From the Soviet Scientific System to Russian Academic Involvement in the War Against Ukraine

Laboratory of Military Ecotones

Super-Normal Science and the Post-Soviet Academic Community

Problem: institutional continuity and changing doctrine

Institutions and academic hierarchies survive changes of state authority.

Public explanations can change without an account of earlier errors.

Coercion and career interests explain part of the pattern.

What makes repeated adaptation normal professional work?

Theory: super-normal science

State authority defines the legitimate picture of reality.

Academic institutions translate it into professional language.

Degrees, journals and expert councils preserve scientific form.

Autonomous investigation becomes subordinate to that framework.

Theory: formation and survival of the institutional type

Late 1920s onward: the proposed formative period in Soviet science.

Administrative control links resources and careers to political authority.

After 1991: new states inherit institutions and organizational practices.

The hypothesis concerns reproduction of dependence across regimes.

Theory: negative selection and cognitive autonomy

Autonomous questions can become an organizational problem.

Exclusion may use the language of professional inadequacy.

Repeated selection rewards recognition of the current state framework.

Collective cognitive capacity can decline despite individual expertise.

Method: comparative institutional analysis

Unit of analysis: institutional decisions and public knowledge practices.

Documents establish dated roles, structures and statements.

Participant observation identifies mechanisms and research questions.

Comparison tests continuity against alternative explanations.

Results: Nikolai Bagrov and continuity of status

Late Soviet period: senior political and academic positions.

Independent Ukraine: TNU rector, Hero of Ukraine in 2007.

2010: full member of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

1 January 2015: president of Russia-established Crimean Federal University.

Source: Crimean Federal University museum biography. Dates identify documented institutional roles.

Results: Tavrida National University after occupation

The institutional trajectory divides between Crimea and Kyiv.

The Kyiv university provides a contrasting response to occupation.

The author’s experience supplies participant observation.

Staff totals and individual motives require independent records.

Results: the Russian Geographical Society

November 2009: Sergei Shoigu becomes RGS president.

2009: the Society establishes its Board of Trustees.

The board chaired by Vladimir Putin connects state, corporate and academic power.

This structure documents an institutional bridge to state authority.

Sources: official RGS governance pages. Current roster consulted 10 October 2026.

Results: public legitimation of war in March 2022

4 March 2022: the Russian Union of Rectors publishes its appeal.

The appeal endorses the state’s account of the invasion.

It calls for support for the army and the president.

It connects university duties with patriotic education.

Source: Russian Union of Rectors, official appeal, 4 March 2022.

Results: geographical concepts and the evidential boundary

The supplied studies examine concepts of post-Soviet borders.

The author interprets some spatial models as compatible with expansion.

The complete 2013 cross-border study remains unavailable in this corpus.

A claim of operational planning needs a documented chain of use.

Evidence boundary: the complete 2013 publication has not been examined.

Comparison: shared inheritance and different state projects

Russia and Ukraine inherit important Soviet institutional practices.

The paper proposes a common type with different political realizations.

Russia demands legitimation of aggression and territorial expansion.

The Ukrainian comparison requires a matched documentary corpus.

Comparative hypothesis: shared inheritance does not establish equivalence of state projects.

Implications: investigating the consequences of war

State dependence can shape which consequences become research objects.

Negative selection can weaken investigation of inconvenient harm.

The wider series examines the recognition of military contamination.

Autonomous problem formulation is an empirical research requirement.

Key takeaways

Super-normal science names a proposed mechanism of state-dependent inquiry.

Negative selection can reproduce dependence across changes of doctrine.

Documents establish specific transitions, connections and public support.

Comparative cases must test the model and its limits.

Key references

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Academic autonomy and responsibility

Who defines the questions that science is allowed to ask?

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Scientific responsibility includes the conditions of inquiry.