

# “To Trust or Not to Trust” Is Not the Question; “How to Study Trust” Is Much More Challenging Task\*

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The article considers trust as one of the most teasing and vague notions in sociology for it is widely used in both everyday language and scientific discourse as taken for granted and not presuming any special interpretations or situational definitions. In the first section the author identifies key elements of the sociological study of trust (causes and effects; determinants and practical implications of different “types” and “levels” of trust; the prevailing definition of trust as a means of coping with uncertainty, etc.). The second and the third sections consider the empirical study of trust within quantitative and qualitative approaches pointing briefly to their focus of interest, which is social and political trust measured in large-scale surveys, often in the comparative perspective, in the former case; while the latter seeks to understand what trust means for people and why they prefer to speak about trust using specific words in particular situations. The fourth section discusses the discursive construction of trust; the author believes that narrative analysis is a perfect methodological decision (provided there is enough “quantitative” and “qualitative” data to contextualize its findings for correct interpretation) to identify the typological discursive constitution of trust in everyday practices; and illustrates such a potential of narrative analysis on a small example of semi-structured interviews with the Russian rural dwellers. The article ends with a few concluding remarks to summarize key findings and challenges of the trust research for now, which is justly enough considered to be at the crossroads.

*Keywords:* trust, distrust, quantitative approach, qualitative approach, narrative analysis, discursive practices, everyday language, scientific discourse

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“But it does not seem that I can trust anyone,” said Frodo. Sam looked at him unhappily. “It all depends on what you want,” put in Merry. “You can trust us to stick with you through thick and thin—to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours—closer than you keep it yourself. But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone, and go off without a word.”

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Relationships are mysterious. We doubt the positive qualities in others, seldom the negative. You will say to your partner: do you really love me? . . . You will ask this a dozen times and drive the person nuts. But you never ask: are you really mad at me? . . . When someone is angry, you do not doubt it for a moment. Yet the reverse should be true. We should doubt the negative in life, and have faith in the positive.

Christopher Pike, *Remember Me*

We all and always live in a verbally and visually discursively constructed world. We quite often do not pay any attention to the meaning of the words we use (a) to communicate with each other, (b) to describe ourselves as unique personalities or typical social creatures, and (c) to make many different things around us clear, even for ourselves. Undoubtedly, the words we use in everyday life and in scientific discussions are not (always) the same. As scientists we seek, with the help of specific notions and categories, the “higher” level of generalizations so as not to drown in the swamp of insignificant details, and to make social life look clear, reliable, and predictable as a collection of skillful models. However, there are words of everyday language that are used in scientific studies as well. The most important words for the sociological study of social and personal well-being seem to be “happiness” and “trust” (of course, there are many more important notions, but these two have attracted recently more sociological attention and heuristic resources than any others). Although the words “happiness” and “trust” could compete in vagueness and multiplicity of (contextual) meanings, the latter is more difficult to work with. The former is perceived and defined quite easily in everyday life. We all occasionally think about how happy we are when referring to different media, advertising, or examples of literature or the arts that form the basis and the framework of national traditions and mass culture. Trust is an awkward notion, for we are not used to a constant everyday reflection on the criteria of trusting people, groups, or institutions, and to the identification of the levels of trust in them. On the contrary, we are rather used to referring to family links, traditions, or previous experience in explaining our decisions, without appealing to the notion of trust in all such cases.

Thus, the aim of this article is to test the hypothesis that, at the theoretical level, sociologists (and social scientists in general) do accept the vagueness and ambiguity of the notion “trust.” However, at the empirical level we pretend to forget (or ignore) that there

is no certainty in the “content” of trust since we use this notion as a valid and reliable empirical indicator of current social and political situations. Certainly, the aim of the article is too ambitious and impossible to achieve, so one goal is not to “give a diagnosis,” but rather to draw attention to the problem of not understanding what we really “measure” under the name of “trust.” Another goal is to suggest some ways to clarify the empirical interpretations of trust in sociological research. To do so, the article starts with a kind of systematization of the theoretical conceptualizations of trust, followed with the listing of the more frequent empirical frameworks and methodological decisions to identify the level of trust in different real life contexts. Additionally, there is a possible solution to bridge the gap between the quantitative and qualitative approaches in the study of trust (primarily to evaluate political or economic situations, or make prognoses on the development of social capital, or the insurance industry, etc.), i.e., a narrative analysis of the discursive construction of trust in everyday communication. Finally, there is a kind of conclusion on the reasons why trust research seems to be at the crossroads nowadays, regardless of its long history of interdisciplinary development. It must be noted that these conclusions are rather a starting point for further debates and research than proper and final conclusions.

### **Trust as a Hard-to-Define Concept of Scientific Discourse (Unlike Non-necessary-to-Define Common Words of Everyday Language)**

Undoubtedly, to be considered a true (and probably trustworthy) sociologist, one should ask awkward questions such as “What do we really mean by naming some relationship as trust and by considering some man trustworthy?” In everyday life, we quite easily warn our companions who trust us by saying that we should or should not trust someone, without providing proofs of this person being a broken reed. We may simply label the other one as obscure or strange. In everyday communication, we usually choose our “trustees,” relying on them in developing our own estimates of people around us without any extra considerations and further discussion. However, the situation is much more complicated in social sciences in general, and in the sociological study of trust, in particular. Sociologists strive to “measure” concepts such as trust that elude definitions. Sociology cannot claim to cover the trust topic entirety for the field of trust research is truly interdisciplinary (see, e.g., Lyon, Möllering, Saunders, 2015). The field of trust research includes psychology, political science, anthropology, management (economic, more generally, and organizational trust, in particular), and computer science, all with their own unique perspectives on trust. This results in significant, yet differing, theoretical and practical contributions and implications to the field of trust studies, considerably blurring the disciplinary boundaries within it (see, e.g., Lane, Bachmann, 1998).

Trust is a recurrent theme in social sciences, especially in the last decades. It has become the focus of a great deal of empirical studies aiming, on the one hand, to identify the causes and effects of trust (or distrust) in social life, and on the other hand, to describe the determinants and practical implications of different “types” of trust. These

types include interpersonal, organizational, inter-organizational, and institutional trust; thoughtless and reasonable trust, spontaneous and voluntary; personal trust—among those who know each other intimately, and trust among strangers—interpersonal, social, generalized; cognitive trust—an estimate of the trustworthiness of those with whom one has relationships, and non-cognitive trust—dispositional or moralistic interpretation of trust as a value. There is also dyadic trust, which depends upon the expectations or social bonds with a particular other, while embedded trust depends upon social networks and institutional arrangements. There is trust in modern and pre-modern societies, and “levels” of trust (e.g., individual, community, population, organization, and at a societal level) for specific fields of social life (economics, politics, finance, self-management, cooperation of all forms, social capital, or civil participation). As a sociological concept, trust has become increasingly important in recent decades (it is considered an essential source of good government and skillful management, economic growth, and social harmony). However, it still lacks a widely agreed-upon definition or commonly shared understanding regardless of the numerous attempts to distinguish it from other semantically similar concepts such as familiarity, confidence, dependence or trustworthiness (Levi, 2015: 667), of the widely accepted theoretical conceptualizations of trust (see, e.g., Jalava, 2006) in terms of its social functions as a part of structure and agency rendering (see Giddens, 1991; Luhmann, 1979).

The concept of trust has a long intellectual history within the sociological tradition, mainly as a key source of the construction of social order, cooperation, institutions, organizations, and the majority of everyday interactions. Such a wide range of interpretations can easily be tied together by the prevailing definition of trust as a means of coping with uncertainty with a conditional way of implementation determined by the specific domains of taking the decision to entrust someone. For instance, one can trust a schoolteacher to care about one’s child, but would not trust a schoolteacher with a large sum of money to hide from one’s spouse. Here, trustworthiness is a conditional attribute of a person or institution that has two obvious dimensions; either the trustor is considered to act in my interests due to some moral values and relations, or the trustor is believed to be competent in the domain of my trust. However, there is still no agreement among scientists on the sources of such function of trust (coping with uncertainty), or on the kinds of interactions which either enhance trust or are enhanced by it (see, e.g., Levi, Stoker, 2000; Tyler, 1998).

Nevertheless, for all representatives of the contemporary sociology of trust (see, e.g., Gambetta, 1988; Govier, 1997; Sztompka, 1999), trust is primarily, though only partly, connected with risks and uncertainty. It is considered to be a kind of remedy from an uncertain future, “a simplifying strategy that enables individuals to adapt to complex social environment, and thereby benefit from increased opportunities” (Earle, Cvetkovich, 1995: 38). Trust is “possible because we are not only knowing and believing creatures but valuing creatures who relate in a profound and profoundly natural way to others” (Govier, 1997: 9). Social norms, values, and familiar behavioral patterns of others alone are not enough to make us feel secure (or comfortable) in today’s society that is full of risks. It fol-

lows, then, that Giddens (1991: 244) defines trust as “the vesting of confidence in persons or in abstract systems, made on the basis of a “leap of faith” which brackets ignorance or lack of information.” To enhance this point of view, Piotr Sztompka writes that “trusting becomes the crucial strategy for dealing with an uncertain and uncontrollable future . . . that has generally beneficial consequences for the partners in social relationships, and the groups to which they belong, as well as for the peaceful, harmonious, and cohesive quality of wider social life” (Sztompka, 1999: 25, 115).

I believe this is a perfect definition of trust for understanding everyday interpersonal interactions, and for explaining complex political, economic, and social issues at the theoretical level. However, this is not the case at the empirical level of sociological analysis. As a respondent, I agree that I do (completely or rather) trust in the national government, in the church, in the army, or in Sberbank of Russia. As for my beloved person, I certainly mean very different things under the same label of “trust.” Certainly, sociologists soundly ignore such a difference of implied meanings for empirical research aims, since similar ignorances make empirical sociology possible. Otherwise, we would have already given up hope and attempts to reach compromises regarding many empirical indicators. However, ignoring such differences does not eliminate the necessity to discuss the problem as it is.

### **A Quantitative Approach to the Study of Social and Political Trust**

As a rule (at least in the Russian sociological tradition), trust is primarily perceived as political and/or social trust being in the sustainable decline in the post-Soviet period. This is a rather sad and depressing fact given the argument that trust is an essential source and obligatory guarantee of a good society. As a rule, such pessimistic estimates of post-socialist transformations in the Russian society are based on the comparisons of decades of responses to the same national survey questions that indicate an obvious reduction in political and social trust. This reduction in trust has been declared the most important empirical indicator of the absence or insufficiency of social capital basically relying on trust as its critical element (see, e.g., Coleman, 1990; Putnam et al., 1993). For instance, G. Hosking argues that the Soviet Union destroyed trust by creating such a repressive Communist regime that made distrust the key element of the totalitarian state, even at the level of ruling political elites (Hosking, 2014: 17).

Undoubtedly, the most universal version of quantitative study of trust in sociology and political science is a kind of statistical analysis of different empirical indicators of trust (designed for varying goals, social-economic circumstances, and political-electoral situations). This type of analysis identifies its variations, their causes and consequences over time, and reconstructs the “ideal” attributes of trustworthy government, economic exchanges, or social interactions in general. In most countries of the world, there is a huge amount of data obtained through national surveys attempting to measure either political or social trust, or both. However, there are probably as many controversial debates about how well they measure data in terms of validity, objectivity, and reliability, as

discussions on whether social surveys can measure social trust at all and not some other issues such as social anxiety or fears (see, e.g., Nannestad, 2008).

Sociological surveys of the last decade indicate the dual nature of social trust in Russian society. On the one hand, there is a high level of everyday practical distrust expressed towards others (strangers in the crowd, people I do not know that are around me). On the other hand, there is high declarative trust in three significant symbolic institutions: (a) the head of the state (the Russian president), (b) the church, and (c) the army (Gudkov, 2012). National opinion polls show that, in general, the credibility of the social institute coincides with the mass recognition of its symbolic role, i.e., with its functional significance in an imaginary picture of reality, and with its importance for the maintenance of social structure and organization of Russian society. In other words, the above-mentioned duality is an indicator of the vast discrepancy between the political sphere and everyday life. This leads to the lack of trust necessary for joint action, to the lack of solidarity, common symbols, identities, civil participation and activity (including mutual responsibility).

The majority of quantitative trust studies in the form of national surveys aims to provide estimates of the level of social or political trust in the comparative temporal perspective, but there are no guarantees (except for bad sociological faith) that we adequately capture (and do capture at all) real changes in trust. This is because people can understand the same questions and response options differently at different points in time due to changing social contextual frames and discursive games of a political or other nature. Obviously, the comparative spatial perspective is no less exposed to the same methodological problems (see, e.g., Narbut, Trotsuk, 2015; Trotsuk, Savelieva, 2015). However, there are many interesting observations on the variations in trust within and across populations and countries based on survey evidence (see, e.g., Yamagishi, Yamagishi, 1994; Rothstein, 2011). For instance, cross-national surveys consistently show that the majority of the population in only a few countries believes that “most people can be trusted,” those of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, the Dutch, Anglophone Canadians, and the Australians. On the other end of the scale, the least trusting people live in Turkey and most countries of Latin America and Africa, which is usually explained by the strong dependence of generalized trust on the economic equality, since greater equality leads to greater trust (Uslaner, 2002).

Another illustration from personal research projects is presented in the table below. The data has been obtained from the surveys on different (but representing the metropolitan universities' student population) samples in a number of countries through the same questionnaire. Sociologists from all countries involved use this data as a basis to evaluate the social confidence of the younger generations in the key social institutions of their countries, regardless of the obvious differences in the interpretations and even perception of such (there is no other way to work within the quantitative approach which seeks the “scale” through the standardization of questions–answers format and omitting the semantic nuances). As can be seen in the Table 1, the figures open an unlimited scope of interpretations (even ideologically biased), provided that the data is considered “trustworthy” in regards to the research procedures and organizers. For instance, there is a

huge difference in the level of the younger generations' trust in the key governing bodies. In Russia and Kazakhstan, about 60% of respondents claim to trust the government and the president, while in Serbia and the Czech Republic, the share of such is four to five times less. However, the other data does not allow making conclusions on the similarities of the post-Soviet countries' student youth worldview as compared to the post-socialist countries of Europe. The levels of trust in social institutions are too different in all of the mentioned societies. This probably points not only to real discrepancies in perceiving social institutions of contemporary societies, but also to the differing expectations for each of them, and the mismatching definitions of trust regarding each institution mentioned in the Table 1.

*Table 1. "To what extent do you trust in . . ."*  
(%, "completely trust" and "rather trust" options combined,  
other options left out, not all objects of evaluation presented)

Objects of trust	Moscow students (2015) <sup>1</sup>	University of Belgrade (2014) <sup>2</sup>	University of Kosovska Mitrovica (2014)	Charles University in Prague (2015) <sup>3</sup>	L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University in Astana (2015) <sup>4</sup>
Government	56.8	12.4	13.5	17.5	58.8
President	63.4	9.0	13.0	9.4	69.2
Political parties	34.3	4.1	5.4	17.2	49.1
Local NGOs	41.8	13.2	11.1	58.1	51.4
International NGOs	37.4	13.5	12.0	51.5	46.7
Police/law enforcement agencies	44.8	25.8	36.6	48.5	44.8
Courts	51.1	23.9	26.2	57.3	48.6
Banks	43.9	20.2	30.1	50.4	50.5
Big business	40.2	9.5	20.3	29.2	55.2
Mass media	31.8	11.2	22.6	26.3	44.8
Church/religion	52.2	48.3	74.9	16.3	59.0
Army	46.5	57.0	64.5	56.3	54.7

1. The survey was conducted on the sample of 1000 Moscow students in different universities of the Russian capital by the Sociological Laboratory of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia.

2. The data on Serbia was provided by the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Priština with the temporary Head Office in Kosovska Mitrovica.

3. The data on Prague was provided by the Department of Social Sciences of the Sociology Institute of Charles University in Prague.

4. The data on Kazakhstan was provided by the Faculty of Social Sciences of the L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University in Astana.

Trust is a too-multifaceted issue to consider it so generally and to be so clearly determined. There are opinions that trust is the default position in a democratic society; the population trusts public officials, for these officials can be removed with understandable procedures (Hosking, 2014: 177). Even so, trust in the government is consistently higher in China than in the United States. Trust rises and falls in time due to different political, economic, and other events of national importance (Pew Research Center, 2014). The situation in Russia is very specific in this perspective, for trust is very differentiated. On the one hand, in recent years, the level of society's trust in the Russian President is consistently high (about 70–80%, depending on the time of survey and the objective social, economic, political, and even geopolitical circumstances). On the other hand, the trust of the population in almost all social institutions has declined, especially in the last year. The most significant decline is typical for such political institutions as the government (45% in 2015 vs. 26% in 2016), the State Duma (40% vs. 22%), and regional authorities (38% vs. 23%) (Levada-Center, 2016). Such a distribution of social trust is a feature of the Russian society in general, and of different social-demographic groups in particular. Thus, the survey conducted on the sample of 1000 Moscow students in 2009 revealed a similar distribution of answers, though with a higher level of trust in all social institutions. The survey showed that 60% of the respondents trusted the president, while only about 30% trusted the government, 20% trusted the State Duma, 26% trusted the Federation Council (26%), 23% trusted the Public Chamber, and so on.

In general, the scientists claim that there is worldwide growing public distrust in official and professional institutions in which we used to place our confidence. R. Putnam suggests, that since the 1960s, membership in associations of civil society has drastically declined (Putnam, 2000). Though the decline in trust is partly illusory since trust is not necessarily at a lower level than it was previously, but it is taking different forms (see, e.g., Giddens, 1991). A “culture of suspicion” is developing ubiquitously, evidenced in such indicators of growing distrust as rising crime rates, the weakening of family institutional functions, an increase in the distrust in scientific and medical knowledge, police, state and municipal officials, and so on (Fukuyama, 1999: 49–52). However, such conclusions do not problematize the meanings that people put into or associate with the word “trust” when evaluating their personal “trust” in very different social “bodies.” For instance, the president of the country is a “real” person most citizens know by sight, by name, and by citations. This is different from “the government” which is rather an abstract concept you prefer to trust or not to trust on very different grounds, including the estimates of the situation in the country in general, in one's municipality in particular, or even on the basis of one's emotional perception of some key representatives of the government (given that you are aware of them). In other words, the quantitative findings call for a qualitative “filling” for the correct interpretation of what the figures in the surveys actually hide behind sustainable and stereotypical generalizations regarding different issues in the countries differing by traditions, their historical paths, and statistical data on the political involvement and civil engagement of the population.

## Qualitative Approach to the Study of Trust as a Basis of Everyday Life

Probably, trust is a perfect topic and concept to illustrate the most common perception of the distinction between quantitative and qualitative approaches in sociological research. The former focus on the “quality” of society as measured through the scale and types of trust and distrust within it (such as what shares of the population claim to trust the government, the church, the politicians, the media, the president, or the police). The latter seeks to understand what trust really means for people, and why members of society prefer to speak about trust using specific words in particular situations, thereby explaining their choices, decisions, and actions. In other words, the dividing line is between the aims of the research and its techniques rather than between the prevailing interpretations of trust. In either a quantitative or qualitative case, we can combine elements of dispositional, moral, social, and instrumental/calculative definitions of trust. However, regardless of one’s interpretational preferences, the empirical researcher must somehow identify all the important elements of trust. These elements include an object of trust, that is, a person/persons or organization/institution being trusted/distrusted; a domain of trust, that is, what the social actors are being trusted to do; the prevailing sources/motives of trust (emotions, traditions, rational reasons, personal relations, impersonal relationships embodied in bureaucracy, market or formal law); and the factors determining the relational character of trust in the situation under study.

Within the qualitative approach, trust is taken for granted as “existing” in many different forms. There is no need in discussing whether trust relies mainly on personal or impersonal/interactions, whether it exists primarily in personal relations with incentives and interests, or is rather an attribute of institutions regulating political, market, and large-scale social interactions. There is no need to discuss whether it exists only in a limited set of cases (when the trustor knows the trustee well enough to believe in their aims and values compatibility), or whether trust relies more on confidence and familiarity or on assurance or coercion of third-party insurers, contracts, and other legal and institutional arrangements. No attention needs to be given to whether trust is essential to a well-ordered society constitutive moral glue, or rather an instrumental and cognitive means to achieve given ends. The vital sociological question is why people trust (or mistrust) one another, which implies clear, everyday interpretations and an understanding of the mechanisms of trust.

For instance, in traditional Russian village communities in previous centuries, peasants were welded together by the so-called “joint responsibility.” If one household failed to pay its share, the community provided a necessary substitute (products, labor, or a recruit for the army) willingly (for reasons of altruism or common sense) or unwillingly. Forms of land tenure and village administration were designed to ensure that the custom of mutual aid would benefit the rulers by collecting taxes and conducting recruitment campaigns relatively easily. The benefit to the peasants was to survive natural, economic and social difficulties, and emergencies. The resulting customs were so strong and sustainable that they re-emerged after the Revolution in Soviet society in the forms of collec-

tive farms or communal apartments. Even today, in post-Soviet society, such structures of trust reconstitute themselves. In the case of emergency or any life trouble, people prefer to look for rescue or solace among their beloved ones or social network (their group of solidarity) and not among formal bodies (law enforcement, courts, etc.). As the results of the last decade's repeated surveys on the representative students' samples in the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia have shown, when young people feel intense fear or anxiety, about 40% usually go for advice/support/comfort to their families and relatives and more than 40% go to their friends, with every fourth respondent discussing one's problems with friends on the Internet. In general, the key source of support for Russians in difficult moments are family members and relatives (87%), and friends (59%) (Kuchenkova, 2016). In other words, Russians prefer to share their difficult life experiences with the most trusted people in their lives, which are parents and friends, that is, the people they feel an affinity with and feel confident to generate, renew, and reinforce the mutual trust resource.

Though these numbers do not fit into the qualitative approach at all, they represent the most widespread format of the sociological study of trust, even in personal relations. Nevertheless, there are examples of "true" "quality" in the sociological evaluation of essential features of trust in our everyday life. For these examples, narrative analysis seems to be a perfect methodological decision and a technique to identify key features of trust as narrated into existence in everyday talks and in more artificial communicative forms, such as non- and semi-structured interviews. Unfortunately, even "purely" qualitative topics in today's sociological research tend to be substituted by quantitative "measurement," making the study of the discursive construction of trust in everyday narratives a necessary step in the interpretation of what people really mean when they talk about trust in different social situations and local contextual frames. Of course, there is a serious restriction that a researcher must always keep in mind: if you ask a person directly about trusting in something/someone, such questioning provokes socially-approved and normatively-determined answers. This negates the attempts to find out everyday "natural" and spontaneous perception of trust issues. Therefore, it is better not to articulate trust topics openly, but rather to direct a respondent to such perceptions accurately and without verbal coercion.

### **Discursive Construction of Trust in Everyday Narratives**

Due to the fact that methodological bases of sociological work with textual data are not summarized in any explicit form, one can apply definitions of narrative analysis in sociological research to any relevant conceptual frames. However, J. Brockmeier and R. Harré (2001) seem to have developed the most "sociological" interpretation of narrative as a general category of linguistic production. Narrative is too often used as a word for identifying an ontology, whereas it is just a name for a number of regulations and standards within communication practices that organizes and makes sense of our everyday experiences, and a condensed set of rules that guarantees us social acceptance and successful

actions within a given culture. Our actions, experiences, and lives in general are too fragmented, formless, and incomplete, so we need narratives to consistently (re)construct and (re)constitute social reality by integrating any individual case of our personal life into the established and approved social and cultural scenarios. We do this through narrative by binding together personal and social modes of life, by expressing our emotions and opinions about what this world should be, and representing our identity and society (Fraser, 2004: 180).

Sociological interpretation of narrative as a textual mode of personal and social life eliminates the traditional restrictions on the choice of conceptual framework, methodological approaches and technical procedures to study social practices as narrated into existence. This gives a researcher a phenomenal freedom in combining conceptual models and techniques under the “label” of narrative analysis. To qualify for conducting narrative analysis, it is sufficient to study real “texts,” that is, recorded narratives, and to choose analytical tools and interpretative models depending on one’s priorities and interests and on the tasks of the research. In the study of trust as discursively constantly (re)constituted in everyday narratives, we are to define any community under study not only as an objective fact of social reality, but also as a set of shared symbolic meanings that form the “life-world” of each of its members (in a rather ethnomethodological interpretation, according to Garfinkel [1963]).

To show the potential of narrative analysis to identify the typical discursive construction of trust in everyday relations and practices and only for exploratory-illustrative purposes, I conducted the simplest narrative analysis of a very specific collection of texts. These were transcripts of semi-structured interviews with local populations (not experts in management or administrative staff of municipal and regional bodies), and conducted in rural regions of Russia over the last decade (2006–2015). This collection is interesting and specific because the issues of trust have never been the focus of the Center for Agrarian Studies projects which aim to identify social and economic strategies of daily survival in rural areas. Thus, the interviewees have never been provided with any “narrative impulses” to reveal common interpretations of trust in the course of interview. If we see any such “narrative impulses” in the transcripts, it is only thanks to their commonality in everyday life stories, or corresponding behavioral and relational patterns when narrators discursively (re)construct common definitions of trust.

Undoubtedly, there is no chance for representativity of the data or for generalizability of the conclusions made. However, the reconstruction of common interpretations of trust (or distrust) and the identification of the so-called “typological syndromes” in considering different types of interpersonal relations as trust-based or trust enhancing is a possibility. The proposed approach has pros and restrictions. On the one hand, we can reveal the fields of everyday life which cannot be described by social actors without addressing the issues of trust in one way or another. On the other hand, the apparent lack of the topic of trust in the interview guide inevitably leads to its ignorance in the course of an interview. This is because the sociological rule that “you get answers only to the questions

you ask and not the answers to the questions you do not ask” works perfectly in studies not focused on the issues of trust.

Here are a few figures. The collection of texts consists of more than 260 transcripts, and in almost every tenth narrative (28 in total), there are mentions of trust as an important element of everyday life. The pieces of texts were selected using the simplest procedure of looking through the narratives for mentions of the root of the Russian word “trust” in all possible contexts, except for notarial documents’ names. The selected narrative fragments indicate that trust becomes an explicit issue when it comes to the explanation how formal relations can work efficiently and “trustworthy,” only if they are based on the habitual confidence in others’ possible actions in close relations. For instance, one respondent said:

An investor in fact is trust and not just a man with big money, . . . we need a person who is interested not only in making money, money, money . . . but who’s not indifferent to our local community, culture, and history . . . though it may seem a kind of an idealistic dream . . . However, otherwise, without trust, there is no way to organize cooperatives . . . or even worse, there will be someone the most cunning and dishonest, who will steal all the cooperative money and disappear.

The issues of distrust appear in the rural dwellers’ narratives mainly when they consider the consequences of today’s market economy for traditional forms of everyday social and economic relations in rural communities. Additionally, the causes of distrust up to the political “power vertical” ruining the previously sustainable forms of economic activities and rural cooperation were sometimes generalized. Another respondent claimed that

our current system keeps people apart, creates the atmosphere of total distrust . . . This mechanism, this structure is called the “vertical of power,” and it intentionally incites small and large farmers against each other, provokes quarrels between monopolists . . . this “vertical of power” is based on submission, on the principle “divide and conquer” . . . Therefore, it is against cooperation, because when people trust each other they unite and easily reach agreements, thus resisting the vertical and insisting on developing and implementing measures in their personal and communal interests . . .

Moreover, according to the narratives, totally and historically sustainable distrust (and not just a lack of confidence) is a typical estimate of the relationship of ordinary people and officials of all types and levels. This is primarily due to the stereotypes both groups have that determine their prevailing perception of each other. Still another respondent answered:

The officials say: “These people are stupid, they are not active, they cannot control their drinking, they must always be given instructions and can never be trusted.” So, people, in their turn, think: “These officials, bureaucrats, they do not under-

stand anything, they cannot be trusted, and, thus, we'd better stay away from them.”  
And this is a typical situation throughout Russia.”

Besides, the distrust to those at the social top is nurtured by a conviction that the state and the business are strongly interconnected in the mutual interests of each other, thus ignoring ordinary people's needs:

It is very difficult to identify, where the state finishes and the business begins. The boundary is very vague . . . while there is a strong distrust in the state and all its institutions . . .

One of the reasons of lack of trust to those who are in power is the course of post-Soviet reforms in the agriculture and rural areas in general. An opinion was recorded as

Well, you know, to be honest, I lost trust to our leaders and the power after the reforms, which proved to be disastrous not only in agriculture, but also in the education and so on. These reforms increased corruption and shortage of staff and nothing else . . .

However, considering the entrepreneurship, the distrust is based rather on the stereotypical perception of it:

There is a general distrust to the entrepreneurs in the society and not only in our region. Everywhere in Russia people are used to think that if one is an entrepreneur, one is totally unscrupulous, his goal is to deceive, to cheat and to grab as much money as possible . . .

Long time ago there was an expression “an honest merchant word,” and today entrepreneurs are considered grabbers.

The only thing that can break such distrust is the personal trust transferred to the sphere of formal relationships. Many people still believe that personal trust is the only “trustworthy” foundation of all other relationships (see, e.g., Seppänen, Blomqvist, Sundqvist, 2007). A response illustrates this idea:

Everyone has one's own circle of friends and well-known people. According to statistics, everyone knows about one and a half thousand people to say “hello” from time to time . . . Your acquaintances have their acquaintances, their own circle of friends . . . Therefore, whenever you start some business you rely on word of mouth to trust people you have not known before . . . To survive at the market you have to find partners—permanent and trusted: I trust them, they trust me . . .

In some fields trust depends on the generational proximity: middle-aged and olders prefer to trust their coevals but not the youth that “cannot be trusted for they were raised

in different circumstances compared to those who are over fifty.” In other situations trust depends on the familiarity of some common practices, for instance, there are still

lists of debtors in many small rural shops . . . Well, if I just returned from vacations and do not have money, I just come to the shop and take whatever I need without paying money for the seller knows that I will pay later and puts me in that list . . . Of course, this is possible only if people trust you and feel confident that soon you will repay . . . Therefore, this works only for well enough known people and not for those who come to the shop for the first time . . .

Thus, without a specific narrative impulse and relevant thematic context, rural respondents mention “trust” very rarely and not to describe personal relations. This is probably because trust is believed to be inherent in such relationships, or otherwise there are no personally significant relations. Trust is clearly articulated and discursively constructed only when narrated relations (personal or not initially) are connected with some formal obligations or institutional functions, i.e., when trust is a strong guarantee that some formal procedures would necessarily work.

### **A Few Concluding Remarks (If You Believe There Can Be a Conclusion in Discussing Trust)**

Trust is a very teasing term, which is both difficult to define (as a theoretical conceptualization) and to observe (in empirical studies), despite its wide use for different purposes, and for naming various phenomena (Gorlizki, 2013). One of the difficulties associated with the sociological interpretation of trust is that the more sophisticated definition we use, the harder it is to choose the empirical content for it. In this case, we have to make compromises that inevitably generate debates even on the most “innocent” definition of trust as a reasonable expectation that the other will cooperate with me in certain situations, the terms of which is impossible to foresee. Such an anticipation must be based not only on interests coincidence, but at the same time, on current personal relations highly valued by all parties involved (Gambetta, 2009: 37).

In 2011, R. Bachmann defined the position of trust research at the crossroads referring to the excessive focus of the dominant stream of literature on the micro-level of trust-building. He suggested placing considerably more emphasis on the “constitutive” embeddedness of trust actors in the institutional environment/context. It should be noted that despite this just criticism, the author aimed primarily to overcome the limitations of mainstream trust research to more accurately describe the role and functions of trust in modern business systems. Bachmann believes that “institutional-based trust develops in concrete relationships between two actors who not only unavoidably orient their behavior to the relevant institutional arrangements but also enact and constantly reproduce the meaning, power and legitimacy of the institutional order in which their decisions and actions are embedded” (Bachmann, 2011: 208). This statement seems to excessively polarize the subject of trust research into the two extremes of either interaction-based trust

or institution-based trust. However, it is necessary to take both views into account for analytical reasons (researchers separate two types conceptually to have stronger foundations for analysis; for instance, within micro-perspectives on trust, one can rely on moral, psychological, or game factors of personal interaction) and applied purposes (two types of trust are actually not separate in practice).

Narrative analysis seems to be a perfect connecting link between micro- and macro-perspectives on trust. This is because narratives are models of the world and of our own "I" at the same time, which binds personal and social modes of human life together. As we get older and accumulate the baggage of life experiences and memories, this helps us to modify our self-esteem and the extent of embeddedness in the existing social order and discursive canon. Narratives of personal experience reveal common psychological definitions of interpersonal trust. This turns out to be a solid place to start formal relations, and in general for organizational and inter-organizational trust. Regardless of the type of trust, it is always a relationship presupposing some reciprocity and interdependence, involving some risk (a possibility of a loss, a vulnerability that the other will act in his selfish interests) and "freedom to disappoint" the other's expectations (Gambetta, 1988: 218), though the expectations are mainly positive (Gudkov, 2012). The point here is not in the predictability and reliability. An expectation of something good to happen due to the free and goodwill decision to trust each other and to take efforts to build and maintain trusting relationships is more important. Moreover, narrative analysis is a perfect technique to demonstrate the multi-dimensional nature of trust. Narrative analysis combines psychological elements (natural or cultural predisposition or tendency to trust), calculative elements (reliability, dependability, predictability, or reputation), social factors, or social influences on the decisions made by individuals about whether to trust others who might be relative strangers, in their respective societies (Singh, 2012), and the identity work. Quite often, one's definition of trust is a discursive representation of one's life experience as being deceived by a trustee, i.e., a narrative of trust violations, which helps the narrator to validate one's identity (see, e.g., Driver, 2015).

Undoubtedly, trust, along with other forms of social interactions such as conflict, domination, exchange, tradition, social differentiation, fashion, or flirting, has always been one of the most important sociological categories for interpreting and explaining social structures. The current scientific interest in the issues of trust is determined not so much by a pursuit for a more precise understanding of the nature of this phenomenon, but rather by the aim of a causal interpretation of the relationship and interdependence of the features of trust and institutional structures (economics, politics, etc.), and often in the comparative perspective. The relative success of such attempts gives hope to develop new means of understanding the cultural influence on the evolution of political and economic relations for both theoretical and applied reasons. To achieve such ambitious aims, sociologists define trust as a social interaction based on the high probability (chance) that the actions of partners (not only individuals, but also social groups and institutions) will take place in accordance with the expected order based on mutual values, moral ob-

ligations, coercion, customs, traditions, social conventions, ideological beliefs, material interests, or common views.

There are different approaches to study trust empirically. Perhaps the optimal analytical strategy would be a narrative analysis of semi-structured interviews (though taking quantitative data into account). The optimal objects of research, under the same conditions, would be people living in small towns and villages (milieus of the surviving pre-modern type of trust). The bases of social trust here are obvious, and may be explicitly transferred to the communal and institutional levels (micro-macro approach in action, as defined by Wilkes [2014]). The informal connections, group and neighborly relations, ethnic or confessional solidarity, are embedded (including discursively) in the routine of everyday obligations, common interests, and mutual support (see, e.g., Kozyreva, 2009). In this perspective, rural respondents are also perfect for demonstrating the heuristic potential of the Bourdieusian theory of interpersonal trust (see, e.g., Frederiksen 2014). It focuses on the relational rather than the cognitive, behavioral, or emotional aspects of trust, emphasizing the constitution of interpersonal trust within the dual temporal dynamics of the social aligning of interaction and meaning, which, together, constitute the process of trusting as an anticipation of forthcoming events.

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## «Доверять или не доверять» — не в том вопрос; что такое доверие и как его изучать — суть социологической проблемы

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Автор рассматривает доверие как одно из самых интересных и в то же время неоднозначных социологических понятий, поскольку оно широко используется и в повседневной коммуникации, и в научном дискурсе как само собой разумеющееся и не требующее специальных разъяснений и ситуативных конкретизаций. Кроме того, социология вряд ли может предъявить претензии на монопольное владение данным понятием — исследования доверия междисциплинарны, что порождает разнообразные его концептуальные и операциональные определения, размывающие дисциплинарные границы между теоретическими и эмпирическими исследованиями доверия. В первой части статьи обозначены основные компоненты социологического анализа доверия (причины и последствия социального доверия и недоверия; детерминанты и практические результаты разных «типов» и «уровней» доверия; попытки отличить доверие от иных, близких ему семантически понятий; общепринятые концептуализации доверия; базовые трактовки доверия как способа избегания неопределенности и т.д.). Во второй и третьей частях статьи охарактеризованы цели эмпирического изучения доверия в рамках количественного и качественного подходов. В первом случае, как правило, измеряется уровень социального и политического доверия в ходе масштабных опросов общественного мнения, нередко в сравнительном или мониторинговом формате. В рамках качественного подхода исследователи пытаются понять, что доверие означает для людей, как и почему они выбирают те или иные слова для описания доверия в разных ситуациях. Четвертая часть статьи посвящена повседневному дискурсивному конструированию доверия: автор считает нарративный анализ оптимальным методологическим выбором (при условии контекстуализации его результатов данными количественных и качественных исследований) для обнаружения типичных механизмов дискурсивного конституирования доверия в повседневных практиках и иллюстрирует свое предположение полуформализованными интервью, проведенными в сельских поселениях России. Статью завершают несколько выводов о тех достижениях и проблемах социологического анализа доверия, которые определяют его неоднозначное нынешнее положение в предметном поле нашей дисциплины.

*Ключевые слова:* доверие, недоверие, количественный подход, качественный подход, нарративный анализ, дискурсивные практики, повседневный язык, научный дискурс