
On the Pilot Project “Sociological Archive”

In 2000 the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) initiated a project on compiling a national sociological data archive supported by the Ford Foundation. The aim of the project is to work out the content, the organizational and financial principles of the formation and further functioning of the national sociological data archive on the basis of a restricted number of VCIOM surveys as well as of other research institutes carrying out representative sociological surveys.

Beginning from the mid and late eighties, the need for a national archive has been discussed by sociologists more than once. However, it was only by the late 90s that real conditions had been created for the project to become viable. First, at present there are many research companies conducting national and international representative surveys which are of scientific value for a wide circle of researchers. This situation posed new questions related to the long-term data retention, their standardization and availability for researchers. Of course, each research company solves itself these problems dealing with their own databases and their possible users. However, as VCIOM's experience shows, possibilities of the solution of these problems within each separate company are limited. Second, besides the existing companies, there are more and more researchers and research teams who conduct surveys supported by grants from national and foreign funds. The data obtained in these surveys are used by the researchers themselves and are unavailable for other interested users, which is contrary to the very nature of non-commercial support of research. Third, due to the development of sociological education in Russia for at least 10 years, there is an increasing circle of potential consumers of sociological data, who need access to such data for secondary analysis in the teaching process, for preparing graduation papers, dissertations, articles and monographs. The facts mentioned above make the sociologist's society move towards compiling a national archive.

However, we realize that this task cannot be solved overnight. It will take at least 2-3 years to create the archive, as well as the effort and goodwill of many interested organizations, first of all those which are prepared to deposit their data in the archive for storage and dissemina-

by Ludmilla Khakhulina & Larisa Kosova¹

tion and also those which are prepared to give financial, material and organizational support.

1. The expected results of the pilot project are as follows:
2. Data files formed on the basis of the data provided by VCIOM and other organizations which agreed to take part in establishing the archive;
3. The information-retrieval system which will enable the users to find the necessary information;
4. Organizational, technological and financial principles of the archive functioning which will make the archive a social institution (design-project);

The duration of the pilot project is one year – from January to December 2001. The project manager is Dr. L. Khakhulina (VCIOM), coordinator and executive manager – Dr. L. Kosova (VCIOM), consultant – Dr. A. Kryshtanovsky (Higher School of Economics).

It is planned to hold an international seminar to present the results of the pilot project of establishing the national archive and to discuss its main technological and organizational principles. The principal characteristic of the pilot stage of the formation of the sociological archive is the fact that VCIOM, the coordinator of the work, plans to do it together with other interested companies which carry out sociological surveys.

In the course of negotiations with the leaders of the most well-known and highly qualified institutes such as A.Oslon (Public Opinion Foundation), E.Bashkirova (ROMIR), L.Drobizheva, N.Rostegayeva, (Institute of Sociology) M.Gorshkov, N.Tichonova (Russian Independent Institute of Social and Nationalities Problems) showed interest in the participation in the setting up of the national archive. Working together with these organizations it is planned, first, to form **data archives** which will constitute the “core” of the future archive, second, **to agree on the principles of cooperation** of the archive and the depositors - owners of the information, on the one hand, and of the archive and its users, on the other hand; these principles will be the basis for the functioning of the national archive. Third, and it is probably the most important item, **to form the Board of**

Trustees (Experts) of the program “Sociological Archive”, which will define the main directions of the archive’s work from the scientific and organizational points of view.

Upon completion of the pilot project the work on the sociological archive formation will be continued. It means that the general design-project of the archive, the sociological data files and the information-retrieval system upon completion of the pilot project will be handed over, with all the legal formalities observed, to the program “Sociological Archive” functioning within the framework of the independent institute “Social Policy”.

Priorities in the selection of information at the pilot stage.

In theory, the sociological data archive can and should contain any data obtained in the course of sociological surveys if they meet certain requirements of the archive. Besides, the archive may contain also texts based on these data (articles, monographs, etc.). However, since the time of conducting the pilot survey is limited, we restricted ourselves at this stage to prepare the data files which are the most “popular” from the users’ point of view (assessed by the number of request sent to the VCIOM), namely:

1. Russian data of the last 2-3 years obtained on a national sample
2. Data from comparative international surveys in which Russia took part
3. Electoral surveys
4. Sociological trends.

Requirements to the data submitted

These are the same requirements as they are set in other archives of Europe and the USA. Following these rules we get the possibility to become part of the “archive” community. Naturally, it will require additional work in some of the companies to fulfill the requirements. We have worked out the outline of a document based on the general requirements and our experience – “Guidelines for the depositor” which describes the content and volume of work to be done for transferring the data to the archive. If a company agrees to participate in this work, it receives this document to prepare the data for the archive.

Relations with the depositors

An important issue in the relations between the archive and the depositor is the copyright for the information. We proceed from the general provisions which are as follows:

The archive is a social institution established on the basis of a voluntary agreement of information owners for the purpose of storing and disseminating this information.

It means that the proprietor of the information is its “producer”, while the archive only receives the copyright

for the information administrator to perform certain functions, namely:

- storing the information received in the established order, having full responsibility for its physical integrity
- dissemination of the information among the users for secondary analysis according to the provisions discussed with and approved by the producer (acting as the depositor) and the general rules of all the archives.

From the legal point of view the above stated means that the archive and the depositor conclude a contract (agreement) on transferring the copyright for the information, which stipulates the rights and duties of each party.

This contract can stipulate all the conditions related to the transfer of the data to the archive. The body of the contract states that the organization, a potential depositor, agrees to prepare its data and the relevant documentation in accordance with the “Guidelines for the Depositor”. In its turn, VCIOM as the coordinator of the project is obligated to ensure the physical integrity of the prepared data and documentation until they are transferred to the archive (within the framework of the institute “Social Policy”). If an organization prefers not to transfer the data to the project coordinator (VCIOM, in this case) it will submit only the required documentation for the research (study description, questionnaires, methodological reports, etc.), which will be entered in the data-retrieval system of the future archive.

Thus at the initial stage we proceed from the possibility that the archive could be based on a distributed storage of data files. In other words, a certain part, preferably the larger part, is stored in the archive, while the rest of the data are kept in the organizations – depositors, which agree to make the data available for the user in the required quality, format and time.

Another problem in the relations with the potential depositors is the stimulation to deposit their data in the archive. At present, we suggest that the following stimuli should be used. The founders of the archive, on the one hand, have the possibility to present their surveys and their companies to the interested public and to have an open access to the data of other companies in the archive and, on the other hand, they can form the quality standard for surveys which can be accepted by the archive for storage and dissemination.

The practice of relations between the archive and its users within the framework of this pilot project is not elaborated. The VCIOM as the project coordinator does not take upon itself the task of disseminating the information (data) of other companies. First of all because the legal procedure of transferring the copyright for information has not been worked out. We just generally assume that, as is

the practice of all other archives, information is made available for the academic community free of charge, especially under the current circumstances of very modest financial resources of both academic institutes, universities and researchers, professors and students.

As it is the practice of the European archives, the principle of free data provision does not extend to commercial organizations (consulting companies, advertising and PR agencies, marketing organizations, etc.), which may apply to the archive for certain data. The model of relations with such organizations is planned to be different. This question, however, has not been considered from the practical point of view so far.

At present, a data file is being formed, the information-retrieval system is being designed, and the interaction with potential depositors is being worked out.

1. Contact: VCIOM, Kazakova 16, Moscow 103064, Russia, Phone: +7 095 2654772. Ludmilla Khakhulina: lkhahul@wciom.ru, Larisa Kosova: lkos@wciom.ru