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**The Role of the Technical-material Infrastructure in
Institutionalizing the Funeral Industry in Modern Russia**

DISSERTATION SUMMARY

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Relevance

The expert community and researchers agree that the funeral business in modern Russia is an area fraught with problems that affect various operation aspects. The orphaned infrastructure, illegal sale of grave spaces at cemeteries and the lack of a service quality assessment system are just some of the concerns often discussed by analysts and the media.

In the meantime, the funeral business is of critical importance to modern society: as a key component of social policies and social welfare (legal guarantees), as part of the social infrastructure (along with affordable education, medical services and cultural sites), and as a significant area for fulfilling society's religious and symbolic lives.

Such significance of the funeral business suggests high research potential of this issue, and recorded problems of the funeral business in modern Russia make it a topical subject of social studies.

Research Problem

Carrying out the human burial procedure is the primary objective of the funeral business. Its operation is directly linked to building and using the funeral infrastructure composed of mortuaries, cemeteries and hearses.

The existing studies, expert assessments and feedback in the professional environment regarding the funeral business in Russia testify to systemic problems persisting in the logistics infrastructure for decades. They have seriously hampered the management and implementation of the burial procedure.

However, despite the infrastructure operation problems, the funeral business in Russia has over years managed to fulfill its primary mission of burying the dead. In the meantime, there is no clear explanation what funeral business actors did to make it happen. It is this contradiction that is the research problem.

The Degree of Elaboration of the Problem

As a controversial and multidimensional type of cultural and economic activity, the funeral business needs a comprehensive sociological analysis and clarification of the basic research categories. By summarizing the international and Russian discussions on the funeral business we can single out the following research areas:

- 1) Managerial approach;
- 2) Institutional approach;
- 3) Comparative historical approach;
- 4) Infrastructure approach.

1) **Management approach.** In the Russian-speaking research environment, funeral studies are normally associated with the managerial approach. Works within the framework of this approach are characterized by a strict regulatory interpretation of the problem field. This approach reflects in expert papers, educational literature and a number of Ph.D. theses, including the papers by M. Godun, T. Zulfugarzade, A. Abelev, S. Rozhkov, R. Grachev, G. Syutkin and E. Cherinko, to name just a few ¹. Such a perspective on the funeral business helps single out the institutional specificity of the Russian funeral business model and formulate the industry's key problems.

2) **Institutional approach.** In Russia, this approach is developed mainly by sociologists. It views the funeral business as a significant social institution that has undergone major changes in recent decades; funerals are studied as commercialized rituals, while the funeral business is analyzed using neoinstitutional theories. This approach is specifically dealt with in articles and Ph.D. theses by M.A. Elyutina, S.V. Filippova, I.A. Razumova and L.A.

¹ Abelev M., Rozhkov S., Zul'fugarzade T. Funeral work in Russia. *Zamestitel' glavnogo vracha*. 2006. No. 4. P. 137–140. Barkov A., Grachev R. The market of funeral services: problems of civil-law regulation. Moscow: Izd-vo Yurlitinform publ., 2013. 176 p.

Barabanova. A serious social study is E. Moiseeva's Ph.D. thesis "Economic and Sociological Analysis of the Funeral Market in Russia" (2013)².

3) **Comparative historical approach.** The above papers are based on the long-standing tradition and characterized by a variety of research approaches. The central feature of this approach is identifying temporal properties of building the funeral business institution and the institutionalization aspects of the industry as a socio-economic phenomenon. One of the most significant areas in social studies is represented by the works of anthropologists and culturologists using the conventional comparative historical method, such as G. Laderman, C. Tamason, T. Walter, P. Jupp, C. Gittings, H. Mytum, J. Rugg, T. Lacqueur, T. Kselman etc³.

4) **Infrastructure approach.** One of the funeral business research areas aimed at identifying socioeconomic implications of regulatory control of the funeral business infrastructure and social practices. This issue is considered in papers by O. Balkan, C. Montet, D. Foos, T. Blayac, D. Harrington, K. Krynski, S. Kopp and others. Considered under this approach are issues of the funeral business professional environment, social inequality and poverty, stratification and social representation in the funeral business process. These issues have come under

² Elyutina M., Filippova S. Ritual funeral practices: Substantial changes. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*. 2010. No. 9. P. 86–94. Moiseeva E. The Commodification of the Funeral, or the History of Formation of the Market of Funeral Services. *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. 2014. No. 2. P. 6–13. Filippova S. Cemetery as a Symbolic Space of Social Stratification. *Zhurnal sotsiologii i sotsial'noi antropologii*. 2009. No. 12 (4). P. 80–96.

³ Walter T. Why Different Countries Manage Death Differently: A Comparative Analysis of Modern Urban society. P. 123–145; Tamason C. From mortuary to cemetery: funeral riots and funeral demonstrations in Lille, 1779–1870 // *Social Science History*. 1980. № 4 (1). P. 15–31; *Death in England* / Ed. P. C. Jupp, C. Gittings. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000. P. 202–249; Mytum H. The Social History of the European Cemetery // *Handbook of Death & Dying* / Ed. C. D. Bryant. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003. P. 801–809; Laderman G. *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 245 p.; Laqueur T. *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. 736 p.; Kselman T. A. *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993. 436 p.

review in papers by R. Mayer, B. Parsons, R. Smith, C. Seale, J. Sanders, Y. Shinya and others ⁴.

Worthy of separate mention, within the framework of this approach, is a series of works by French researcher Pascal Trompette who has long studied the history and evolution of the funeral market in France. A tangible contribution to developing this approach was also made by Tony Walter and his colleagues from CDAS (Centre for Death and Society, University of Bath, UK). They tried to systematize and classify the funeral industry in different countries through a comparative analysis regarding certain parameters, one of which was the infrastructure development level ⁵. This approach is the most efficient one for considering the contradiction that lies at the core of the thesis research.

The above overview helps single out significant relationships specific to the funeral business:

- Historical and cultural rootedness of the infrastructure configuration;
- Dependence of the infrastructure configuration on regulatory control;
- Link between the logistics infrastructure and social interactions of the funeral business actors.

These studies, however, have a **number of assumptions** that hinder the understanding of the Russian case:

⁴ Balkan O. Op. cit. P. 132-147; Blayac T., Bougette P., Montet C. Op. cit; Chevalier J. Morton F. State Casket Sales and Restrictions: A Pointless Undertaking? [Электронный ресурс] // NBER Working Paper No. 12012. 2006. URL: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w12012> (дата обращения: 12.05.2017); Foos D. State Ready-to-Embalm Laws and the Modern Funeral Market: The Need for Change and Suggested Alternatives // Michigan State Law Review. 2012. Vol. 2012 (2014). Issue 4. P. 1376–1418; Kopp S., Kemp E. The Death Care Industry: A Review of Regulatory and Consumer Issues // Journal of Consumer Affairs. 2007. № 41 (1). P. 150–173.

⁵ Walter T. Three Ways to Arrange a Funeral: Mortuary Variation in the Modern West // Mortality. 2005. 10 (3). P. 73–192. Walter T. Why Different Countries Manage Death Differently: A Comparative Analysis of Modern Urban societies // The British Journal of Sociology. 2012. 63(1). P. 23–145.

(1) Most of approaches being developed refer to the regulatory perception of infrastructures, implying that they all operate within the legislative framework and follow the limitations;

(2) Infrastructural problems are assumed to result in creating alternative infrastructure facilities (and, therefore, funeral practices). At the same time, no consideration is given to fitting the logistics infrastructure problems into the informal practice field and the use of these features for other purposes by various groups of actors involved in the burial process.

Summing it up, we can say that the current studies demonstrate convincingly enough that the logistics infrastructure plays a fundamental role in the funeral business and, as a result, affects the actions of those involved in the funeral process. The infrastructure configuration features and operating principles are historically and culturally rooted, and the infrastructure current condition shapes, to a large extent, the institutional design of the funeral business. Nevertheless, infrastructural problems are hardly ever regarded by analysts as determinants, which makes such study a potentially promising and significant research area on the Russian empirical basis.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The research aim is to identify and describe the impact exerted by the logistics infrastructure and its operating features on the sustainable social practices of funeral business actors in Russia.

Research objectives:

- 1) Based on analyses of theoretical approaches to studying the funeral business, conceptualize the main categories (“funeral business” and “funeral business logistics infrastructure”) as sociological analysis objects;
- 2) To analyze the aspects of building the funeral business institution in Russia and identify the logistics infrastructure’s role in the process;

- 3) To analyze the regulatory features of the funeral business and the infrastructure setup in modern Russia, and articulate the main restrictions on implementing regulations;
- 4) Using empirical research, describe the human burial procedure⁶ in modern Russia and single out the logistics infrastructure's main operation features and role in the process;
- 5) Identify the basic groups of actors involved in the funeral arrangement process, describe their features and interaction practices;
- 6) Describe the main strategies for correcting operation problems of the funeral business logistics infrastructure and define the importance of identified strategies in the main actor groups' activities.

Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: In order to make a burial in the context of structural problems and imperfections of the funeral business, its actors are forced to correct difficulties locally and, to this end, interact with one another.

Hypothesis 2: Performance problems of the funeral business logistics infrastructure have long existed in Russia and resulted in stable and replicable social practices among the actors. Such practices largely determine the institutional design of the funeral business in modern Russia.

Theoretical Research Framework

The proposed hypothesis was tested through sociological adaptation of the infrastructure approach in social theory. The approach evolves within anthropology and ethnography of infrastructures (S. Star, B. Larkin)⁷ and is used to investigate

⁶ Elyutina M., Filippova S. Ritual funeral practices: Substantial changes. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*. 2010. No. 9. P. 86–94.

⁷ Star S. The Ethnography of Infrastructure // *American Behavioral Scientist*. 1999. Vol. 43. P. 377-393; Larkin B. The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure // *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 2013. Vol. 42. P. 327-343; Edwards P. Op. cit. P. 185-225; Angelo H., Hentschel C. Interactions

the funeral business (P. Trompette, T. Walter).

The infrastructure approach's regulatory nature was supplemented with theoretical provisions by S. Graham and N. Thrift⁸, as well as with papers on the sociology of repair by T. Dant and C. Henke⁹. These allow us to view repair practices (removal of functional limitations, problems, failures and some infrastructure dysfunctions) as a social action resulting in active communication and exchange of statuses, knowledge and resources.

The concepts applicable to clarifying the institutionalization of the infrastructure operation aspects for different actor groups are represented by several theoretical advances. Among them are D. Stark's theory of "uncertainty" for private business, C. Stone's theory of urban political regimes for public sector representatives, and R. Hertz's rites of passage for relatives of the deceased. Practices of interacting with the infrastructure's troubled state in everyday and social life at early formation stages of the funeral business are supported by papers on the "repair society" by S. Tchouikina, E. Gerasimova and G. Orlova¹⁰.

The stated practices allowed the following research categories to be formulated:

with Infrastructure as Windows into Social Worlds: A Method for Critical Urban Studies: Introduction // *City*. 2015. Vol. 19. P. 306–312.

⁸ Graham S., Thrift N. Out of Order: Understanding Repair and Maintenance // *Theory, Culture and Society*. 2007. Vol. 24 (3). P. 1–25.

⁹ Dant T. The Work of Repair: Gesture, Emotion and Sensual Knowledge // *Sociological Research Online* 2010. Vol. 15 (3). P. 1–22; Henke C. R. The Mechanics of Workplace Order: Toward a Sociology of Repair // *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*. 2000. Vol. 44. P. 55–81.

¹⁰ Stark D. *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 2009; Hertz R. *Death and The Right Hand*. Routledge, 2004. 174 p.; Stone C. N. *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989; Idem. *Urban Regimes and the Capacity to Govern: A Political Economy Approach* // *Journal of Urban Affairs*. 1993. Vol. 15. № 1. P. 1-28; Fligstein N. *Markets as Politics: A Political Cultural Approach to Market Institutions* // *Amer. Soc. Rev.* 1996. Vol. 61. P. 65-73; S. Tchouikina, E. Gerasimova. Repair society // *Neprikosnovennyj zapas*. 2004. № 2. C. 70–77; Ledjaev V. (2010) Research authority in urban communities: types and researches. *Neprikosnovennyj zapas*, 2 (70): 135–144.; Orlova G. The apology of a strange thing: the "little tricks" of the Soviet person // *Neprikosnovennyj zapas*. 2004. № 2 (34).; Stark D. 2009. *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

The funeral industry is a sociotechnical network comprising infrastructure and people that interact to ensure that a deceased person is buried. The funeral business is unable to operate without an infrastructure.

The funeral industry infrastructure is composed of social infrastructure facilities involved in performing the primary function of the funeral business (i.e. burial of the deceased) that cannot operate without such facilities. In this thesis, funeral infrastructure facilities include only technical-material infrastructures, such as a viewing room, dead body storage place (mortuary or dead body storage), cemetery or crematorium, body transportation method, viewing place and burial site.

The funeral infrastructure problems are understood to mean the impossibility or limited possibility of human burial. It should be taken into account here that it is the actors who define their expectations from the infrastructure performance, i.e. problem is emic in nature and, therefore, is not a designed category.

The funeral industry institutionalization of is understood to mean the process of formalizing relations among funeral business actors, as formal and informal institutions, in various documents, standards, rules and practices, knowledge and rituals ¹¹.

Author's Personal Contribution to Problem Development and Data Collection

The thesis research demonstrates a limited nature of the infrastructure approach used in funeral business studies and argues for the need to allow for the specific operation features of the infrastructure and its impact on social practices related to the funeral business. Such a contribution to problem development was made possible by the author adapting the theoretical considerations of repair sociology to the standard infrastructure approach to studying the funeral business.

¹¹ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books. 1991

Furthermore, the infrastructure approach has not been previously applied to investigating the Russian model of the funeral business, so its possible application and obtained results are of interest to the academic community, in particular, as regards future comparative studies that are currently overlooking Russian specifics.

Conducted as part of data collection was the first large-scale multi-method empirical study of the funeral business in modern Russia, using the ethnographic approach within the framework of qualitative sociology. We were the first to carry out long-term participant observation of funeral companies and describe the basic practices and strategies pursued by actors involved in the funeral procedure.

The obtained results, on the one hand, can be used to address the structural problems facing the funeral industry in modern Russia and, on the other hand, they can help discover new phenomena related to the infrastructure features and practices developing around the infrastructure's state outside the funeral business (for example, when analyzing the utility infrastructure, shadow economy and handicraft industry, and researching culture and repair practices).

The practical significance of the problem tackled in this thesis research is that the research findings demonstrate the scale of structural problems facing the funeral business institution, while focusing the problems on specific social, cultural and economic functions of the logistics infrastructure, not only on ritual commodification or regulatory issues.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

The thesis research methodology draws upon the papers by researchers who test the ethnographical method in studying the funeral business, primarily C. Velez Zapata and H. Suzuki, and rely on the methodological base of sociological and anthropological studies undertaken by organizations and institutions, including the

works by M. Burawoy, P. Atkinson, A. Bruni, J. Cassel, W. Corsaro, S. Delamont and others ¹².

A field study conducted in several regions of the Russian Federation (Kaluga Region, Tula Region, Orel Region, Kursk Region, Lipetsk Region, Stary Oskol, Moscow and Moscow Region) served as an empirical basis for the thesis research. The study involved describing and interpreting the professional activities of 5 ritual agencies of these regions, as well as other actors taking part in interactions and funeral activities, including dozens of cemeteries, mortuaries, manufacturers of ritual accessories and so forth.

The basic research method is ethnographic participant observation engaging a funeral team worker and a partner managing the funeral agency. The participant observation lasted a total of 100 days from October 20, 2015 through November 2017. All data was recorded in a field diary now containing 452 records. Recording was subject to the basic recommendations for keeping ethnographic diaries ¹³. The main body of records and observations is devoted to how the funeral procedure was arranged and carried out.

The recorded field data was encoded and analyzed according to P. Atkinson and D. Silverman's method that includes an observed phenomena breakdown into groups of participating actors, actions performed thereby and logic of action visible and attributed thereto, field situation context analysis, observer objectivization, and

¹² Atkinson P. *The Ethnographic Imagination*, London: Routledge. 1990. 195 p.; Bruni A. *Access as Trajectory: Entering the Field in Organizational Ethnography* // *Management*, 2006. Vol. 9 (3). P. 129–144; Burawoy M. *Revisits: an outline of a theory of reflexive ethnography* // *American Sociological Review*, 2003. Vol. 68 (5). P. 645–679; Corsaro W. A. *Something old and something new: the importance of prior ethnography in the collection and analysis of audiovisual data* // *Sociological Methods and Research*. 1982. Vol. 11 (2). P. 145–166; Delamont S. *Ethnography and participant observation* // *Qualitative Research Practice* / Eds. C. Seale, G. Gobo J. F. Gubrium and D. Silverman. London: SAGE Publications. 2004. P. 205-217.

¹³ Emerson R. M. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. 320 p.

reflection¹⁴. Examples of such field diary entries and their analysis can be found in the annex to the thesis.

Additional research methods included interviews in the form of an ethnographic talk with social interaction participants to clarify the nature of certain actions. Use was also made of the Internet data: data from active communication of the actors under study, as part of exchanging messages on social media, and professional groups of funeral agents on WhatsApp and Viber came into focus of the research, thus making it possible to enrich the database of cases studied.

The paper makes use of archival sources – the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), the Russian State Archive of Moscow Region (RGAMO), archival data from other researchers and data from open sources. This helped reconstruct the process of institutionalizing the funeral business in Russia and see the infrastructure's role and performance features at different stages.

The empirical data is supplemented by qualitative analysis of Russian laws and regulations related to the issues of growth and operation of the funeral business in Russia, as well as of other regulatory documents, including available statistics on the problem under study.

Using such a broad range of tools and an extended empirical base allowed us to generalize the findings, going beyond the regional framework and the narrow ethnographic description of specific organizations.

Research Results

- 1) We analyzed the corpus of sources and studies of the funeral business, identified and structured the key areas and approaches previously unavailable

¹⁴ Silverman D. *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, London: Sage, 2006. 428 p.; Idem. *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting, Quite Cheap Book about Qualitative Research*, London: Sage, 2007. 168 p.; Atkinson P., Hammersley M. *Ethnography and participant observation // Handbook of Qualitative Research / Eds. N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994. P. 248-260.

and unknown to the Russian-speaking academic community. This helped us not only formulate key research categories, but also see potential theoretical assumptions in funeral business studies and potential removal proposals.

- 2) Using archival materials and open sources, we analyzed the aspects of setting up the funeral business institution in Russia, starting from the late Russian Empire until the collapse of the USSR. We managed to define the logistics infrastructure's role in institutionalizing the funeral business and identify the infrastructure development rules and practices that have been formalized through the informal economy and "repair culture".
- 3) We analyzed the regulatory aspects of the funeral business and infrastructure setup in modern Russia and described the basic impediments to implementing regulations, including a ban on private funeral infrastructures, infrastructure underfunding by local authorities, orphaned infrastructures and their legalization problems.
- 4) We described the human burial procedure, singled out the logistics infrastructure's role in this process using empirical material on funeral agencies and identified the key features of an occasional, orphaned, failure-prone infrastructure.
- 5) We identified the basic groups of actors involved in the funeral process – relatives of the deceased, private funeral agents and public sector representatives. We also described the peculiarities of each of these groups and interaction practices among them, including symbiotic business economic formations between public sector representatives and private agents.
- 6) We described the key strategies designed to remedy performance problems of the funeral business logistics infrastructure and meaningfully interpreted the importance of such infrastructure problems for each group of actors in funeral arrangement.

Overall Conclusions

On the one hand, in Russia there are persistent and long-term problems in the funeral infrastructure performance, which have repeatedly hindered the human burial procedure. On the other hand, despite the current infrastructure state, the funeral business in Russia has over decades continued to perform its primary function. This being the case, it remains unclear from scientific discussions why and how this happens.

The following assumption was taken as the research hypothesis. As they arrange and implement the burial procedure, the funeral business actors had to correct infrastructure performance problems locally while keeping active interaction. The long enough persistence of infrastructural problems gave rise to specific social corrective practices that over time found their institutional reflection as unspoken rules and principles of relationships among key actors. As a result, the logistics infrastructure operation features became part of the funeral business institution.

Verification of this hypothesis was a gradual process. Thus, an analysis of the literature and conducted studies showed that links between the logistics infrastructure and the funeral business structure do exist. These links are analyzed in the comparative historical and infrastructure approaches. The approaches, however, do not allow a researcher to trace and identify a link between infrastructure operation problems (and the technical state in general) and social practices of funeral business actors, as they consider only the guideline notion of the infrastructure operation.

In order to be able to analyze such states of the infrastructure in the funeral business, the infrastructure approach was re-conceptualized using exploratory studies in the infrastructure anthropology field (S. Graham and N. Thrift) and sociology of repair (T. Dant, C. Henke). Such a synthesis of concepts allowed the limitations in the infrastructure operation and their acceptance/elimination practices to be regarded as sociological categories.

Using these categories, we analyzed the experience of institutional formation of the funeral business in Russia. It was shown that the infrastructure was controlled by the state for several decades (since 1917), and the early experience of communal infrastructure administration by the Soviet state, for lack of resources, led to its compound crisis. The infrastructure problems were to some extent covered by garage and handicraft shadow production, as well as by spontaneous, independent maintenance and development of infrastructure facilities by Soviet citizens.

Thus, a decline in the funeral infrastructure was enshrined in the Soviet culture as a “norm”. The infrastructure problems were utilized to become the basis for numerous social practices. This was described by sociologists and anthropologists within “*repair society*” and “*repair culture*” concepts of S. Tchouikina and E. Gerasimova.

Subsequently, as shown by qualitative analysis of the regulatory framework (the Federal Law on the Funeral Business and regulations by local governments), the established institutional model of the funeral business (and the infrastructure setup) was formalized in modern Russia as several legislative conflicts:

- 1) The infrastructure may not be owned by private individuals, its condition should be monitored by municipalities. Private agents, which are actually legalized garage businesses, may arrange only the burial procedure. This results in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, local authorities receive a whole complex of a situationally operating infrastructure that they must service, maintain and develop. On the other hand, there are already established practices of independent use of this infrastructure by private agents and service consumers.
- 2) Such a situation is due to the lack of: statistical and recording systems for burials and movement of dead bodies, requirements for opening ritual companies, and control and accounting systems for funeral activities.

The ethnographic material collected by the author helped identify and describe the basic logistics infrastructure locations/facilities of the funeral process:

- Place of death;
- Mortuary and cemetery widely separated and hard to access;
- Viewing/burial service place;
- Road (passage) and hearses.

The following key problems of the above locations/facilities were identified and described:

- Impossibility to collect the body from the mortuary;
- Risk of cosmetic defects on the body;
- Hindered access to the cemetery;
- Impossibility to find (buy/obtain) a grave space and prepare the burial due to landscape complexity (trees, fences, etc.);
- Carrying the coffin to the burial place;
- Difficulty in selecting funeral accessories (size, cost).

A conclusion was made about the structure-forming line of the funeral business in modern Russia: occasional (random) nature of offered service packages for operations with dead bodies, the lack of a stable scenario for this activity, the stable links among actors, diversity and variability of specific forms of linkage among mortuaries, carriers, ritual agents and state representatives.

The logic of each group of funeral business actors was further presented in detail to explain the “acceptance” of funeral business problems and their standardization and transformation into operating rules and principles of the funeral business institution.

The logic of private actors in the funeral business is presented using D. Stark’s concept of “uncertainty”. The author identified the main feature of “private agents”

in the funeral business – a spontaneous organizational structure and weak institutionalization status of funeral business processes. In fact, a funeral agency is not a private business company, but a formation of diverse actors around specific logistics infrastructure facilities. This system is able to operate only due to the well-established network connections and the problem state of those facilities. Such an organization of the funeral business allows it to operate in a consistent manner only while maintaining a certain equilibrium state.

Thus, the funeral business institution is able to efficiently operate contingent upon retaining the status quo that is understood, firstly, as the informal nature of links among infrastructure actors and, secondly, as controlled restrictions in the infrastructure operation. Thus, the professional environment, one of the funeral business institution's components, turned the knowledge of dealing with infrastructural problems into professional competence.

Relationships between private ritual companies and government agencies, as well as their individual representatives, were considered within framework of the theory of urban political regimes, with its emphasis on informal ties ensuring that the regime is effective and durable. The theory of urban political regimes considers urban spaces, which include, in particular, logistics social infrastructure facilities, to be a subject of political bargaining. In the case of the funeral business in modern Russia, restrictions on the infrastructure operation are not just an economic resource, but a management and loyalty achievement tool.

It was shown that the fundamental feature of the funeral business in Russia is using a specific mechanism of power control of the infrastructure environment as a resource. Influencing its state is a special form of flexible political control when infrastructural problems and correcting this state are a compromise goal between the authorities and private ritual companies. According to S. Graham and N. Thrift, repair (as the practice of correcting failures) does not have to be effective. It appears that the status quo, which consists in infrastructural breakdowns, is

intentionally maintained by actors and is a legitimate type of interaction between the authorities and business, i.e. a rule and standard and, therefore, is an institutional characteristic of the funeral business.

The classical ritual concepts of “rites of passage” by A. Van Gennep and R. Hertz, as well as the concept of “litany” by N. Rhys, adjusted for the infrastructure and sociological adaptation of these categories, helped the author see how a limited functionality becomes a form of ritual practices. As compared to Western models, wherein the infrastructure creates a funeral rite sequence assigning a role to the dead body, the situation here is similar. It is the dead body that is given the central place in the infrastructure chain, whereby relatives are made aware of the need for smooth remedial of failures and are granted a symbolic status. The funeral infrastructure fulfills the same principle as in “litany” – *overcoming* difficulties, i.e. infrastructure dysfunctions, is implemented in practices and conversations as something natural and even desirable, while it is *overcoming* that emerges as the central element of a funeral rite.

By combining these interpretations, we showed that modern Russian funerals represent a specific format for their participants to interact with the infrastructure environment. As a result of this interaction problems in the work of the infrastructure are solved. Such interaction helps in addressing infrastructural problems.

The funeral arrangement process appears to build not only on ritualistic ideas about the significance of a dead body or funeral paraphernalia, and not on economic expediency, but on sharing resources, knowledge, statuses, and gifts, where obligations and existing conventions are more important than efficiency and technology (the “industrial world”). In this sense, the funeral business loses even the market status: here there are no requirements for the quality of goods and services and for the infrastructure state, and funerals are viewed not as a service,

but as a “common cause” in which different actors interact to overcome difficulties and bury a dead body.

Such a new, sociological view makes serious amendments to the understanding of the funeral business institution’s operation in modern Russia and worldwide, placing special emphasis on the funeral business structural element – the logistics infrastructure and its operating principles that turned into funeral agents’ expertise, a ritual or a political power exercise element.

Thus, the initially stated hypotheses were validated. While presenting and interpreting the material, it was shown how the funeral business infrastructure problems create various social practices that include the infrastructure’s technical state in the linkage basis. This, in turn, contributes to the formalization of the infrastructure’ problem state (even formalization in regulatory documents), the institutionalization of this state and its maintenance by funeral business actors.

As a result, infrastructural problems become not just a characteristic feature of the funeral business institution, but also a precondition for its operation.

All of the above allowed us to reasonably state and propose a number of theoretical and conceptual additions within the framework of the infrastructure approach in funeral business studies, which would help allow for various infrastructure operating modes and take a fresh look at the institutional structure principles of the funeral business worldwide.

List of publications:

Monography:

1. 2018. Sergei Mokhov. The birth and death of the funeral industry: from the middle graveyards to the digital immortality. - M.: Common place, 2018. - 360 p.

Main articles:

1. Mokhov S. Death Care Industry in Modern Russia: Breakdown of Infrastructure As Power Resource. *Sociology of power (Sotsiologiya vlasti)*. 2016. №. 28 (4). P. 83–103.
2. Mokhov S. V., Zotova V. The Case of the Fence, Table and Bench: Orders of Worth in the Allocation of Places within a Cemetery. *Journal of Social Policy Studies (Zhurnal issledovaniy sotsialnoy politiki)*, 2017 №1 p. 21-36.
3. Mokhov S. Handling the Ambiguity and Stigma: Ethnography of a Local Funeral Market. *Economic sociology (Ekonomicheskaya sotsiologiya)*. 2017. Vol. 18. № 1. P. 28–50.
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5. Mokhov S., “Ideal Breakdowns”: The Infrastructure of the Funeral Market and the Production of Social Order (*Etnograficeskoe obozrenie*) 2018, №. 2 p.146-160
6. Mokhov S.V. The Burial Industry in Comparative Perspective: How Infrastructure Creates National Models. *Sociological Journal (Sotsiologicheskiy Zhurnal)*. 2017. №. 4. P. 51–68.