



Ivan Vepkhvadze, *Synthesis*, 1976 (fragment)

How Science Became Popular: Epistemic Governance and Scientific Citizenship in the Twentieth Century

March 25–26, 2022
Department of History
University of Houston

For a long time, being a good citizen meant being an obedient citizen. The authority claiming obedience was a shifting category ranging from God to the Sovereign to the ideas of Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood. The twentieth century brought with it a new contender: Knowledge. The ideological divides and struggles of the twentieth century, especially during the Cold War, forced national elites to invest in massive efforts to make societies accept and embrace scientific epistemes as frameworks regulating the daily lives of their citizens. International organizations such as UNESCO extended these efforts to the Third World. All over the world, mass scientific, technological, and medical literacy became equated with good citizenship. This led to an impressive expansion of public education and unprecedented attention to the public communication of science. The state of ideological confrontation that much of the world had been through during the twentieth century added a certain feeling of urgency to this process. Politicians and scholars on the both sides of the capitalist-socialist divide as well as in the Third World sought to find and introduce new ways for dissemination and popularization of science by multiplying points of access to it and overcoming traditional social and cultural obstacles and epistemological privileges.

Consider this example: when a prominent Soviet scholar and a full member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Ivan Artobolevsky, was put in charge of the Soviet mass scientific literacy campaign in 1966, he felt so triumphant about the Soviet social and cultural superiority that he spoke condescendingly to American delegates to UNESCO: “You are losing the struggle for mass scientific and technological literacy, and it will be a decisive factor in our scientific and technological competition.” This triumphalism was not based on historical materialism, the spread of socialist regimes in the Third World, or the Soviet military capabilities; rather, Artobolevsky argued that it was the public communication of knowledge that gave socialism a

huge competitive advantage in its confrontation with capitalism. Socialism was in his view destined to overcome and outcompete capitalism because it produced better citizens through its vast system of the state-sponsored dissemination of scientific, medical, and technical knowledge.

The aim of this conference is to discuss how political and intellectual establishments deployed knowledge communication with a goal to turn their societies into rationally organized, disciplined, and easily controllable communities. We invite papers that examine how modern states as well as international organizations and other non-state actors engaged in the public communication of scientific, medical, technical, and other forms of knowledge during the twentieth century. Examples can include but are not limited to the activities of state-sponsored and voluntary organizations that aimed to foster a scientific mindset in certain social groups or entire populations; particular scientific or medical literacy campaigns; intellectual debates around science and the public good; visions and understandings of scientific citizenship; and theoretical discussions about epistemic governance. We are also interested in unforeseen consequences of states' involvement in the public communication of knowledge such as the erosion of public trust in the official scientific authority and the spread of alternative knowledge. The questions of epistemic governance and scientific citizenship have recently become important areas of inquiry in historical scholarship, political science, and STS. We seek to contribute to our understanding of these questions by bringing together scholars working on different regions and periods yet commonly interested in how knowledge through its popularization and communication to the public became instrumentalized for political and social governance in the twentieth century.

The conference will be hosted by the University of Houston Department of History over two days, March 25–26, 2022. We will be able to provide travel and accommodation support for graduate students and early-career scholars. To propose a paper, please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words along with a two-page CV to epistemic.governance.2022@gmail.com by **December 15, 2021**. We will communicate the decision by mid-January. If you require travel support, please attach to your application a note with an estimate of your travel costs using the most economical means of transportation. This conference is planned as an on-site event.

Program committee:

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