

## PHOTOGRAPHY AND PHOTOJOURNALISM IN RUSSIA: CURRENT TRENDS OF DEVELOPMENT

## ФОТОГРАФИЯ И ФОТОЖУРНАЛИСТИКА В РОССИИ: СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ РАЗВИТИЯ

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*Photography was invented when printed Guttenberg culture could not represent the whole diversity of quickly changing world. Being “an evidence of a fact”, photography possessed complete advantage in comparison with painted pictures or written sources. It could also transmit a huge amount of information during the shortest period. And in this respect photography exceeded radio and cinema. But in fact photography has become an effective tool of communication when two key problems were solved at last – relative ease of reproduction and possibility of mass copying (first of all thanks to periodicals). When both of them were solved – photography became indispensable part of mass media, effective element of propaganda in conflicts and World wars.*

*As well as abroad, photography was rather popular in pre-revolutionary Russia but the most dynamic period of its development is connected with the Soviet epoch. Photography and photojournalism in the USSR was under the state control along with other media, but after the Soviet system collapse Russian photography and especially it's such important direction as photojournalism began to develop under the influ-*

*ence of new factors – absence of the Soviet ideology and developing market economy, digital technologies' development etc. – to identify and analyze the most significant ones is the main purpose of the work.*

**Key words:** *photography; photojournalism; Russia; communication; trends.*

*Фотография была изобретена, когда печатная культура Гуттенберга уже не могла отражать быстро меняющийся мир во всем его многообразии. Будучи “доказательством события”, фотография обладала большими преимуществами по сравнению с картинами или письменными источниками, а также могла передать огромный объем информации за кратчайший период. И в этом смысле она превосходила радио и кинематограф. Но по-настоящему эффективным средством коммуникации фотография стала, когда были решены две ключевые проблемы: стало возможным относительно легко воспроизводить фотоснимки и публиковать их в больших количествах (прежде всего, благодаря периодической печати). Когда в начале XX в. обе проблемы были решены, фотография стала незаменимой частью масс медиа, эффективным элементом пропаганды в конфликтах и мировых войнах.*

*Так же, как и за границей, фотография была достаточно популярна в дореволюционной России, однако ее наиболее динамичный период развития связан с советской историей. Фотография и фотожурналистика в СССР находилась под государственным контролем. Однако после распада Советского Союза, российская фотография и фотожурналистика стали развиваться под влиянием новых факторов – отсутствия советской идеологии и развивающихся рыночных отношений, развития цифровых технологий, возрождения массовой фотографической культуры и проч. Выявить и проанализировать наиболее важные из этих тенденций – главная задача данной работы.*

**Ключевые слова:** *фотография; фотожурналистика; Россия; коммуникация; тенденции.*

From the first years of the Soviet rule the Bolshevik leaders paid much attention to the development of photography. They seriously considered photography an effective tool of propaganda of “revolutionary accomplishments” and “peaceful creation” suggested by the governing party. It was important to represent the “fairy-tale transformation to reality” and “tomorrow’s bright future”. In this respect photography was an irreplaceable tool of visualization of unprecedented social experiment in global history, as it was almost impossible to describe the full scale of transformation, which took place in the Soviet Union in 1920–1930s, if you did not see it (Orlova, 2006). As a documentary evidence of the “brilliant future”, photography had a capability “to speak using the language that is understood by the wide masses and in addition to conviction, which is typical in photographic picture” (Podluzskiy, 1927). As for the Soviet photographer who worked in periodicals, he (she) should “transform reality using the class approach relying on a high level of class consciousness”.

In other words, the value of published photographs was determined not only by their artistic significance or aesthetics, but also by their compliance with the ideological assumptions which were determined from the top, “social significance” in the form in which it was determined by the power.

In the system of the Soviet periodicals the photographs very often played a representational and additional role in relation to the text (with the exception of such illustrated magazines as *Ogonyok*, *SSSR na Stroike/Sovetskiy Souz* and some others). Nevertheless, even in this case, photographs published in the Soviet periodicals acquired a special status, meaning and significance, even though a possible touch-up or staging “proved” that the event actually took place and emphasized its importance. Thus, the absence of photos in mass media could mean that the event was not so significant, or it simply did not happen at all. During this period a limited number of professional photographers and editors of the state-own editions were working within the framework defined by the official ideology. At the same time, millions of Soviet amateurs had lit-

tle opportunity to publish their works. Thus, the boundary between professional photographers and amateurs was fairly clear (Kostykov, 2011).

Published in the Soviet media, photographers until the mid-1980s should take into consideration the official requirements of the “party perception of life around them” (Satukov, 1961). Only after the social and political transformations, which started in the Soviet Union photojournalism and photography in general got free from state control, and began to cover recently officially embarrassing or even strictly forbidden topics.

Modern Russian photography is under influence of several factors. First of all, a published photograph does not fall under ideological censorship. At the same time, photographers and photojournalists can face a number of restrictions on shooting imposed by the owners of private property, security guards, etc. Such restrictions apply not only to the internal arrangement of the private property, but also to its appearance. Svetlana Balashova, employee of the Center for Media Law at the Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University, considers that these prohibitions are related to the fact that photographers can find something “to dig” (Balashova, 2011; also: Morozova, 2011; Basharova, 2011). In other words, restrictions on shooting are very often irrational, arbitrarily treated and in most cases do not correspond to the Russian legislation.

Another trend is closely connected with the growing influence of digital technology and developing Russian market economy. Thanks to the “digital revolution”, photography in Russia is undoubtedly experiencing a new stage. In our opinion, the best reflection of this trend is the Russian market of education in sphere of photography. Today it is represented by a huge number of different academies, private schools and short-term courses of different levels and quality. Getting profession of a photographer as the second one has become a trend among students of at least several recent years. This trend could be partly illustrated by the data presented by the *Head Hunter*, the agency working in the market of Internet-recruitment. According to this data, approximately 12% of

Russian white-collar workers would like to be photographers. In other words, profession of a photographer is considered along with four other most desirable professions, such as designer, artist and office employee (Media Trendy, 2011). In recent years one can observe an increase among female students who want to be photographers or photojournalists. This is not surprising, if we bear in mind the fact that Russia has an increasing number of women who want to be journalists as such. We also note that the profession of a photographer is among the most asked-for creative professions in Russia closing the top-10 of such professions.

It is no coincidence that Russian job search websites propose large number of such vacancies. According to the statistics for April, 2010, there were 278 relevant vacancies for the profession. Moreover, average salary per month accounts for about 26 thousand roubles (the first three positions in the index are such professions as web-designer, animator and model) (Prytin, 2010). Meanwhile, it is not absolutely clear what the notion “photographer” means according to this rating. Does it imply to the popular wedding or corporative photographers, or anything else? For example, some employers want to hire photographers with complementary competencies – photographer and designer, photographer and PR-manager, photographer and driver, etc.

Photography is well represented in advertising and glossy magazines dedicated to the contemporary fashion, automobiles, travel and other spheres of modern life. As a reflection of public interest to the problems of photography, we can estimate the appearance and development of special periodical editions dedicated to the history, actual problems and prospects for photos both in Russia and abroad. First of all, we mean such magazines as *Digital Photo*, *Foto&Video* and *Photomasterskaya*. The relative lack of sources on the photography is partially compensated by the specialized websites<sup>33</sup>, forums and groups in social networks, books on different aspects of shooting and digital processing of photographs, technical features of still cameras and photograph albums. Unfortunately, the number of scientific studies devoted to various aspects of photog-

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<sup>33</sup> URL: [www.photographer.ru](http://www.photographer.ru); URL: <http://www.a-photo.net>, etc.

raphy is not that big. To some extent, the problem of access to such literature is solved thanks to the studies published by the representatives of the Soviet school, whose works have not lost their importance up to the present day. Meanwhile in recent years a number of interesting studies on philosophical reflection on the phenomenon of photography, books on photojournalism, history of photography in the Soviet period were published (Savchuk, 2005; Berezin, 2006; Stigneev, 2009).

Photo exhibitions and galleries have become an inalienable part of cultural life in many Russian cities, and Moscow and St-Petersburg above all. The target audience of these exhibitions usually consists of rather young people of 20–30 years old. The public interest in photography can be well illustrated, if we look at the increasing number of *The Best of Russia*, the All-Russian photo competition attracting participants of all ages and levels of professionalism<sup>34</sup>. In 2008 there were 16675 images from 312 Russian cities and towns that were sent to take part in the contest and 43213 visitors came to have a look at the exhibition. A year later 25234 images were sent from 569 Russian regions and 71018 people visited the gallery. The youngest participant of the competition was 7 years old, and the oldest one was 86 years old. As organizers of the contest say, in 2010 there were more than 27000 participants from 570 cities and towns of Russia. At last, approximately 30000 photographs were sent in 2011. Totally for the 4<sup>th</sup> year more than 700000 people visited *The Best of Russia* in Moscow, St-Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk and Perm<sup>35</sup>.

Speaking about widespread development of digital technology, first of all we mean the appearance of digital cameras of different types with technical characteristics, which made it possible to change long procedures of processing and printing photographs, to shoot more photographs in high quality, and to have a look at the result at once, to work with the pictures using built-in image editing programs. The growth in popularity of photography was also connected with the development of

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<sup>34</sup> The organizers' aim was to present the life of Russia in 365 photographs.

<sup>35</sup> URL: <http://thebestofrussia.ru/about>; URL: <http://thebestofrussia.ru/news/7>; URL: <http://thebestofrussia.ru/news/18>

such a perfect channel of distribution as Internet, which made it possible to send pictures in just a couple of seconds, publish them for the widest audience all over the world, and even to earn money. Not surprisingly, both technological factors have visibly erased the verge between professional photographers and amateurs.

The coming of amateurs into the profession made an illusion of its “simplicity” and “clarity” as such. As a result, the amateurs’ pictures published via Internet in social networks, blogosphere and other recourses are interpreted as “the model” of mastership in photography. Sometimes amateurs are equipped with rather expensive professional digital cameras and have an opportunity to travel not only in Russia but also abroad. They can also present the results of their work and probably sell them. Meanwhile, they are not restricted by any demands of professional ethics in shooting, technical processing of their photographs, which could change content and meaning of the photo at all, etc. (Kostykov, 2011). In other words, the amateurs’ coming makes a new competitive environment and professionals have to face the competition (Markin, 2010).

An important result of the Internet development is the appearance of a huge number of different pictures which are copied and distributed via Internet by the private persons and even mass media without the authors’ permission (Balashova, 2010). Unfortunately, the piracy in this field is a widespread phenomenon in Russia, but in some experts’ opinion the situation is gradually changing for the better (Shachidzhanian, 2010).

An important trend is the appearance of Russian photo banks that allows us to speak about the origin of civilized market of photographs’ purchase – sale in Russia. Today there are about fifty companies in Russia purchasing and selling pictures first of all of Russian and foreign photographs, previously from the former Soviet republics. For example, *photobank.ru* is an exclusive Russian partner of the *Getty Images* – one of the greatest Western players in photo bank market in the world. The significant player at the Russian market collecting its own bank of still images and video is the *LORI* photo bank. The sphere of its interests is not only images’ selling but also organization

of photo-and video shooting<sup>36</sup>. The *LORI* photo bank was able to collect more than 2,8 million images and to create the biggest collection of its own images in Russia. Estimated by Svetlana Terent'eva, the head of the *LORI* agency, the necessity in photographs is growing first of all thanks to the periodicals (40%), advertisement (25%) and Internet resources (30%) (Biznes fotostokov, 2012). Another feature visible in Russia is connected with not so enthusiastic attitude towards photojournalism, as it exists towards photography as such. The rating of professions published by the *RBC.Rating* agency confirms this conclusion. In September 2009 photojournalism was not even a part of top-30, including the most popular professions among Russians (Kostykov, 2011). The profession of photojournalist hardly applies to the most prestigious and perspective, and the salary is not so high. However, as we have said in this situation Russian case not so unique. For example, according to the rating of the 200 best and worst professions for 2010, published in the United States, profession "photojournalist" was almost at the end of the list, at the 185<sup>th</sup> place, having lifted on 4 positions in comparison with the previous year (Media Trendy, 2011). But photojournalism is not only an unpaid and sometimes very dangerous profession demanding significant physiological, physical and professional costs. Some experts do not see any perspectives for the development of photojournalism in the future – coming of amateurs, and their competition with professionals are not just the only dimension of the problem.

Today the system of educational institutions in Russia teaching professional photojournalists and picture editors is not so well developed. But even those graduates who have become professionals do not always have a chance to find a well-paid job. The editors of many Russian central and regional periodicals prefer to buy pictures using the services of photo banks or to supply their "writing" journalists with camera. Photography is very often just in the capacity of illustrated supplement to a text. In that way, in most cases photographs play the role of "confirma-

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<sup>36</sup> URL: <http://lori.ru/doc/>

tion” for the text propositions. Sometimes staged photographs are used, and it is being not clear that they are staged.

According to Andrey Polikanov’s point of view, the former *Time* magazine picture editor and the director of photography of the *Russkiy Reporter* magazine, photo illustration in Russia is not well developed, and the reasons are connected with the policy of the most part of Russian media who do not have their own vision of photo materials’ presentation. He suggests that another reason is concealed in the “diaphoretic” methods used in work with the photographers, and in their unnecessary overwork. As a result, the editors get half-done and template material. The low level of picture editors’ professionalism is also very important. But the reasons that were mentioned above are just the result of disdainful attitude regarding photo services activity in general (Polikanov, 2005). The rare exclusion at the Russian market of periodicals is presented in the *Kommersant* publishing house<sup>37</sup>. One of the basic principles of the *Kommersant* photo service is connected with rather clear differentiation of the work. So, after an everyday planning meeting a bild editor provides instructions to the photographers. When shooting is done and gets into the archive, a picture editor works with it and chooses the images he needs. The selected images are signed and put into the electronic archive. The other images are written down on the electronic medium and marked to make it possible to find the necessary image in several minutes (Shachidzhanian, 2010).

In addition to the *Kommersant* publishing house such socio-political magazines as *Itogi* and *The New Times* pay much attention to photographs (Kostykov, 2011). The *Russkiy Reporter* magazine holds one of the leading positions among Russian weekly magazines devoted to socio-political spheres. Andrey Polikanov was recognized the best picture editor in the world. But in general, the amount of periodicals in Russian market that pay attention to photography as an important and at least equal in rights with the texts media, isn’t that big.

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<sup>37</sup> *Kommersant* is Russian publishing house. *Kommersant* publishes, i.e. newspaper *Kommersant*, such magazines as *Den’gi*, *Vlast’*, *Ogonyok*, and owns the *Kommersant FM* radio station.

Professionals talk about several ways of photojournalism surviving. According to the point of view of Eddy Opp, the director of photo service of the *Kommersant* publishing house, the future of professional photojournalism in Russia is closely connected with the development of qualitative liberal periodicals – the main consumer of the high level photographs (Opp, 2006). Some specialists connect survival of the profession with the growth of photographs’ artistic level and others with the personal projects’ creation. Some of them supporting their Western colleagues suppose “photojournalism is dead” (Greenslade, 2011; Kraus, 2009). It’s partly true if we mean “traditional” photojournalism existed in “paper” media – newspapers and magazines that endure not the best times. But we tend to share the views of those representatives of expert community who suggest that the future of photojournalism depends not only on development of qualitative editions but previously on multimedia space. Therefore, such development requires new competences from photojournalists, who should be professionals of multimedia culture. And in this respect prospects of development of Russian photography look promising.

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