indicated period there were significant changes in the theoretical and methodological basis of historical science on the post-Soviet space. At the same time, the researchers state that there were many problems, and some aspects were considered superficially, that led the situation to a dead end or resulted in a monistic understanding of the historical process. In addition, there was a problem of noncritical transfer of theoretical constructions, ideas and approaches of the Western European and North American historical science to the post-Soviet "historical soil".

Thus, the aim of this work is to analyze the state of the theoretical and methodological base of post-Soviet historical science in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, to note positive changes and to identify problems (some of them, unfortunately, are still unresolved). Particular attention is paid to specific examples of solving complex problems and issues in the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus.

Some attempts to cover the entire historical process, to build a theoretical foundation of the history of mankind in one way or another were undertaken in different epochs. In simplified form, they all boiled down to two basic approaches: history as a linear process and history as a cyclical development. According to most modern experts, the methodology of history as part of the methodology of general scientific knowledge began to form in the first half of the XIX century. The term methodology, on the one hand, means a set of methods of research that are used in a particular science; on the other hand, the methodology is a doctrine of methods of cognition of reality, and with the third it is seen as a set of the most common dialectical methods that act on the whole field of scientific knowledge and are specified through a general scientific and narrowly specialized methodology.

Until the late 1980s, most Soviet scientific historical works used "the most important methodological approach to the study of any historical phenomenon and process; this is the principle of Marxist historicism" [Sakharov, 1981, 181]. It was pointed out that 'the theoretical basis of all our studies is Marxism-Leninism and no mathematical and other methods can change or improve our theory of cognition of historical phenomena' [Ibid., 184]. So all the facts and events that did not meet the postulates of the party's "main course" were hushed up.

However, it was during the period of the so-called "perestroika" that the interest in history, especially the domestic one, had increased. On the wave of "general democratic rejoicing" more and more historians in the USSR consciously or unconsciously began to abandon the monistic understanding of the historical process. Visually everything looked like a transition to methodological pluralism in historical science. Nevertheless, along with those positive changes, new problems began to appear gradually in the historical science. Often the replacement of some ideological schemes and principles by others was latent, and later it became explicit. In scientific works of the 90s of the 20th century, a simple method was often used, in which the author used the expression: "The work was based on a civilizational approach based on universal values". At the same time, it was not explained what exactly was meant by "universal human values".

In the 90s of the 20th century, some monographs on the problems of the theoretical and methodological base of historical science appeared on the post-Soviet space. In the works of the Ukrainian historian L.A. Zashkilnyak, such as "Introduction to the methodology of history" and "Methodology of history from antiquity to the present" an attempt was made to reveal the main theoretical achievements of world historiography in the field of historical knowledge. The author claimed that the questions of the methodology of history took a prominent place in the process of renewal of Ukrainian historical science and education [Zashkishnyak, 1996; Zashkishnyak, 1999].

In the second part of the work "Methodological Aspects of the World Historiographic Process and Contemporary Ukrainian Historical Science" Zashkilnyak analyzed methodological research in the Ukrainian historical science of the 90s of the 20th century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some positive points were shown that contributed to the renewal of the theoretical and methodological basis of historical science in Ukraine: the use of new methods, the denial from the

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monistic view of history, the publication of monographs and collections of articles on methodology issues, etc. At the same time, the Ukrainian historian stated that, unfortunately, the questions of methodology have never been a strong point of Ukrainian historical science, and Ukrainian historians for the most part are not aware of the leading trends in world's theoretical and methodological thought [Zashkilnyak, 2004].

The Russian researcher V.F. Kolomiitsev in his "Methodology of History" highlighted the close relationship between the level of development of historical science and the state of its theoretical and methodological base. In this regard, he urged experts to pay more attention to the questions of theory and methodology of history, especially of an interdisciplinary nature [Kolomiitsev, 2001].

In 2003, the work of A.I. Mel'nik called "Higher school and the problem of the laws of history" was published. Drawing on the experience of the 1990s, the author opposed the linear misunderstanding of the development of mankind, disagreed with A. Toynbee's version of history, "who, with his civilizational theory, developed a draft version of modern globalism, or so-called synergetic methodology" [Mel'nik, 2003].

The rejection of the Marxist methodological approach to history in its simplified Soviet version aroused interest in the questions of the periodization of world history. Based on the analysis of the state of teaching and studying the history of the Middle Ages in the post-Soviet space in the last decade of the twentieth century, the researchers A. Ya. Gurevich and D.E. Kharitonovich concluded that the definition of the state-dynastic principle of periodization as a non-alternative has gradually passed away. It is necessary to take into account the social realities and cultural development of a particular spatial and territorial unit. In the opinion of these Russian specialists, the periodization is based, in each case, on one side of a historical process that is recognized as the most important in this era. In addition, the concept of Middle Ages is used mainly to refer to a certain period in the history of Europe [Gurevich, Kharitonovich, 1998].

The critical remarks of S.I. Zhuk's "One-Dimensional History" (1992) on the A. Ya. Gurevich's article "On the Crisis of Modern Historical Science" mentioned above are quite interesting. S.I. Zhuk appreciated the importance of A. Ya. Gurevich's work, but revealed its flaws and excesses: the absolutization of scientific achievements of the French historical school called "Annals"; the anthropocentrism as the starting point of historical analysis is more applicable to the history of Europe; the story-narration has the right to exist among other options for illuminating historical knowledge [Zhuk, 1992].

The solution of the topical and debatable questions of theory and the methodology of history is almost impossible without wide dialogue. Teachers of historical faculties of higher educational institutions of the post-Soviet space proclaimed the need to search for new approaches to understanding and highlighting historical events and events, and emphasized the expediency of holding scientific forums at which historians would exchange their experience, including questions of the theoretical and methodological basis of historical science. Similar discussions took place at many historical faculties. The problem was also in the fact that the majority of the scientific and peda-

gological staff was specialists trained on obsolete monistic views. The new generation was not yet completely oriented in the changes that affected education, science and society as a whole. Hence it is understandable why in the 90 years of the twentieth century, historians considered methodological issues as one of the most important problems.

The Marxist methodological approach gradually became one of the approaches to the analysis of history. It was not uncommon for the situation to use this approach as a non-alternative in the practice of the educational process, in educational literature, some part of which was published in the USSR and used to train students. This particularly refers to the history of the Ancient East, Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, the history of the southern and western Slavs, and special historical disciplines. The Marxist formational approach paid main attention to one aspect of historical existence, the socio-economic. In addition, it is more conducive to the analysis of the socio-economic history of Western civilization and almost does not apply to the history of the East, the Eastern Slavs, etc. The attempts to completely abandon the Marxist method shouldn't be called appropriate. From today's perspective, it is clear that, in certain issues and aspects, the difference between the Marxist and non-Marxist interpretations of history is not as large as previously thought. It is difficult, for example, to reveal the global and profound processes of civilizational development, while completely ignoring the Marxist concept of progressive development and changing of socio-economic formations.

The 90th years of the twentieth century became a period of approval of not only the political, but also the scientific pluralism. But it is possible to cite many facts when the higher historical education was oriented towards "instilling" a certain point of view for students; it considered the approaches as "right" and "wrong". In our opinion, all the approaches and concepts should not be divided into "right" and "wrong" ones. They are different and have a right to exist, regardless of how they are argued.

Understanding a sufficient conventionality of the interdisciplinary division (cultural anthropology, for example, largely coincides with ethnography), historians in the post-Soviet space used interdisciplinary approaches in their studies, thereby confirming the trend towards integration of science and practice. The empirical, conceptual, theoretical connections between disciplines (the accumulation of homogeneous facts in different disciplines, the emergence of qualitatively new connections between facts and concepts, the correlation of concepts, facts and regularities) contributed to the improvement of the quality of the teaching and educational process at historical faculties.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, along with the positive changes that enriched the higher historical education and science in the post-Soviet space, the negative tendency of artificial transfer to historical science and the formation of foreign concepts and terms became increasingly noticeable. Often there was a simple copying of them. In addition, a certain part of the concepts and interpretations in the history books became "Eurocentric". Since Western Europe (and later the US) had moved to the forefront of socio-economic development, it used to consider itself the center of world civilization.

Some experts emphasized that it is necessary to understand the terminology more clearly, to give a scientific interpretation of the specific historical meaning of such concepts as democracy, empire, independence, sovereignty, independence, statehood etc., which are often found in historical literature and, unfortunately, are often used in a different, sometimes even opposite meaning, and this does not contribute to the improvement of the theoretical and methodological basis of historical science.

Despite some considerable progress, the historical school of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus did not finally decide on such a broad historical and philosophical notion as civilization; an outstanding French historian, a representative of the Annals school, L. Febvre defined it as 'material and spiritual, intellectual and religious powers, which affect in a given period of time, in a given country, the consciousness of people' [Febr, 1991, 282]. Civilization is not always a "good" phenomenon. We can recall at least the seizure of America by the more technologically advanced civilization of the West, the colonization and genocide of the Indian population. The issues related to the analysis of the notion of "historical progress" remain unresolved. What should be taken as a basis: the development of the economy or culture? It is known that most modern historians tend to the following perspective: historical progress is determined primarily by the existence of conditions that contribute to the improvement of mankind.

Humanization of history was recognized as the core trend and strategic perspective of the development of mankind in the third millennium. Humanization in general terms is understood as a priority direction that requires the researcher to put the person with their life goals and qualities at the forefront when studying scientific problems. Humanitarization is a mechanism of humanization (through appeal to the spiritual sphere of humanity). The value of each individual is not in individual differences, heredity, environmental conditions, but in the uniqueness of life goals and meanings that are realized by every person. In this connection, a particularly important task is the personification of history, a return to the cultural fund of forgotten names.

It was during this period that valuable collections of documents on events and phenomena, concealed or tendentiously illuminated during the Soviet period (dispossession in the USSR, the famine of 1932-1933, the first days of the Great Patriotic War, etc.) were published on the pages of periodicals. Accordingly, there arose new problems, themes, and plots.

The process of building national states in the former Soviet republics influenced the nationalist ideology of many historical works, sometimes by the authors who were quite far from science. The investigation of events occurred without a theoretical interpretation of their causes and essence, there was no internal logic of the development of the historical event from its origin to completion, its place and significance in regional and world history were not determined. Let us analyze, for example, certain aspects of such a large and complex problem as the history of Kievan Rus. This layer of historical knowledge is equally important for the three East Slavic peoples. Despite the existence of a huge body of specialized literature created by more than one generation of historians, the Old Russian problems continue to attract the attention of medieval historians, not only in the post-Soviet space.

A notable event was the appearance on the post-Soviet historiographic space of specialized periodicals, the magazine "Mediaevalia: mentality and the history of ideas" founded by A.P. Tolochko and N.M. Yakovenko in 1992, and a collection of articles "Medieval Russia", which since 1996 was published in Moscow under the editorship of AA. Gorskii.

The Ukrainian historian V.M. Rychka in his work called "Kievan Rus: Problems, Search, Interpretations" attempted to understand the complex issues of the history of Rus, paying attention to the contradictions that accumulated in historical science. The quite widespread in the scientific and educational literature of Ukraine thought of the Galicia-Volyn principality as a single heir to Kievan Rus causes difficulties for studying this period. Such views, in our opinion, significantly limit and impoverish the content of the history of the medieval state, thus not calling it the heirs of Kiev and Chernihiv. Galicia-Volyn association was an important, but not the only source of Old Russian statehood in Southern Russia. His powerful rival, the Chernigov principality, fought against the Galician-Volhynian, Vladimir-Suzdal and Smolensk princes. The role of Kiev, too, should not be reduced to the role of "boundary town", given its importance for Russia as a cultural and sacred center. V.M. Rychka believes that we should abandon the attempt to date the creation of the ancient Russian state precisely (it is commonly believed that it appeared in 882). It is necessary to take into account the fact that the processes of statehood formation in the north and south of the East-Slavic world passed asynchronously and unevenly, the northern and southern proto-state associations differed in the level of socioeconomic, political and cultural development. V.M. Rychka believes that the beginning of the existence of Russia as a state should be considered the rule of Princess Olga, as the collection of tribute became clearer, the terms and places were determined, and the regulation of taxes was carried out. All this indicated that a decisive step was taken in the nationalization of tribal principalities. Disputable in historiography remains the position of the early feudal Kiev state: some researchers believe that it was relatively unified in its character, while others believe (and not without reason) that the relationship between the princes had more a character of inter-city ties, and not feudal, since they all belonged to the same Rurikovich dynasty [Rychka, 2001, 3].

The study of national histories in independent post-Soviet countries is another topic for discussion. We think that national history would be more interesting and richer, if it is not viewed in isolation, but in interrelation with the processes that occurred in world history. So we point out the need to use synthesized courses on history in higher education, that is, the history of today's content has every reason to be taught as a rational combination of factual and interpretational, problematic and regional, civilizational and formational approaches. For example, when the issues of the Ukrainian national liberation movement are considered in the mid-17th century, a young historian does not adequately reflect what exactly happened in Western Europe, what historical processes took place in America. When considering the actual material on the history of the Ukrainian national liberation movement of the middle of the XVII century only, the perception is one-sided. Synchronous teaching of national and world history should contribute to a holistic view of the world historical process.

Let us dwell on the concept of the liberation struggle of the Ukrainian people of the mid-17th century, which was developed in the 1990s by Ukrainian historians V.A. Smolii and V.S. Stepankov. In accordance with it, the main content of events was determined by the solution of the following major tasks: the creation of an independent conciliar state in the ethnic boundaries of Ukraine and the establishment of a new social and economic system with a small (farmer-type) Cossack property on land. According to the authors of the concept, the tasks set indicate that these events can be identified as a national revolution. The authors are convinced that it was at this time in the history of Ukrainian socio-historical thought that the main principles of the national idea were formulated: the right of the Ukrainian people to create their own state; the unity of Ukrainian statehood; genetic connection with the Russian state (Rus) [Smolii, Stepankov, 1998, 24].

V.A. Smolii and V.S. Stepankov highlight the parallel use of the various names of these events: "Cossack uprising", "Russian rebelia", "Slavish uprising", "Great Ukrainian uprising", "National uprising", "civil war", "the great war of 1648-1654", "Liberation War", "National liberation war", "bourgeois revolution", "Cossack revolution", "Ukrainian revolution", "National revolution", "People's revolution", etc. (the authors counted 21 name). Ukrainian specialists proposed and justified the new chronological framework of the liberation struggle, 1648-1676.

The process of objective description of these events was hampered and complicated by another aspect: the historical significance of the Pereyaslav Rada of 8 (18) January 1654 for the Ukrainian people. In the past there were many points of view on this occasion, some of them of polar difference. In our opinion, the attitude to the Pereyaslav Rada should be formed in the process of studying the sources and historiography of the issue. Two main points should be emphasized: the Pereyaslav Rada of 1654 was an important and determining phenomenon, and in those historical conditions it was one of the best ways to protect the state; we should not be tendentious, but study this phenomenon objectively, reasonably and from the standpoint of historical analysis, relying on existing sources and the consequences of these events.

We emphasize that the concept of V.A. Smolii and V.S. Stepankov cannot be considered completely non-alternative (which corresponds to the criterion of unscientific), but, according to modern Ukrainian historians, it was a step forward in solving many complex issues related to the events of the mid-17th century.

After gaining independence, Belarus and Ukraine strived to create a concept and periodization of the newest history of the Eastern Slavic republics. According to Ukrainian experts F.G. Turchenko and S.V. Kulchitskii, the core principle on which periodization of the history of the people in the newest period should be built, is the idea of statehood, which gradually migrated into the mainstream of organized political struggle. Some researchers, A.G. Slyusarenko and G.P. Savchenko in particular, suggest that the starting point of the newest period of Russian history is not 1917, but the beginning of the twentieth century. The beginning of the century is also the time of the rise



of Bolshevism (1903). In this sense, "would it not be sensible to count not from the moment the Bolsheviks came to power, but from the moment when they started to prepare and organize their triumph" [Slyusarenko, Savchenko, 1993, 58-59].

The accumulated experience of Belarusian historians has stimulated the formulation and solution of such a task as the creation of an alternative history of Belarus of the 20th century, based on an anthropological approach and synergetic effects. A new periodization of the recent history of Belarus was developed [Sidortsov, 2010, 42].

In the "Methodology of History" of the Belarusian historian V.N. Sidortsov the need to increase the theoretical and methodological level of historical knowledge (and research and teaching) was explained by the unstable state of historical science. At the same time, it was shown that more attention should be paid to the characterization of the methods of historical research [Ibid, 3]. V.N. Sidortsov analyzed new directions of historical knowledge, which took place in post-Soviet historical science in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. These areas include historical informatics, the history of everyday life, psychohistory, oral history, gender history, demographic history, etc. The author emphasized that the French school "Annals" brought out the history from the crisis in the twentieth century. It seems to us that the social and historical thought of representatives of the school "Annals" to some extent took the same position in the historical science of France as the Marxist formational approach did in the USSR. But the methodology of "Annals" has alternatives.

Stressing the importance of research and study of national histories, specialists stated need to determine the place and role of countries in the world community. In the article of the Ukrainian historian V.A. Potul'nitskii called "Ukrainian and World Historical Science: Reflections at the Turn of the Century" it was directly pointed out that Ukrainian historical science did not yet have its own scientific research version of the history of Ukraine in its national-state dimension, which would be synchronized with the world history. In his opinion, there are Russian, Polish, Jewish and other versions of the history of Ukraine, which are isolated from world history and, in addition, sometimes contradict each other [Potul'nitskii, 2000].

## **Conclusion**

Thus, the period of the 90s of the XX century and the beginning of the 21st century became a time of qualitative changes in the development of the theoretical and methodological basis of the post-Soviet historical science. In the past, there remained methodological monism and lack of alternatives in the coverage of historical phenomena and processes. More and more new methods and approaches now were used, relying on the achievements of world historiography. At the same time, new problems and excesses appeared: Eurocentrism, methodological uncertainty, blind copying of Western theoretical constructions; in some cases, the dominance of new ideological clichés, and so on.

In our opinion, every methodological school has the right to exist. There is a rational grain is even in the subjectivist conception of the English historian Collingwood, who questions the possibility of objective knowledge of the past by means of historical science. The Western proclaiming of its "uniquely correct" point of view began in the last decade of the 20th century and it can be still felt in the development of modern historical thought. Only methodological pluralism and tolerant attitude towards various theoretical and methodological constructions can guarantee the full development of historical science.

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## **Теоретико-методологическая база постсоветской исторической науки (90-е гг. XX – нач. XXI вв.)**

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### **Аннотация**

В статье анализируется теоретико-методологическая база постсоветской исторической науки в 90-е годы XX – начале XXI века. Утверждается, что в указанный период произошли значительные качественные сдвиги в обновлении теории и методологии истории. Однако вместе с позитивными моментами появились перегибы и проблемы, которые затрудняют развитие исторической науки на постсоветском пространстве. В работе показано, что каждая методологическая школа имеет право на существование. Рациональное зерно есть даже в субъективистской концепции английского историка и философа Р.Дж. Коллингвуда, согласно которой возможность объективного познания прошлого средствами исторической науки ставится под сомнение. Навязывание Западом своей «единственно правильной» точки зрения началось в последнее десятилетие XX века и до сих пор ощущается в развитии современной исторической мысли. Только методологический плюрализм и толерантное отношение к различным теоретико-методологическим конструкциям являются залогом полноценного развития исторической науки.

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**Ключевые слова**

Методология истории, теоретико-методологическая база исторической науки, постсоветское пространство, методологический плюрализм, цивилизационный подход, формационный подход, европоцентризм.

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