

## Social science education in Russia: Between civic responsibility and the reality of life

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- The report identifies the main contradictions in teaching social science in modern Russia in the context of the implementation of the idea of civic education and the formation of civic responsibility.
- The results of the comparative analysis of the basic federal documents of social science education, textbooks, sociological surveys and supporting materials for the examination in social science are described.
- It is shown that despite the declared ambitious goals of creating civic responsibility, critical consciousness and practical competencies, the course of social science continues to remain abstract and does not fully correspond to the social realities in Russia and the world.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this report is to show how the problems of teaching social science in Russia are related to the problems of reconciling the goals of social science with the practice of real teaching this subject in a modern Russian school.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The report was prepared on the basis of the comparative analysis of the basic documents of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation that define the goals and objectives of teaching social studies, two basic lines of social science textbooks, exam materials, as well as secondary sources presented.

**Findings:** Modern social science in the Russian school continues to be a theoretical discipline, extremely weakly connected with practical skills. The federal educational standard continues to be a fairly abstract document. The two popular series of social science textbooks are not focused on the formation of a real civic position of the student and his involvement in the practice of social life. Their goal is to teach a terminological apparatus to the student, part of which reproduces the language of the Soviet era. The main goal of the Unified State Exam in social science is to test the level of theoretical knowledge that is loosely related to the goals of school civic education and real life in Russia.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

As in other countries (Acikalin, 2011; Kosińska, 2019; Bombardelli & Codato, 2017) social science [обществознание] in Russia is an interdisciplinary course designed to give school students knowledge in the fields of sociology, political science, law, economics and philosophy. This course first appeared in the Soviet Union in 1925 and was called "Social Science" [обществоведение]. The basis of social science was the study of modernity, where history should be an illustration of modernity. From the first days of its appearance at school, the course of social science was to perform an ideological function. That is why from the 1930s until 1963 the course had different names ("Constitution of the USSR", "Fundamentals of Political Knowledge"). However, the new course in "social science" that appeared in 1963 was primarily aimed at educating "conscious and active builders of communism", at developing a "high ideology, a clear class position", and "cultivating intransigence towards bourgeois morality and ideology" (Дружкова, 1983). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the course was canceled and revived only in 2000 in the form of the interdisciplinary subject "Social Science", neutral to the changes in the political situation inside and outside the country.

The course of social science in a modern Russian school begins at the middle level (5th grade) and continues until graduation in 11th grade. From the 5th to the 7th grade students get acquainted with the main institutions of the society in which they are already involved, for example, the institution of the family. Further, the task becomes more complicated and the student is introduced to the fact that society is a system that includes subsystems, spheres of society. The attention of schoolchildren switches to the social, economic, political, spiritual spheres. The issues of morality and law as the main regulators of human behaviour in these areas are considered separately. In high school, in grades 10 and 11, the task of teaching social studies changes slightly. The focus of the teaching is the human being himself. Students discuss such topics as people in the system of economic relations, people in the system of political institutions, social statuses and roles. More attention is paid to legal issues of labour regulation, family life, political, environmental rights and obligations. Thus, the content and nature of the tasks are associated not only with increasing complexity, with new sections, but also with a complex cyclical return at different stages of education to the same issues.

The school course of social science is aimed at professionally orienting a young person. In the teaching of social science in Russia, its worldview is very important. In this matter, the influence of the Soviet traditions continues to be very noticeable. Here we can see one of the key problems inherited by Russian social science from the Soviet era. As in Soviet times, the general principles of teaching social science are extremely overpriced, ambitious and do not fully correspond to the surrounding reality. So, E. Bryzgalina writes that one of the key problems of modern social science is "the contradiction between the requirements of formal educational institutions and informal socialization agents and other institutions" (Брызгалина, 2012, p. 20).

Another equally important problem is the eclectic nature of social science, uniting various fields of knowledge: philosophy, psychology, logic, political science, sociology, cultural sciences, law, economics. On the one hand, this eclecticism is quite understandable, since one of the most important goals of the social science course is to focus on interdisciplinarity, which makes it both unique and very difficult to perceive. On the other hand, eclecticism does not allow us to fully talk about the systematic nature of the knowledge gained. The experts note that "the subject, the most important tasks of which is the formation of civic positions, the spiritual and moral world of students, legal, financial and economic culture, currently does not cope with the solution of these problems" (Фомин-Нилов, 2016). It is no exaggeration to say that the eclecticism of the subject is also a consequence of the ambitious goals of the course, which, as in Soviet times, are oriented towards the formation of a "holistic system of views" on the surrounding reality (Дружкова, 1983; Федеральный, 2012; Концепция, 2018).

The third and most significant problem is the orientation of a significant number of students to pass the Unified State Exam (further - USE) in social science, which makes it possible to enter a wide range of professions at universities. However, the preparation for the exam is not included in the list of the competencies of school teachers and is parallel to the taught social science course. Having its own worldview orientation, the course of social science is leveled to the successfully passed exam.

The purpose of this report is to show how the above mentioned problems of Russian social science are related to the problems of reconciling the goals of social science with the practice of real teaching this subject in a modern Russian school. Our research focus will be on civic and citizenship education, and in particular on the problem of forming civic responsibility as one of the main goals of social science education in Russia.

In the process of preparing the report, we relied on basic official documents defining the educational process at the course of social science in Russia. We analyzed the federal state educational standard (further – standard) (Федеральный, 2012), the draft concept of teaching social science in the Russian Federation (Концепция, 2018), the documents of the Federal Institute for Pedagogical Research (Демоверсии, 2019) that determine the structure and content of control measurement materials for the USE in 2019.

Figure 1: The website of the Federal Institute for Pedagogical Research

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ФЕДЕРАЛЬНОЕ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЕ БЮДЖЕТНОЕ НАУЧНОЕ УЧРЕЖДЕНИЕ  
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ПЕРЕГОВОРНАЯ

2

Our report is also based on the analysis of the most common social science textbooks. The choice of textbooks was determined by the policies of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation [Министерство науки и образования Российской Федерации]. There is a federal list of textbooks recommended for teaching in Russian schools and teachers are required to choose textbooks from this list. The most common series is the textbooks edited by Bogolyubov L.N. In order to compare we used the series of the textbooks edited by Kravchenko A.I. and Pevtsova E.A. (second most common textbooks that gained teachers' recommendation).

Our report is based on the analysis of the data from sociological surveys on the attitude of schoolchildren to the USE, as well as on the results of the analysis of a number of secondary sources and expert opinions of leading Russian experts in the field of social studies.

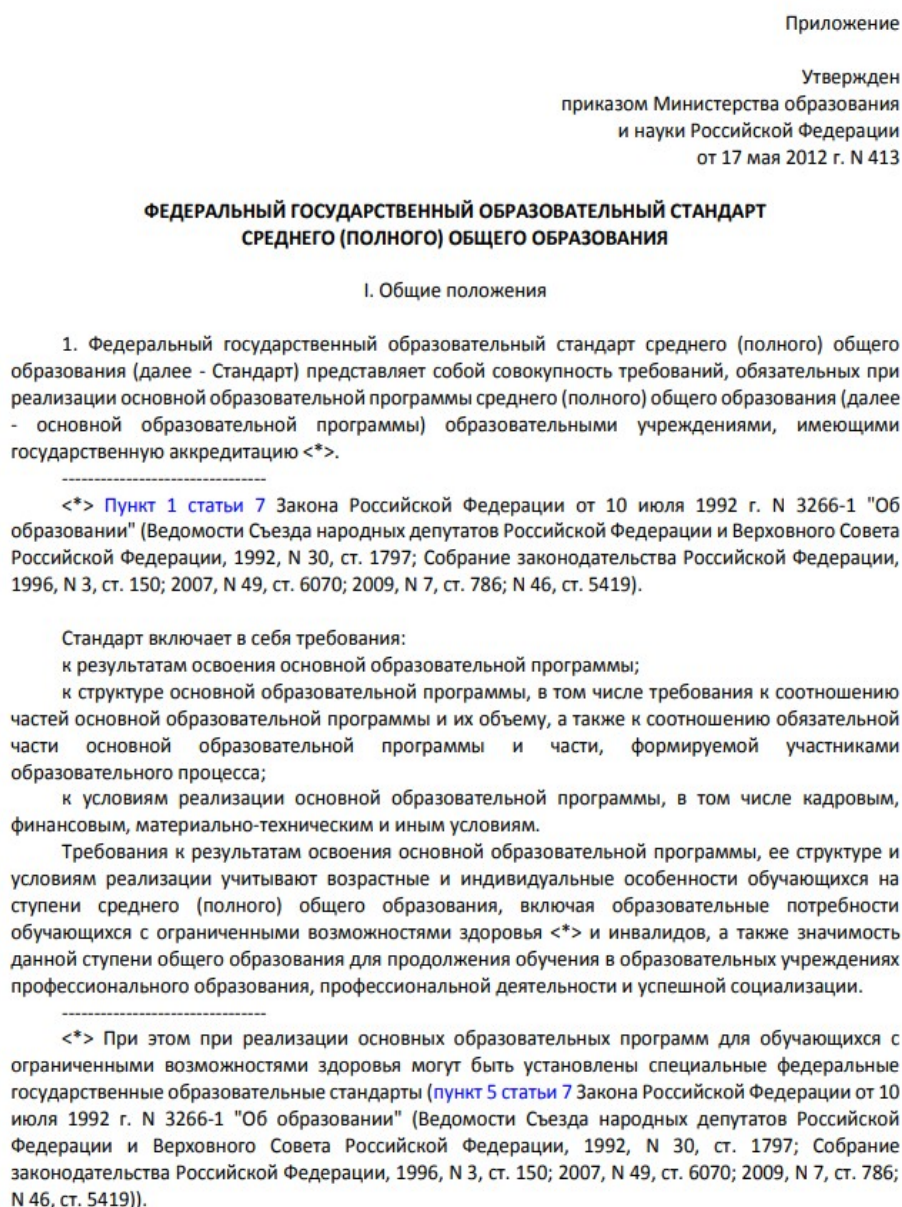
## **2 WHAT DOES THE STATE WANT? THE MAIN GOALS AND PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING SOCIAL SCIENCE IN RUSSIA**

The main expectations of the state regarding social science education in Russia are formulated in the federal state educational standard of secondary general education. It is the key document defining the goals and basic principles of teaching social science in a modern Russian school. The first basic goal of getting secondary general education for students highlighted in the standard is “the formation of the Russian civic identity of students” (Федеральный, 2012). It is the discourse of civic identity and responsibility that takes priority when listing the requirements of the state for the personal characteristics of a school graduate. It is understandable that the first two of the eleven requirements are the following characteristics: “loving his land and his homeland, respecting his people, his culture and spiritual traditions”, “aware of and accepting the traditional values of the family, Russian civil society, multinational Russian people, humanity, aware of his involvement in the fate of the Fatherland” (Федеральный, 2012). Among other requirements for the personal characteristics of a school graduate, there is also such: “self-conscious, socially active, respecting the law and order, aware of responsibility to the family, society, state, human” (Федеральный, 2012). We believe that the goals of teaching and educating the student that we have identified are not exclusive to Russia and can be found in similar official educational documents of other countries. However, they underlie all the other basic goals of secondary education in Russia.

The Russian standard of general secondary education establishes three groups of requirements for the results of the development of an educational program: personal, meta-subject and inter-subject requirements. It is personal requirements that play the key role, where the topic of civic education and civic responsibility takes priority positions. According to the developers of the standard, personal learning outcomes should reflect:

- “1) Russian civic identity, patriotism, respect for people, feelings of responsibility towards the homeland, pride in the land, the homeland, past and present of the multinational people of Russia, respect for state symbols (coat of arms, flag, anthem);
- 2) citizenship as an active and responsible member of Russian society, aware of their constitutional rights and obligations, respecting the law and order, self-esteem, consciously accepting traditional national and universal humanistic and democratic values;
- 3) readiness to serve the Fatherland, its defense;
- 4) the formation of a worldview corresponding to the modern level of development of science and public practice, based on a dialogue of cultures, as well as various forms of social consciousness, awareness of one's place in a multicultural world;
- 5) formation of the basics of self-development and self-education in accordance with universal values and ideals of civil society; readiness and ability for independent, creative and responsible activity;
- 6) tolerant consciousness and behaviour in a multicultural world, readiness and ability to conduct a dialogue with other people, achieve mutual understanding in it, find common goals and collaborate to achieve them;
- 7) moral consciousness and behaviour based on the assimilation of universal values;
- 8) a conscious choice of a future profession and the possibilities of implementing your own life plans; an attitude to professional activity as an opportunity to participate in solving personal, public, state, national problems” (Федеральный, 2012).

**Figure 2: The federal state educational standard of secondary general education (Федеральный, 2012)**



These eight out of fifteen personal requirements specify the general goals of civic education and reflect the basic principles of the formation of civic responsibility of a student of a Russian school. Further, according to the developers, these principles are concretized within the framework of the requirements of the standard for individual subjects. And here we see several disciplines that reveal the features of the formation of civic identity and civic responsibility. Each of the disciplines involves a basic and advanced level: Russian language and literature, native language and native literature, foreign language, economics, law, history, Russia in the world. Thus, the standard creates the prerequisites for differentiating a single course of social science into separate blocks. At the same time, if history, economics, law and languages assume a basic and an advanced level, then the separately highlighted subject "social science", like the subject "Russia in the world" [Россия в мире], has only a basic level. Moreover, while economic and legal issues look rather con-

cretized, the “social science” and “Russia in the world” blocks are written in a rather abstract language. The requirements for the basic level of social science rely solely on sociology to a greater extent:

- “1) the formation of knowledge about society as an integral developing system in the unity and interaction of its main spheres and institutions;
- 2) knowledge of the basic conceptual apparatus of the social sciences;
- 3) having skills to identify causal, functional, hierarchical and other relationships of social objects and processes;
- 4) the formation of ideas about the main trends and possible prospects for the development of the world community in the global world;
- 5) the formation of ideas about the methods of cognition of social phenomena and processes;
- 6) having skills to apply the acquired knowledge in everyday life, to predict the consequences of decisions;
- 7) the formation of skills for assessing social information, the ability to search for information in various types of sources for the reconstruction of missing links in order to explain and evaluate various phenomena and processes of social development” (Федеральный, 2012).

Detailed requirements for studying the political life of society, as well as questions of morality and moral consciousness aren't specified in any points of the blocks related to the topic of civil liability. It turns out that the student is expected to form a civic responsibility without reliance on political and moral consciousness.

The principles and requirements of the standard are specified in the FIPI documents, which directly show what students need to know to successfully pass the exam. The key value among them is played by the codifier (Демюверсии, 2019) of content elements and requirements for the level of training of graduates. On its basis the tasks for the exam in social science and textbooks for schools are being prepared. The codifier describes in sufficient detail the basic elements of sociological, political, economic, philosophical and legal knowledge necessary for a “mandatory minimum” when passing the exam. However, it focuses only on the successful passing of the exam within the limits of formal testing. The question of those ambitious goals that are stated in the standard remains unclear. In this regard, the mechanism of how the studied units of knowledge should contribute to the formation of the high life goals of the student remains unclear, too. In this case, this question is transferred to the social science textbooks used in the Russian school.

However, before we move on to the analysis of social science textbooks, it should be noted that the main difficulties in developing a social science course were associated not only with the rather ambitious goals set by the authors of the standard, but also with the transitional state of pedagogy and social sciences in Russia as a whole.

First, the developers of educational programs in new Russia declared the need to develop critical thinking and creativity (Кирилов & Кулагина, 1995), the development of which did not imply the goals of the Soviet school (Witt, 1961). The competency-based approach was declared basic in this regard. In contrast to the formation of knowledge, skills as the goal of the Soviet school, the competency-based approach in the modern Russian school is focused on the ability of students to solve problems in various fields of activity independently. It is also focused on the application of the received information, skills in further studies and everyday life. It is based on the assumption that the ability to acquire knowledge is more important than the knowledge itself. Therefore, it is necessary to teach the application of this knowledge in changing conditions (Ульянина, 2018).

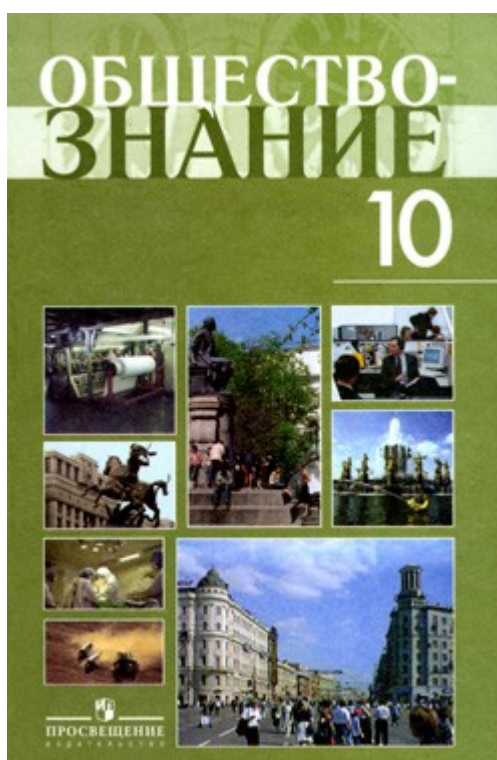
Second, in the early 2000s, there was practically no foundation to form the content of a new course for post-Soviet Russia on. In the Soviet school there were several disciplines designed to

adapt schoolchildren to the life in the Soviet society, which were studied in high school ("Foundations of the Soviet State and Law" [Основы советского государства и права], "Ethics and Psychology of Family Life" [Этика и психология семейной жизни]), but their content did not correspond to the realities of the new Russia. The country has changed too quickly for research intuitions to be effectively used to train the younger generation. In the 1990s, teachers noted difficulties in teaching social sciences due to constant internal political changes that could not be reflected in the content of textbooks (Красникова, 1998). The task was complicated by the fact that the authors themselves also finished the Marxist-Leninist school and were not able to fluently speak the languages of other social theories and modern teaching methods.

### 3 WHAT IS WRITTEN IN THE TEXTBOOKS? COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN TEXTBOOKS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

The above mentioned difficulties and the ambitious nature of the goals influenced the content of social science textbooks and the methodology used in them. In recent years, several modes of textbooks "Social Science" or "Human being and Society" [Человек и общество] have been created, first from grade 8, and since 2004 - for grades 5-11. Within the framework of the course "The World around us" [Мир вокруг нас] for the elementary school, propaedeutics of social disciplines (history and social science, along with the basics of the natural sciences) was also introduced. In 2008, the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Education adopted the concept of studying social science at school (Лазебникова & Иванова, 2018), the general principles of which (integrity, concentricity, continuity in terms of education levels) are preserved in modern textbooks. Subsequent updates to the concept concerned individual private issues and did not affect the methodological aspects of teaching the course.

**Figure 3: The textbook "Social Science" by L.N. Bogolyubov, A.Yu. Lasebnikova, N.M. Smirnova**



The first version of the textbook was prepared in a rather short time in the early 1990s under the title “Fundamentals of Modern Civilization” [Основы современной цивилизации] edited by L. N. Bogolyubov and A. Yu. Lazebnikova (authors - Bogolyubov L. N., Lazebnikova A. Yu., Ivanova L. F, Zhiltsova E.I., Sukholet I.N., Matveev A.I. et al.) (Боголюбов & Лазебникова, 1992). The editor and partly the collective of authors are still the main authors of the line of textbooks on social science. In 2007 the group of authors led by L.N. Bogolyubov launched a series of specialized textbooks that differ in the amount of material. Along with the textbooks of this group of authors, a textbook edited by A.I. Kravchenko and E.A. Pevtzova is also very popular. We will use these two series of textbooks of grades 5-11 recommended by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science for schools for comparison.

We used three main criteria for our comparative analysis. The first criterion was the language used to describe educational material in the textbooks. The second criterion was the basic definitions of a “citizen”, “state”. We compared only these two basic concepts due to the large volume of educational material and the features of our focus of research. The third criterion was a comparative analysis of some common problems of educational material.

The methodological apparatus of both series of textbooks, in addition to the text containing the necessary material, also includes questions and assignments on the topic, primary sources (texts), diagrams, tables (as explanations or assignments for schoolchildren), illustrations, and a dictionary. Some questions are marked as a “problem” or are problematic in content, however, most classes do not work with them due to the overloaded course and / or inertia of the methods of teaching social sciences. The main work is carried out with the content of the paragraph, the heuristic possibilities of additional materials are not taken into account.

Figure 4: The textbook “Social Science” edited by A.I. Kravchenko and E.A. Pevtzova





The most important thing to pay attention to when analyzing both series of textbooks is the language which they are written in. The results of our analysis did not allow us to identify any significant differences in the language of writing textbooks. In our opinion, this is due to two key factors. First, the inertia of linguistic practices that are characteristic of social sciences that use the language of dialectical materialism of the USSR remains quite strong. This is also manifested in keeping such terms as “class” (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, p. 105), “anger of the revolutionary crowd” (Кравченко & Певцова, 2011, p. 10), “forced concession of the upper classes” (Кравченко & Певцова, 2011, p. 44), “industrial relations” (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, p. 110), etc. Second, and this seems to us a more serious problem, even in Soviet sociology, the teachings of Talcott Parsons became widespread. The search for a methodological base after discrediting the theoretical and methodological foundation of dialectical materialism led to the actualization of the Parsons language because of the lack of an alternative strong paradigm. Of course, the large-scale and well-thought-out Parsons theory could not be used completely in constructing the content of textbooks, therefore, such structures as four spheres of society’s life appear in the text (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, p. 22), extremely rigid classifications of society as in the textbook edited by Bogolyubov (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2013, p. 9), and in the textbook edited by Kravchenko (Кравченко & Певцова, 2013, p. 11), the system structure of society (Боголюбов & Лазебникова & Смирнова, 2017, p. 100-101), numerous distinguishing functions of practically all studied phenomena and processes. For example, in the textbooks the functions of culture (Кравченко & Певцова, 2011, p. 167), taxes (Кравченко & Певцова, 2013, p. 76-77), which are presented in the form of schemes, and are subject to mandatory memorization, are highlighted in the same order. Despite the announced formation of critical thinking, the allocation, for example, of precisely these cultural functions (educational, cognitive, communicative, recreational, hedonistic) is not justified. The civilization approach, common in the first versions of textbooks, was gradually replaced by the sphere approach. However, within individual blocks (spheres), the linearity of the description can be maintained. It manifests itself both in the presence of an evolutionary approach to the human being and in the description of the sequence of the traditional, industrial or post-industrial stage of development of society. Since the further application of the large-scale and rather complex Parsons system in the framework of social science textbooks is difficult, the authors depart from this scheme or simplify it. The errors arising from an attempt to classify can be considered as a consequence of the lack of consistent systematicity. For example, the judiciary is considered by the authors to be “non-principal social institutions” (Боголюбов & Лазебникова & Смирнова, 2017, p. 100-101), although according to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the judiciary, along with the executive and legislative branches, belongs to the three branches of government and, in any case, is an obligatory part of the state.

The emergence of social science in the structure of the school curriculum is directly related to the post-Soviet transformation of the educational system in the 90s of the XX century, when a course that could give a holistic view of the basic social and human sciences was required. The content of social science that had taken shape at that moment wasn’t revised, which led to the fact that a significant part of social science topics was the discussion of the problems that were relevant in the early 90’s in the context of a hidden or open polemic with the communist legacy. For example, in the “Human being” block, a separate topic is kept on the correlation of the formational and civilizational approaches, and in the “Economics” block, despite the methodically important clarification regarding the impossibility of a specific economic system in its pure form, the advantages of a market economic system are separately emphasized in comparison with the command (planned) economy.

The second criterion for the comparative analysis of the two lines of textbooks was the basic definitions related to the topic of civil liability and identity. We have chosen the concepts of the

“state” and the “citizen” as the most fundamental. We tried to compare their interpretations in the two lines of the textbooks.

The development of the content of textbooks, teaching methods and techniques for the new course of “social science” in the 2000s took place on the sites of thematic journals for teachers. The international projects and Western experience have played a weak role in this work (Webber & Liikanen, 2001). The concepts, theories that traditionally comprise the content of teaching social disciplines (law, will, state, government, etc.) have a different history in Russia and the English-speaking world (Webber & Liikanen, 2001, p. 264) and denote quite different institutions and / or phenomena. For example, the idea that the state protects human rights will be completely differently understood by a Russian and a foreign student. However, in Russian textbooks there are quite a lot of texts of Western classics, as well as wording common in English discourse, but not corresponding to Russian realities, which causes difficulties for both schoolchildren and teachers. For example, the teaching of social sciences seems to be one of the ways to educate a citizen of the new post-Soviet Russia. The problem is the definition of the concept “citizen”. “Being a citizen means being responsible, burdened with the noble duties that are also enshrined in our Constitution, and citizenship means not only the political and legal status of a person, but also his moral behaviour in relation to his country” (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, p. 59). For the student, these definitions, not supported by examples or justifications, will remain phrases for which there is no content. In addition, the authors of the textbook contradict themselves, describing the citizen first through his rights and duties, and then generally declaring that “patriotism is love. And love is a lofty and deeply personal feeling ... And the main manifestation of love is selfless service” (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, p. 59). Thus, the concept “citizen” is immediately connected with the moral and legal sphere, which can cause difficulties for Russian students. The explanation of the attitude to the state through “selfless service” to the state contradicts the modern values of civil society, although it is fully consistent with Russian political culture.

The authors of the other authoritative line of the textbooks connects a citizen with “legal relations with the state” (Кравченко & Певцова, 2009, p. 106) or do not offer a definition at all. Citizenship is interpreted through the “mutual rights and duties of a person and the state” (Кравченко & Певцова, 2011, p. 50). The description of these rights and duties is mainly limited by suffrage. However, as in the previous line, special attention is paid to patriotism, “characteristic of most country residents” (Кравченко & Певцова, 2009, p. 106). The schoolchild should know that “the political sphere of society is a sphere of activity related to the conquest of society, the retention and use of state power” (Кравченко & Певцова, 2011, p. 4). The definition of a state is proposed through its functions (Боголюбов & Аверьянов & Городецкая, 2009, p. 233) or features (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, 231). Trusting the content of the textbooks, a modern Russian student begins to identify a centralized state with an empire and a power (Кравченко & Певцова, 2011, p. 23), which can become a source of serious geopolitical risks.

The third criterion for our comparative analysis was the identification of some common problems in both textbook lines. It was revealed that the authors of the textbooks do not take into account the geographical and socio-political characteristics of the country. The Russian Federation is a multinational state, where more than 190 peoples live, but the content of the textbooks does not reflect these features. The universal educational standards for all the territories suggest that schoolchildren from the national republics and regions with predominantly Russian population, villages and metropolitans study social science equally. As the reason for this decision, it is announced that the student can go to any school in Russia or prepare for the exam. It does not take into account that the majority of students remain in their regions throughout the course of their studies. After graduation, students enter universities or colleges in their own or in the neighboring region. However, the content of the textbooks does not give schoolchildren an adequate idea of their region. It is generally recognized that the

unification of education is aimed not only at caring for the future adaptation or success of schoolchildren, but, along with television, it is a social protection system, simplifying the management of the huge Russian population, that is, forming an “imaginary community” (Anderson, 2006). Some experts call the school, especially in Russia, the main body that conveys the dominant culture, which is institutionally verified and validated (Apple, 1990; DiMaggio, 1991).

Of course, one cannot require the content of the school textbooks to correspond to modern ideas about the development of such complex phenomena as the state and political regime. However, the unambiguity of the proposed formulations, the need, in accordance with methodological manuals, to memorize mechanically both definitions and other substantive points, contradicts the formation of critical thinking, which was declared as a goal in the federal standard. Moreover, sometimes the authors rely on rather complex distinctions without defining them. For example, “there are more than 100 ethnic groups in present-day Russia, including 30 nations” (Кравченко & Певцова, 2011, p. 20), but there aren’t any definitions or differences between these concepts in the textbook. If schoolchildren remember the definitions from the previous class, then they will face a contradiction, since in the 8th grade textbook the authors considered that the “distinct statehood” is a hallmark of the nation, in fact, identifying the nation and citizens of a country (Кравченко, 2011, p. 143). The authors of the other textbook define a crime as “an encroachment on the rule of law, a socially dangerous act stipulated by the Criminal Code” (Боголюбов & Лазебникова, 2013, p. 179), omitting that the person who commits these actions must be guilty, and does not act, for example, in the state of necessary self-defense or any other circumstances. This inattention and / or attempt to simplify the proposed concept may lead to incorrect judgments.

There are bad mistakes in the textbooks, for example, “Registration of marriage is carried out at the place of residence of one of the spouses” (Боголюбов & Лазебникова & Смирнова, 2017, p. 312) (in fact, by the registry office), “The employee has no right to challenge working conditions ... And your favourite work can turn into a difficult test” (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Матвеева, 2013, p. 273), Belarus is a European country, but its citizens do not have the right to apply to the ECHR, although the authors’ team argues the opposite (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Матвеева, 2013, p. 326).

The analysis of the textbooks’ content shows that Russian students are introduced selectively to globalization trends and the possibilities of intercultural dialogue. Despite the fact that Russia, like many other countries, has faced migration challenges and problems of the global information space, this information is practically absent in textbooks. If “social science” is the knowledge about society, then a Russian school student gets acquainted only with Russian society. A student can only learn about the existence of other countries only through the quotations of the authors with the foreign surnames and historical calculations (moreover, mainly from the regions outside the Russian Federation, examples are taken, mainly from Ancient Greece and the Ancient World). The global world in the textbooks is represented only by the “global problems of our time”: environmental degradation, the gap between the “rich North” and the “poor South” (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, p. 32). The textbooks lack such topics as gender issues, the problem of poverty, climate change, migration, etc., that are natural for Western teaching of social sciences. For example, the acquaintance of modern Russian schoolchildren with gender roles suggests a description of the social conditionality of the gender (which corresponds to scientific ideas), but as an example, schoolchildren should remember that “a man and a woman usually do different housework. Women take care of children, clean the house, cook, wash, etc. Men repair cars, household appliances, in the countryside they work in the yard” (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, p. 120). Further the importance of maintaining gender roles in the professional sphere is described, although it is noted that “a change in gender role settings is typical for modern postindustrial society (Russia refers to the industrial type by the authors of the textbooks)” (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, p. 121). Or, in the other line,

“traditionally, a man is the head of the family, father, breadwinner and protector. A woman is a mother, a housewife, an employee” (Кравченко, 2012, p. 93), “the main role of a woman is the birth and upbringing of children and constant care for them” (Кравченко, 2012, p. 94).

The question of the need for regular updating of the textbooks' content was raised by teachers and methodologists (Шаяхметова, 2015, p. 53-59), however, judging by the latest versions of textbooks, it has not yet been resolved. The psychology block repeats the conclusions of Soviet historians (an activity approach, choosing a profession as an answer to the question “who am I?”) or sociologists (socialization agents, classes, etc.), and the economy is generally represented mainly by the ideas of mercantilists. Thus, the textbooks do not fulfill their main function – the acquaintance of students with the basics of social sciences.

The content of the textbooks describes some alternative reality, where a citizen has the right to “practice any religion or not practice any”, and the benefits are distributed fairly (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, p. 157) (no definition of justice is supposed), and the president “is the guarantor of the citizens' rights of the Constitution and is responsible for the economic well-being of the people” (Кравченко & Певцова, 2011, p. 35). The examples of the state functions that are provided in the textbooks relate to history, and not to the present (Кравченко & Певцова, 2011, p. 16-18, 22). A student at social science lessons does not learn more about the environment, but turns out to be in a world similar to folk tales, where there is a strict dichotomous division into the subjective and objective, material and spiritual, there are internal and external cultures (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, p. 49), morality is kind and evil (Боголюбов & Городецкая & Иванова, 2014, p. 57), and the laws of social development also work without fail, like criminal law in particular cases of average Russians, and there is only one correct answer to those questions that social sciences face.

When finishing school, the student must learn the functions of culture or know the forms of the state, but will not be able to prepare a statement of claim in court or fill out a tax return. Although, we must note that in the latest editions there are such paragraphs as consumer rights (Кравченко & Певцова, 2011), labor rights (Кравченко & Певцова, 2011, p. 107-109), some information about administrative and criminal liability but again without any useful practical tasks (preparation of an application, analysis of situations, etc.). That is, know a terminological apparatus (as we noted above – very outdated), but are not able to use it. Moreover, while in grades 5–7, the authors offer many examples, on their basis schoolchildren should come to certain conclusions, in high school the student is given a non-alternative scheme that must be memorized.

Thus, the results of our comparative analysis indicate that, despite the fact that schoolchildren have a choice between the two most popular textbook lines recommended by the Ministry of Education, both of them demonstrate a fairly typical and uncritical view of social processes and relations, preserving the language and terminology of the Soviet era. However, the key problem of the textbooks continues to be their orientation toward an abstract description of a certain ideal society, which contradicts the realities of modern Russian life. The more interesting fact is that the textbooks can fulfill the function of preparing for the exam only to a certain extent. The vast majority of graduates are forced to prepare for the exam on their own or with the help of tutors. This is surprising, since the employees of the same laboratory, who wrote the first mass social science textbook, actively participated in the development of the first control and measuring materials.

#### **4 WHAT DO STUDENTS WANT? THE UNIFIED STATE EXAM IN SOCIAL SCIENCE**

The title of this paragraph may seem rather controversial, primarily because the initiator of the introduction of the Unified State Examination (USE) was the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, and not public organizations, students and their parents. The debate

around the exam has not yet subsided, although it is worth noting that changing the system of final certification still solves a number of the most pressing problems for students. From the state's point of view, the introduction of the unified assessment system fulfilled several main goals:

1. Unification of the assessment system in various Russian regions;
2. Determination of the minimum set of knowledge that allows one to judge the students' mastering of the school curriculum.
3. Reducing corruption in entrance exams to higher education institutions.

At the same time, in addition to the declared goals, one can see indirect tasks, the solution of which should have been facilitated by the USE. The legacy of liberalization in education in the 90s of the XX century was a sharp jump in the number of students in higher education, especially in the humanities - economics and law. At the same time, there was no correlation between the increase in the number of students in these professions and labor market requirements. In other words, the Russian economy in the early 2000s didn't require such a number of lawyers and economists. Therefore, the USE, which establishes certain requirements not only for graduation, but also for the possibility of entering higher educational institutions, had to perform a certain corrective function. It consisted of reducing the number of potential applicants and redirecting school graduates to colleges that provide working professions.

**Figure 5: Schoolchildren in Kaluga pass the exam in social studies (Regnum, 2017)**



It is significant that the introduction of the subject "Social science" and the first test of the unified exam for school graduates took place at the same time. Already on February 16, 2001, the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation "The organization of the experiment to introduce the unified state exam" was signed, after which trial tests in several subjects were organized in several regions (Chuvashia, Mari El, Yakutia, Samara Region, Rostov Region). The number of these subjects included social science (Мишуква, 2001)

In subsequent years, the number of regions joining the USE steadily increased - in 2002 there were already 16, in 2003 - 47, and in 2004 - 65. The list of subjects that were part of the USE was determined until 2008 by each region independently. The final stage of the USE

implementation was 2009, when this form of final certification became mandatory for all Russian students. Even Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov, that occupies a special place in the educational system of the Russian Federation, was forced to take into account the results of the exam on admission. However, unlike other universities, it received the right to conduct its own separate entrance test.

Over the past ten years, the exam has become a familiar element of school education, which, however, did not lead to a decrease in disputes around it. The most significant drawback, from the teachers' point of view, is a decrease in the ability of pupils to non-standard and creative arguments, a decrease in personality in the educational process, since common tasks set certain response parameters that must be met in order to score the required points. From the parents' point of view, the key negative effect of this methodology is an increase in the psychological burden on high school students, for whom passing the USE becomes almost the only chance for higher education and building a successful career. Although modern rules provide the possibility of a graduate to retake the exam every year, or use the existing results for re-admission next year. From the point of view of the school system itself, the key drawback is the gap between the normal learning of school subjects and the need to thoroughly (with the help of tutors and educational courses) learn the disciplines which the students will have to take the exam in.

The most paradoxical thing is that for the students the introduction of the USE, despite the psychological and social difficulties associated with it, led to certain positive consequences. First, the ability of school graduates to apply immediately to several universities has increased dramatically. Second, the corruption component for admission to prestigious universities and prestigious departments has decreased, since the ability to influence the results of admission in the selection committees of higher educational institutions has practically disappeared. Third, the horizontal mobility of school graduates has increased dramatically, many of whom have been given the opportunity to enter the capital's educational institutions.

From the point of view of sociology, the attitude of Russians towards the USE remains mostly negative - only 32% of respondents in 2018 said they had a positive opinion of it (Attitude of Russians to the Unified State Exam, 2018). Although, in relation to the age distribution of responses, very indicative trends are reflected in Table 1.

**Table 1: The attitude of Russians towards the USE**

What's your attitude to the USE?	Definitely positive	Rather positive	Rather negative	Definitely negative
Younger than 18	11%	39%	35%	15%
18-30 y.o.	9%	30%	42%	19%
31-45 y.o.	5%	23%	44%	28%
46-55 y.o.	3%	20%	43%	34%
Older than 56	5%	23%	36%	36%

Source: Отношение россиян к ЕГЭ, 2018.

We can see that the dynamics of attitudes towards the exam is directly related to the age of the respondents. In older age groups, more than 70% of respondents have a negative attitude towards it. In the age group from 18 to 30 years, the number of opponents is reduced to 61%, and among students it does not exceed 50%.

Nevertheless, the preservation of such a critical attitude forces the representatives of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, as well as the *Federal Education and Science Supervisory Service* (FESSS), to periodically come up with the initiatives to change individual components of the USE without abandoning the practice of conducting it. In 2014, the former Minister Dmitry Livanov suggested thinking about the complete replacement of the test part in

humanities with creative tasks. This would avoid reproaches that the structure of the exam itself is focused exclusively on natural and technical sciences and not on humanities (Back in the USSR, 2014). In 2018, the head of FESSS Sergey Kravtsov proposed to transfer the exam in digital format to ensure that each graduate could receive a unique version of the test, which would be formed randomly, based on the common bank of tasks (Сергей Кравцов, 2018).

As you can see, these initiatives coming from the authorities concerned exclusively procedural aspects of the USE, and not its substantive side. Although, as far as social science is concerned, there are a large number of complaints.

As mentioned above, social science from the very beginning became a part of the disciplines in which the introduction of the USE was tested. Moreover, from the statistics (table 2), we can conclude that social science as a discipline of the USE remains stable throughout all the years of its conduct.

Except compulsory subjects (mathematics and the Russian language), social science is far ahead of all other school subjects. This popularity is due to the fact that social science is included in the list of the disciplines, the points of which are counted when entering most humanitarian specialties (economics, law, political science, philosophy, etc.). The great popularity of social science makes specialists in the field of pedagogy and philosophy of education pay attention to the mass incorrectness of the tasks used.

**Table 2: The number of students passing the exams**

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
The amount of students passing the exam (thousands)	446,4	444,2	280,3	455,9	482	422,2	371,2	382	318	368	315,2
Percentage of the total number of students passing the exams	44,2	53,1	58,9	60,9	55,9	61,6	51,2	48	45,2	53	42
The average score	57,7	56,4	57,1	55,5	59,5	55,4	58,6	53,1	55,4	55,7	54,9

Source: own research

Already in 2010, O. Andreeva and G. Tarasevich stated that the USE test in social science was read as a bad joke for both technical and ideological reasons. The technical shortcomings of the exam in social science are that many tasks allow different interpretations, none of which is sufficiently correct. For example, the question “What function of science illustrates the creation of artificial sugar substitutes for people suffering from various diseases?” suggests the following answers:

1. Explanatory
2. Predictive
3. Social
4. Production

As a senior researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, G. B. Gutner, “None of the above answers are appropriate. The social function of science is not formulated in terms of the creation of drugs, but in terms of changes in social life. But here not a word is said about this. All the other listed functions have nothing to do with it” (Андреева & Тарасевич, 2010).

A certain ideological bias is manifested to a greater extent in the questions of politics and economics. An interesting aspect is that the ideologization of these blocks is different. In the "Politics" block in the tasks of the Unified State Exam, one can clearly see the desire to get away from the topics of the authoritarian political regime (although it is presented in the educational literature). This leads to a clear contrast between the totalitarian (as uniquely negative) and the democratic (as uniquely positive). All intermediate options are leveled. At the same time, in the USE economic block, there are a lot of tasks that demonstrate commitment to a market economy, for example, the question of the main features of manufacturers' competition in a market economy suggests the following answers:

1. It leads to a decrease in labour productivity.
2. It balances supply and demand.
3. It enhances government intervention in the economy.
4. It stimulates an increase in production costs.

According to Boris Brodsky, a professor at the Higher School of Economics, "it is assumed, of course, that the student will choose the answer about "balancing supply and demand". It follows logically from the principles of neoclassical Western economic theory. But I would not say that this is an absolute thesis. To be honest, as a result of competition, demand does not always balance supply". (Андреева & Тарасевич, 2010)

Despite the fact that recently the role of multivariate tasks, as well as independent work with text and writing an essay, has increased in the test, the principles of organizing this test have remained the same. They test not the student's correspondence of his knowledge to the realities of modern economic, political or social life, but for the exact reproduction of those opinions that are given in the educational literature. A certain ideological discrepancy contributes to the formation of the personality of a modern school graduate who studied social studies as one of the school subjects or prepared to pass the Unified State Exam.

Despite the declared competency-based approach designed to ensure the transition from acquiring knowledge to acquiring skills, the transformation of the USE in social science demonstrates the incompleteness and limitations of such a methodology. Digitalization is aimed at individualizing verification procedures, but does not strengthen the practical orientation of the subject, which in its current form is aimed at developing skills in working with information, and not with primary social reality. In this sense, the gap between the skills acquired in the process of preparing for the USE and socially useful skills significantly widens.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the subject of social science appeared in Russia in 2000, disputes over the content of this subject have not subsided to this day. This is primarily due to the inclusion of such multidirectional blocks as economics, law, sociology, political science and philosophy.

The integrative nature of social science is considered by many researchers as the main advantage of this subject. The emergence of social science in the structure of the school curriculum is directly related to the post-Soviet transformation of the educational system in the 90s of the XX century, when a new course that gives a holistic view of the basic social and human sciences was required. The content of social science that had taken shape at that moment wasn't revised. It led to the fact that a significant part of social science topics was the discussion of the problems that were relevant in the early 90's in the context of a hidden or open polemic with the communist legacy.

This specific position of social science as a school subject causes some criticism. In particular, there are initiatives to replace the integrative course on public issues with practically oriented



courses in economics and law. Instead of learning the definitions from the textbook, students will be given practical skills in starting their own business, arranging subsidies, legal rules applicable to minors, etc. But in this case there are two significant problems. First, such a reorientation will make it difficult to test students' knowledge in the format of the Unified State Exam. Second, the school curriculum will lose an important course, focused on the formation of a certain worldview position, and possessing not only cognitive, but also educational value.

One can see the key contradiction of the subject "Social science" in it. Having appeared in the modern system of school education in Russia in 2000, it most of all, in comparison with other school subjects, reflected the internal cataclysms of Russian society. Having replaced the pluralistic tendencies in education, it reflected the state's need to form a unified system of values and ideas about the surrounding social world. At the same time, the content of this educational course turned out to be more focused on liberal ideas. In recent years, the request to preserve the educational component in the school system has not gone away, but there has been doubt about the ability of social science to be fully responsible for the implementation of this component.

On the one hand, social science has turned out to be much less ideological in the modern education system than history, which has been closely monitored by the state when introducing a new standard and creating a single line of textbooks. On the other hand, social science is turning into a purely theoretical discipline, focused on obtaining and reproducing a limited set of skills that are extremely weakly connected with practical skills. As our analysis showed, the sources of this are a feature of both the basic documents of Russian education themselves and the problems of educational literature, as well as the orientation of school students to pass the USE. Despite the fact that one of the basic goals of social science in Russia is the formation of an active civic position of the student and his civic responsibility, the federal educational standard continues to be a fairly abstract document. At the same time, the two most popular series of social science textbooks, corresponding to all the units of knowledge described in the standard, are not focused on the formation of a student's real civic position. They pursue the goal of teaching the student a terminological apparatus, part of which reproduces the language of the Soviet era, without learning the possibility of critical use. Finally, the procedure of the USE in social science is more focused only on its successful passing, memorization without any practical use in everyday life.

One of the ways out of this situation is, according to a number of educators, the rejection of this subject in its modern configuration, namely, the allocation of separate disciplines of economics and law. The essence of these disciplines will be subordinate to the practical orientation of graduates, that is, associated with the acquisition of skills in calculating and paying taxes or concluding an employment contract. As a result, the ideological and educational role will be retained by the reduced version of social science, which will include topics related to people, culture, society and politics. But such separation gives rise to a number of problems associated with the integration of practically oriented courses into the system of the USE, therefore it remains the most logical, but technically difficult solution to the problem.

Modern discussions about social science among the officials and teachers can be described with the help of the Russian proverb: "If you chase two hares, you will not catch a single one". An attempt to give social science the character of a tool for the formation of civic responsibility, as well as the desire to make it as practical as possible, are the opposite intentions that illustrate the complex and non-linear nature of education in modern Russian society. The desire for re-ideologization is overlapped on the idea of a technological breakthrough, and the contemporary Russian youth is becoming a hostage to the emerging contradictions.

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